

Empedocles' Elements and Forces of Life: Towards an Apposite Approach to Human Relationship Today

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Abstract

Empedocles of Acragas (c. 495 – 435 BCE), a 5th century BC philosopher, distinguished himself as a classical pluralist. He proposed that reality is composed of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire. In addition, two opposing forces rule the universe: love - philia, which unites, and strife - neikos, which separates. The operation of the two forces depends on the interactions of the four elements. Elements of same nature attract, and lead to love. Nature with diverse elements repel, and lead to strife. According to Empedocles in Peri Physeōs (On Nature) and Katharmoi (Purifications), there is a cosmic cycle of mixture and separation in the universe, and every individual, by nature, possesses a dominant element among these four elements. One's dominant element rules, creates, and defines a person's character and attitude to life. By implications, individuals should be attentive towards detecting, and understanding one's dominant element and that of the others for a better understanding and mutual co-existence. The awareness of one's

dominant element and its proper applications should help to build a mutual force of love. This article argues that challenges in relationships, violence, wars, and conflict, etc, could be as the result of the ignorance and unfamiliarity of the working and application of these elements.

Key words: Empedocles, Pluralism, Elements, Nature, Earth, Water, Air, Fire

1. Introduction

The fact of an intrinsic connection between humans, and nature is undeniable. That connection transmits messages of life that requires human's metaphysical consciousness, as well as mystical awareness and re-awakening towards inquiring into such messages. That is why Abraham Irua asserts "nature speaks to us, nature beckons and invites us to embrace an indicated message of life – messages of calmness, silence, etc; sometimes, those messages pass unaware but the ability to grasp the wisdom imbibed in such messages enlightens and nourishes man's curiosity and search for meaning and values in life."¹ In the wisdom of the ancient philosophers, the consciousness of this intrinsic connection between humans, and nature remains one of their upmost preoccupations. It was vivid to the ancient thinkers of the nature's embodiment of knowledge that when tapped should enhance human intellectual capacity. It is a fact that nature around humans is nature-in-communication to them.² Thus, throughout the history of humanity, the human beings

¹ Abraham Irua, *Man Search for Meaning in Nature* (Benin City: Royal Crown Ltd, 1989), 43.

² Ancient thought across diverse cultural traditions shared a common metaphysical intuition: that the universe is not a chaotic expanse but a structured and diversified whole, codified into fundamental entities or principles. These entities serve as metaphysical keys towards unlocking the underlying realities of nature. In the ancient Greek world, particularly among the Ionian philosophers, there was a determined quest to identify the *archē*; that is, the primary substance or principle from which all things originate. These thinkers, often described as material monists and

have ventured into the search to understand the fundamental nature of the world and how the nature relates and communicates to humans. One of earliest and most influential philosophers Empedocles, insists that nature relates and communicates to humans through the four elements of life – earth, water, air, and fire as well as the two opposing forces of nature – love (*philia*), and strife (*neikos*). These elements are not just symbolic references but rather mystical embodiments and depiction of facts that when understood, reveal the true meaning or identity of who, what, why of a human being. In recent years, the view of nature, its elements and its relationship to life practicality have gradually become the

