Summary

EMPEDOCLES’ SPHERE IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF ANCIENT INTERPRETERS

This article attempts to shed more light on a problem we addressed in a previous work, namely the nature of Empedocles’ Sphere, which we take for a structured whole and not – as it seems to be usually interpreted – as an amorphous mixture. This time we did not concentrate on the fragments of Empedocles himself, but we studied the further reception of the Sphere by ancient Greek writers.

First, we attempted to show that the interpretation prevalent today is actually due to Aristotle’s equation of the Sphere with his concept of first matter conceived as an undetermined substratum. The only ancient author who seems to hold the interpretation of the Sphere as an amorphous mixture is, however, John Philoponus and, moreover, in some his commentaries to Aristotle only. Then we have gone through the Neoplatonist explanation of the Sphere in which it is regularly equated with the intelligible word of the Forms. Although its transcendence is clearly at odds with the original intentions of Empedocles, in this interpretative approach it must be, however, structured as the Forms are. Finally, if we concentrate on Plato himself, we can find Empedoclean traces especially in the Timaeus and Politicus. In both case the Sphere is equated with the sensible world which is, again, a structured whole. We have then extended our research from the Politicus to Symposium on the basis of which we would like to claim that mysterious “whole-natured forms (οὐλοφωνείς τύποι)” from Empedocles’ zoography are the same as Plato’s androgynes.

If we are then to conclude by the reconstruction of the whole cosmic as well as the life cycle according to the testimonies of later authors, we suggest that the both processes are closely interconnected. Under the influence of the Love more and more complex forms of life appear by composing together primarily created individual limbs. This evolutive process goes on until it reaches the “whole-natured forms” which – similarly to everything else – form a part of the Sphere. When the perfect unity of elements is broken under the renewed influence of the Strife, the perfect “whole-natured” organisms are destroyed by division into the men and women we know today. Then, together with the overall destruction of the cosmos, organisms will be decomposed into the primary limbs that will finally cease to exist, too.