hylozoists (those who believed that matter is alive), held that life or vitality permeates the entire cosmos. Thales of Miletus proposed *hydōr* (water) as the foundational substance. Anaximander, moving beyond the tangible, posited the *apeiron* which is the indefinite, boundless, and eternal as the source of all things. Anaximenes, by contrast, identified *aēr* (air) as the vital principle animating reality. In the Far East, ancient Chinese philosophy expressed a similar integration of humanity and cosmos. The proverb *Tian ren he yi*— “Heaven and man are one”—encapsulates the holistic vision of existence, where nature and human life are inseparable. Influenced by this worldview, Confucius developed his ethical-philosophical system centered on *Li* (ritual) and *Ren* (humaneness), emphasizing moral cultivation as the fundamental cosmic harmony. His *Analects* begin with expressions of joy in learning and living, highlighting a life in tune with nature: “Work energetically and forget to eat; be joyful and at peace with nature; forget sorrow, and do not even realize old age has come.” For Confucius, to live well is to live in dialogue with nature. It is letting nature speak to the soul, and in turn responding with one’s whole being. Ancient African philosophy, particularly from the Nile Valley civilization of Kemet (Egypt), also wrestled deeply with the origin and order of existence. From the primordial waters of *Nun* emerged *Atum* (or *Ra*), the self-created source of life and the initiator of creation. Central to this worldview is *Ma’at*, the principle of cosmic order, truth, justice, and balance, which sustains the harmony of the universe and guides human action within it. These ancient systems reveal a profound metaphysical insight: that the universe is not random but intelligible; that its foundational elements or principles are reflected in both nature and human nature; and that to live wisely is to live in attunement with these principles.

focus of academic research. Many scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on these philosophical thoughts from different angles, involving the unity of nature and man, two forces of life and the four elements.³ These studies do not only enrich our understanding of Empedocles and his quest for the relationship between nature and man, but they also provide a new theoretical perspective for modern environmental and existential ethics, ecological and philosophical philosophy. However, the current research focuses on the understanding of Empedocles' cosmological and philosophical poem that reality is composed of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire. In addition, there exists two opposing forces that rule the universe: love - *philia*, which unites, and strife - *neikos*, which separates.

³ Primavesi in "Empedocles' Cosmic Cycle and the Pythagorean Tetractys", argues that the six fundamental principles that Empedocles posited to account for reality (love, strife and the four elements) are all causally efficacious. Love and Strife are efficient causes; but the elements too are causally active, changing their own state (towards homogeneous concentration, by the attraction of like to like). Catherine Rowett in "Love, sex and the gods: Why Things have Divine Names in Empedocles' Poem, and Why they come in Pairs" addresses the question of whether, when Empedocles uses a divine name for one of the items in his ontology, this serves merely as a poetic metaphor, or it means that the item in question is a god, with personal agency and intentions. In Empedocles' poem, most things are described as if they were intentional agents and seem to function as such. Rowett argues that Empedocles was talking of a universe in which all the components, without exception, are living beings with mental capacities and that their power is the power of agents, acting voluntarily, not of inanimate forces acting mechanically. There is nothing in Empedocles' ontology that could be described as inert matter, and there are no inanimate things. In "Empedoclean Super-organisms" David Sedley looks at Empedocles' zoogony, where an original set of single-special organisms – solitary hands, eyes, etc. – combine into complex organisms, of which the fittest survive. What the fittest is naturally selected for is not the individual and/or its kin, but, as most manifestly in insect colonies, the cooperative group. Empedocles' Love likewise works by promoting co-operation.

2. Empedocles' Metaphysics of Nature: Plurality in Universe

Unlike the Ionian philosophers that emphasized monism of fundamental elements, Empedocles identified plurality in universe. His convincing pluralism, as a philosophical doctrine, holds that multiple fundamental substances or principles form the basis of reality. This stands in contrast to monism, which asserts that everything arises from a single underlying principle. According to Empedocles, realities are structurally codified distinctly into four main root elements directed by two forces that operate on these elements. The elements in nature (*physis*) are; earth (*gaia*); water (*hydōr*); air (*aer*) and fire (*pyr*). These elements are operated on by two forces: love (*philia*) and strife (*neikos*) which bring the elements together and separate them. Empedocles' universe is an organized system of diverse entities maintaining regularity over long periods of time. It is the impulses and thoughts of the elements (qua agents in the system) and of love and strife that answer these questions. Love and strife, working within the laws of nature, provide the major structural aspects of the cosmos: the circular motion of the whirl created by the opposing forces produces the masses of roots that are worked up into the heavenly bodies and the living things that populate the cosmos/universe. With these assertions, Empedocles stands as a proto-power-structuralist, by which for him the basic ingredients of the world (the elements together with love and strife) are ontologically prior to the medium sized objects of sensible experience.

3. Structural Codification of Universe's Plurality under Four Elements and Two forces

The plurality of realities is structurally codified under the four root elements: earth, air, fire, and water, which are set into motion by the two opposing forces of love and strife. Through this codification, the human mind and reason are enabled to articulate and comprehend the diversity of sensible realities, since all things perceived by the senses are composed of these elemental principles.

Moreover, this structural framework allows reason not only to grasp the multiplicity of beings, but also to assert and infer the specific constitution of each individual reality in terms of its elemental composition. The assertion portrays the originality of Empedocles in his metaphysical thought. The originality of Empedocles was sighted by Aristotle's remark at *Metaphysics* "Book Alpha", that Empedocles was the first to speak of the four so-called elements of the material kind. In the very next line, he identifies these four as fire, air, water, and earth (I.4, 985b1-2). So, it seems, we have it on Aristotle's authority that Empedocles identified fire, air, water, and earth as the elements, or principles, and, that he was the first to do so.⁴ Perhaps the first thing is to point that Aristotle is not crediting Empedocles with terminological novelty. Empedocles did not call fire, air, water, and earth 'element'.⁵ The use of the term 'element' in the sense of 'root' or 'principle of nature' is generally accepted as a later innovation.⁶

According to Timothy Crowley, "Indeed, that Empedocles did not use the term seems often to be treated as a mere historical accident, as if, incidentally, the word στοιχεῖον [element], in the appropriate sense, was not yet available to Empedocles; as if, had the word been available to him, he would have used it, to refer to fire, air, water, and earth."⁷ In other words, there appears often to be an assumption that Empedocles set out a theory of four elements, and simply used a different term for 'elements'; namely, ῥιζώματα (pizomata), that is, 'roots'.⁸

⁴ Timothy Crowley, *Aristotle, Empedocles, and The Reception of the Four Elements Hypothesis* (London: Upper Orbit Press, 1987), 1.

⁵ John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th ed (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 228.

⁶ One usually credited it to Plato; see Hugh Diels, *Elementum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899), 17.

⁷ Timothy Crowley, *Aristotle, Empedocles, and The Reception of the Four Elements Hypothesis*, 3-4.

⁸ David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 33. The author suggests 'rootings' as a more literal rendering of ῥιζώματα.....

Thus, William David Ross writes, “Empedocles’ own word for elements was ῥιζώματα.”⁹ In raising this assertion of doubt, I do not intend to suggest Empedocles’ fire, air, water, and earth, should be exclusively termed ‘roots’ rather than ‘elements’. This is indeed a move that we sometimes see adopted, motivated no doubt by a worry that to speak in terms of στοιχεῖα, ‘elements’, would be anachronistic. But while such a move may be useful to signal that Empedocles does not use the term στοιχεῖα (elements), it may well be more misleading to insist on referring to fire, air, water, and earth as Empedocles’ ‘roots’, than to describe them as his ‘elements’. The issue here is not so much whether it is anachronistic or not to talk about Empedocles’ fire, air, water, and earth as his ‘elements’. If we take as central to the later use of the term στοιχεῖον in the sense of ‘element’, that is, its use in physical contexts, the notion that a στοιχεῖον is a basic constituent of bodies, then it seems that Empedocles does have such a notion in mind, for he does deploy fire, air, water, and earth as the constituents of bodies. Empedocles holds that everything that comes to be is a mixture of these four. As such, these four things, insofar as they are constituents of compound bodies, are elemental, or at least candidates for elemental status, and so we might call them ‘elements’, indeed, ‘Empedocles’ elements.’¹⁰

The concern is whether the term ῥιζώματα (roots), as Empedocles uses it and στοιχεῖα (elements) are more or less interchangeable. And there are some reasons to think they are not. For one thing, while the term ῥιζώματα (roots) itself suggests something of an organic or botanic vitality, which may indeed evoke the idea of a principle or origin, that from which other things grow, it is not clear that this can also capture the notion central to the term στοιχεῖον (element), that is, the most basic, simplest constituent of bodies.

⁹ William David Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 138.

¹⁰ Timothy Crowley, *Aristotle, Empedocles, and The Reception of the Four Elements Hypothesis*, 6-8.

Moreover, Empedocles uses the term ῥιζώματα (roots) but once as a generic term for fire, air, water, and earth. It does not seem, in other words, to be a devoted generic or 'technical' term adopted by Empedocles to refer to fire, air, water, and earth, one that effectively plays the role of, or can readily be replaced by, a later term like στοιχεῖα (elements). Arguably, it would not be characteristic of Empedocles to employ a technical term for specific uses. These points might already seem to count against both those who wish to say that Empedocles' word for στοιχεῖα or 'elements' is ῥιζώματα or 'roots', as well as those more overly conscientious scholars who disdain to use the term 'elements' with regard to Empedocles, insisting upon the use of 'roots' instead.¹¹

4. Personification of the Elements

In *Elemental Change in Empedocles*, John Palmer argues that Empedocles envisages the elemental roots too as having their own life cycles and undergoing their own (but not self-caused) transformations, like virtually everything else in his system, except love and strife. Empedocles conceives the processes of generation and destruction not as the coming into being or annihilation of substances, but rather as the loss and recovery of the elements' distinctive qualitative identities. This occurs as the elements intermingle through the unifying agency of 'love' and separate through the divisive force of 'strife'.¹² This result makes it possible to understand Empedocles' general description of the dual processes involved in the generation and destruction of all specimen compounds. Empedocles uses the phrase 'the four roots of all things', he names these roots not as 'fire', 'air', 'water', and 'earth', but personifies them as the divinities *Zeus*, *Hera*, *Nestis*, and *Aidoneus*. For, it seems, it makes a significant difference as to whether we

¹¹ Walter Kelvin Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: The Later Plato and the Academy*, Vol. V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 141.

¹² John Palmer, *Elemental Change in Empedocles* (New York: Seaman Press, 2007), 78.

understand fire, air, water, and earth as the completely separate and independent principles effected under the rule of 'strife' (νεῖκος), in which state their true nature is revealed, or as being regarded as mixed together, culminating in the complete uniformity of the 'sphere', under the rule of 'love' (φιλία).

5. The Individual and the Knowledge of One's Element

The discovery of one's dominant element presents a reflective and nuanced task. However, this journey is often guided by those endowed with a particular aptitude for aiding individuals in the realization of their elemental constitution. Various approaches have been developed and employed to discern the predominant element within a person, drawing on both observation and interpretive insight. They are: *Theory of Elemental Vitalism*, *Theory of Energeticosophy*, and *Theory of Stoicheiophilia*.¹³

The **Theory of Elemental Vitalism**, also known by M.R. Wright as **Elemental Energism**, suggests that the fundamental elements of nature, earth, water, fire, and air, are active substances as well as dynamic bearers of vital energy. Each individual draws life-force or vitality from a particular element in a manner that is both intuitive and experiential.¹⁴ According to this theory, human beings are inherently attuned to any of these elemental forces. The attuned element serves as the dominant element; and through contemplative awareness and somatic sensitivity, one can discern the specific element from which their deepest vitality emanates. William Ellery Leonard in *The Great Works of the Pluralist: Empedocles* asserts that "the dominant element becomes a conduit of heightened energy, clarity, and self-realization".¹⁵ In the presence

¹³ Max Ray Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (London: Yale University Press, 2017), 48-56.

¹⁴ Max Ray Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, 49.

¹⁵ William Ellery Leonard, *The Great Works of the Pluralist: Empedocles* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 2021), 89.

of this element, the individual may experience an extraordinary sense of empowerment, achieving feats or insights that lie beyond their ordinary capacities.

Elemental Vitalism is quite different from the popular ‘Vitalism’ which is a philosophical and historical doctrine that holds that living beings are fundamentally different from non-living things because they are governed by a special common “vital force” or unified “life-principle”, and not reducible to purely physical or chemical processes.¹⁶ In as much as ‘Elemental Vitalism’ recognizes the presence of ‘vital force’ or ‘life principle’, it dismisses the ‘unified’ or ‘common’ life principle in all living things. Elemental Vitalism holds that there are four life principles that are at the disposal of the living things and each living thing is to participate solely in one of the four life-principles.¹⁷ Therefore, Elemental Vitalism encourages individuals to observe the nuanced responses of their bodies, minds, and spirits to each element, as a pathway to self-knowledge, holistic well-being, and existential flourishing. For instance, a person whose vitality is rooted in the element of water may find profound tranquillity and cognitive lucidity when immersed in or in engagement with aquatic environments. In such states, rational and analytical faculties are not only heightened but harmonized with the deeper rhythms of being.¹⁸ The theory envisions the natural elements as metaphysical archetypes—each offering a unique vibrational frequency through which the human person may access deeper layers of vitality, purpose, and self-coherence.

Within the basis of Elemental Vitalism, individuals may be broadly categorized according to the elemental source from which they derive their deepest vitality and energy. These archetypes:

¹⁶ Marcel Okeke, *Vitalism and Its Tenets* (Aba: Orbit Press Ltd, 2023), 17.

¹⁷ Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, “Introduction to Metaphysics: Essay on Elemental Vitalism,” Lecture Note, Nairobi, Consolata Institute of Philosophy, 2013-2014 Academic Year, 24-26.

¹⁸ Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, “Introduction to Metaphysics: Essay on Elemental Vitalism,” 25.

Aquaists, *Ignisists*, *Terraists*, and *Aerists* (or *Auraists*) represent distinct modes of energetic resonance with the natural world.¹⁹

Aquaists are those whose inner being is profoundly attuned to the element of water. For them, water is not merely a physical substance but a sacred medium of clarity, inspiration, and emotional equilibrium. It is often under rainfall or while immersed in water that their cognitive faculties awaken, allowing insight, creativity, and contemplation to emerge with unusual clarity. In communion with water, they seek not only peace but a deeper understanding of self and existence.

In contrast, *Ignisists* find their vital energy in the element of fire or heat. Fire becomes for them a symbol and source of transformative power, passion, and spiritual intensity. It enkindles within them a resilience and drive that propels them through moments of adversity and creative endeavour.

Terraists are those whose vitality is grounded in the earth. The soil, for them, is not inert matter but a living, sacred presence. They often exhibit an instinctive desire to connect physically with the ground—frequently walking barefoot during times of deep reflection or crisis—as a means of anchoring themselves, drawing strength and clarity from the solidity and nurturing presence of the earth.

Meanwhile, *Aerists* or *Auraists* are sustained and invigorated by the element of air. For them, breath and atmospheric purity are deeply symbolic of intellectual clarity, spiritual elevation, and existential freedom. This archetype finds resonance with the ancient figure Aenesidemus, the 1st-century revival of Pyrrhonian scepticism, who might be regarded as a *proto-Aerist*. His philosophical posture embodies the qualities of the “aerial vitalist”: one who remains resilient, lucid, and more dedicated amidst challenges because the purer the air the more sound they are.

¹⁹ *Aquaists*, *Ignisists*, *Terraists*, and *Aerists* (or *Auraists*) are the terms I coined using the Latin translations of ‘water’ for ‘*aqua*’; ‘fire’ for ‘*ignis*’; ‘earth’ for ‘*terra*’; and ‘air’ for ‘*aer*’ or ‘*aura*’. The ‘*ists*’ attached to those latin terms are to indicate the individuals who are the possessors of those elements.

The **Theory of Energeticosophy** theorizes that some individuals, by their very nature, are endowed with an intuitive and spiritual capacity to perceive and guide others toward the discovery of their intrinsic elemental essence.²⁰ These individuals are known as *Energeticosophers*—a term derived from the fusion of the Greek *energeia* (energy) and *sophos* (wise one or sage). The *Energeticosopher* is thus a “sage of energy,” a person attuned not only to the vibrational patterns of the natural elements but also to the subtle energetic constitution of human beings. An *Energeticosopher* possesses the rare ability to discern, through deep observation and intuitive resonance, the dominant elemental force within people.²¹

This discernment is not merely psychological or behavioural; it is existential. Just as some are innately gifted in identifying talents such as musicality, athleticism, or artistic expression, the *Energeticosopher* reads the patterns of personality, temperament, and behaviour to unveil the elemental source from which an individual draws their vitality—be it water, fire, earth, or air. These individuals are also referred to as *Anthropognosts*, from the Greek *anthropos* (human being) and *gnōstēs* (knower). The *Anthropognost* is a knower of the human essence—one who perceives the latent gifts, hidden motivations, and spiritual archetypes that underlie human character. They possess a form of existential insight that transcends empirical observation, moving into the realm of intuitive knowledge, or gnosis. Thus, *Energeticosophy* offers a dual pathway to the identification of elemental affinity: “Introspective Realization”—where individuals, through contemplative engagement with the elements, come to recognize their own energetic alignment; and “Energetic Mediation”—through the guidance of the *Energeticosopher* or *Anthropognost*, who facilitates the revelation of one’s elemental identity.²²

²⁰ Max Ray Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, 51.

²¹ Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, “Introduction to Metaphysics: Essay on Elemental Vitalism,” 26.

²² Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, “Introduction to Metaphysics: Essay on Elemental Vitalism,” 27.

The **Theory of Stoicheiophilia** derives from the classical Greek terms *stoicheion* (στοιχεῖον), meaning “element,” and *philia* (φιλία), meaning “love” or “affection.” Rooted in the cosmological bases of ancient thinkers such as Empedocles, Plato, and Aristotle, this theory explores the intimate affinity between the human soul and the foundational elements of nature: earth, water, air, and fire. It is also referred to, in a more poetic Latinized expression, as *Elementumamor*—the love of the elements. *Stoicheiophilia* speculates that one’s elemental identity can often be discerned through the profound emotional and existential attachment an individual feels toward a particular natural element. This affinity is not arbitrary but expressive of a deeper ontological resonance, a felt sense of belonging to the elemental order of the cosmos. For instance, individuals who are naturally drawn to aquatic environments—those who find peace in showers, are comforted by the sea, ocean, or rivers, or who intuitively gravitate toward bodies of water often embody the characteristics of the water archetype. For such individuals, water is not merely a sensory pleasure but a medium through which intellectual clarity, emotional balance, and intuitive reasoning are awakened. It serves as both a metaphor and conduit for their inner flow of thought and being.²³

Likewise, those who feel most alive in open air, high altitudes, or breezy spaces may belong to the air archetype, resonating with freedom, mental agility, and philosophical elevation. Those deeply connected to soil, forests, or natural landscapes may align with the earth archetype, valuing stability, contemplation, and organic rootedness. Those drawn to heat, firelight, or the transformative power of flame often reflect the fire archetype, characterized by passion, will, and creative intensity. The theory thus affirms that what one loves and instinctively prefers reveals where one metaphysically belongs. This elemental attraction becomes a compass pointing to the soul’s natural domain, and in recognizing this, individuals can orient themselves toward deeper self-

²³ Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, “Introduction to Metaphysics: Essay on Elemental Vitalism,” 27-28.

understanding, well-being, and existential harmony with the cosmos.

6. The Four Elements in Relation to the Forces of Love and Strife

The experience of the two forces of life for Empedocles depends on the relationship and interactions of the elements. When an *aquaist* encounters another of the same elemental affinity, there is an immediate resonance—a mutual recognition born of elemental harmony. Love, in such moments, is not merely felt but flows naturally, for kindred elements are drawn together by a deep ontological rapport. Conversely, when an *ignisist* meets a *terraist*, conflict often arises; the inherent dissonance between fire and earth manifests as tension, since opposing elements tend to resist one another's essence. M. Schofield argues that the proximity of elements to each other reflects their closeness to the primal forces of life. This is, symbolically, evident in the elemental correspondence with the human fingers: their positions and interactions mirror the metaphysical relationships among the elements, revealing the subtle interplay of attraction, resistance, and balance that governs both nature and the soul.²⁴

In the symbolic mapping of the elements onto the human hand, each finger embodies a fundamental principle of being. The thumb, which is the stoutest and most grounded, signifies *physis* (nature), the primordial foundation of existence. The index finger, used to point and direct, represents *gaia* (earth), the stable and formative force. The middle finger, longest and centrally positioned, corresponds to *hydōr* (water), symbolizing depth, fluidity, and emotional intelligence. The ring finger, associated with bonds and breath, signifies *aēr* (air), the element of communication and spirit. Lastly, the little finger embodies *pyr* (fire), the subtle yet potent

²⁴ Matthew Schofield, "Empedocles (c.495–c.435 BC)," In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Taylor Francis (London: Princeton Publishers, 2002), 113-14.

principle of transformation, passion, and will. Within this elemental framework, relationships among individuals reflect the proximity and compatibility of their governing elements. A person of water, for instance, finds natural affinity with those of earth and air. Water nourishes earth and moves freely with air, creating conditions for harmonious friendship, emotional connection, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Likewise, air complements fire, enabling mutual inspiration and a shared rhythm in life's movement.

However, tension arises when elements at odds come into contact. Fire and earth, distant both in position and nature, struggle to coexist; in other words, the fiery temperament finds the grounded stillness of earth too resistant, while earth views fire as too volatile and consuming. Similarly, the relationship between air and earth is marked by disparity: air seeks freedom and ascent, while earth remains rooted and unmoving.²⁵ The distance between fingers becomes a metaphor for the metaphysical distances between beings; distances that shape attraction, resistance, harmony, or discord in human interaction.

7. The Elements and the Forces: A Practical Application

The study becomes more practical in applying the knowledge of the elements and forces of Empedocles to the day-to-day living experience. The areas of the living experiences extend to courtship towards marriage, human relationships in family and community.²⁶

²⁵ Hillary Oguejiofor Eze and Celestine Edozie Anyaorah, "Revisiting Empedocles' Philosophical Postulations to Science", in *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 11, No. 9, ed. Anthony Kanu (Umunya: Tansian University, 2025), 54-61.

²⁶ Castro Barbosa de Castilho, *The Theory of Four Elements Through History and Its Influence on the Development of Chemistry* (New York: Orbit Press, 2022), 91.

a) Relationships in Family and Community Living

The dynamics of family life, like all human relationships, are not merely products of upbringing or circumstance. They often reflect deeper metaphysical structures, such as the interplay of elemental types. Persistent tension or recurring discord between family members may stem not from malice or misunderstanding alone, but from a fundamental disharmony in their elemental constitutions. Just as fire and water repel, or earth and air struggle to relate, so too do individuals whose elemental natures diverge find it difficult to establish enduring peace within close proximity. Conversely, feelings of affinity, affection, or special closeness among certain members of a family may be traced to a shared elemental type or complementary elemental resonance.

This shared metaphysical ground fosters mutual understanding, emotional synergy, and intuitive connection. Some contemporary interpreters of Empedocles, such as Simon Trépanier in *Empedocles on Nature*, explore the symbolic depth of the four elements by aligning them with human dispositions. Earth represents stability and trust, symbolizing reliability, commitment, and the grounding force in relationships. Those of the earth type are naturally faithful, protective, and steadfast. Water embodies emotion and adaptability, reflecting empathy, sensitivity, and the capacity to adjust in the face of relational challenges. Individuals governed by water tend to prioritize harmony, often yielding their own desires for the sake of connection. Air signifies communication and intellect. It represents clarity of thought, the need for dialogue, and the freedom to express.²⁷ In relationships, air types thrive on shared ideas, openness, and mental stimulation. This elemental framework reveals that relational harmony is not accidental but rooted in the deep metaphysical interplay of character and elemental essence.²⁸

²⁷ Simon Trépanier, *Empedocles on Nature* (London: Random Publishers, 2023), 67.

²⁸ Recep Kulcu, "Pioneers of Scientific Thought: Empedocles and Anaxagoras", In *International Journal of Research and Innovations in Social Science*, 14(2), ed. Lawrence Wallace (London: Novum Publishing, 2003), 122-24.

Peter Kingsley, a British philosopher and mystic who has explored extensively on Empedocles argued in *Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* that the proper awareness of one's natural element is a sapiential illumination that should help persons in living better in communities. Communitarian clashes, conflict, and violence towards each other is as a result of the inability to understand and appreciate the natural element differences among us.²⁹ In fact, A.V Halapsis, Dnipropetrovsk State University of Internal Affairs in Ukraine, writes in *Divine Evolution: Empedocles' Anthropology* reconstructs the importance of Empedocles' philosophy to the human development and co-existence. He affirms that in the formation of communities, and even in assigning individuals to roles of authority or responsibility, serious attention should be given to the natural elemental constitution of each person.³⁰

When this metaphysical reality is ignored, disharmony often follows. For instance, placing an earth type in close daily interaction with a fire type is likely to generate conflict, not out of ill will, but due to their inherently opposing dispositions. Only through significant personal maturity and conscious effort can individuals of contrasting elements, such as water and fire, coexist harmoniously. In contrast, communities composed of individuals with the same or closely aligned elemental types tend to experience greater stability, mutual understanding, and existential balance. Thus, for the sake of communal harmony and flourishing, the elemental nature of individuals must be thoughtfully considered.

b) Courtship towards Marriage

The study of one's elemental constitution ought to be an essential component of any preparatory course for courtship and marriage. Just as prospective couples undergo medical testing to determine

²⁹ Peter Kingsley, *Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, (New York: Harper and Row, 2022), 32.

³⁰ Andrew Vim Halapsis, *Divine Evolution: Empedocles' Anthropology* (Dnipropetrovsk: Dnipropetrovsk State University of Internal Affairs Press, 2024), 13.

blood group or genotype compatibility, so too should they seek to discern their elemental types. For the knowledge of one's elemental nature is not merely a matter of curiosity. It is a key to wisdom in human relationships. Understanding one's elemental type equips a person to choose a partner with greater discernment and to approach relational dynamics with deeper insight. For instance, it would be unwise for a person governed by the element of water to unite in lifelong partnership with one ruled by fire. Such elemental opposition breeds dissonance, and if unacknowledged, may ignite persistent conflict. It is right to note that many relational difficulties are not solely caused by elemental difference but may also arise from excessive similarity or elemental proximity.

When individuals share the same element or closely related ones, tensions may emerge from mirrored temperaments, competing drives, or emotional saturation. Yet, as Empedocles' elemental theory suggests, while such pairings may experience conflict, they often also possess the innate capacity for reconciliation, rooted in their shared essence. The modern crisis of marital instability and the alarming rise in divorce rates may, in part, reflect a collective neglect of this metaphysical insight. By ignoring the elemental makeup of individuals, many enter into unions blind to the deeper energetic and existential forces at play. A philosophical return to the wisdom of elemental harmony could restore balance and deepen human understanding.

8. Conclusion

Empedocles' notions on the elements of nature – earth, water, air, and fire – alongside cosmic forces of love (*philia*) and strife (*neikos*) has given us an important idea for understanding society today. Empedocles' assertions are vital today because they touch the crucial aspects of human existence. It is the conviction that human interactions are governed by the factors such as love which fosters unity, cooperation, and harmony, while strife engenders division, conflict, and destruction. Therefore, in today's world where social fragmentation, are sustained by political ideological conflict and personal alienation are prevalent, an "opposite approach" to human

relationships would require a conscious cultivation of love as a binding force. Just as the elements achieve balance through the interplay of these forces, so too must human relationship be nurtured through dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect.

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