

THEME 01 / QUESTIONS 01–10

Knowledge, evidence & limits

READ On Nature, Proem; Introduction II, IV, VI–VII.

Text: Empedocles of Acragas, The Complete Fragments, uploaded bilingual edition.

For Socrates: Ask one numbered prompt at a time. Request textual evidence, test the answer with an objection, and invite revision. B means Diels–Kranz 31 B; a decimal marks verse numbers. Intro means the Introduction’s numbered section. Distinguish its claims from the fragments themselves.

- 01 **A glimpse of the whole.** Why does seeing only a small part of life lead people to believe they have found the whole? What kind of intellectual discipline would answer this criticism without making inquiry impossible?
Reference: B 2
- 02 **Trusting the senses.** What does it mean to examine something with every available faculty? When sight, hearing, and the tongue seem to disagree, does this passage supply a rule for deciding between them?
Reference: B 3.9–13
- 03 **Truth and restraint.** Why should the desire for honour tempt a speaker to say more than is holy? Does the appeal to piety protect truthful inquiry, restrict it, or leave that relationship uncertain?
Reference: B 3.1–8
- 04 **Testing a teacher.** How can the demand to sift an argument coexist with the claim that the base distrust those who prevail? What would distinguish responsible criticism from the distrust condemned here?
Reference: B 3–4
- 05 **Learning as growth.** When learning is said to increase the mind, is knowledge merely added to an unchanged learner? Compare this with B 110’s promise that “these very things” grow and remain with the attentive reader.
Reference: B 17.14; B 110.1–5
- 06 **Quotation and survival.** How might a later author’s purpose shape what survives of an argument? What changes when we remember that a numbered fragment is not necessarily a unit Empedocles himself composed?
Reference: Intro II
- 07 **Arrangement and argument.** What interpretation is encouraged by placing the daimon passages in the Proem of On Nature? Why must we distinguish a useful reading order from evidence of the original poem’s structure?
Reference: Intro IV; B 115–126
- 08 **Visible uncertainty.** How should a supplement, a dagger, or an incomplete sentence affect the weight placed on a passage? Choose one example and separate what is printed securely from what remains uncertain.
Reference: Intro VI–VII; B 46; B 125
- 09 **The missing evidence.** Which kinds of evidence does this edition deliberately omit? How should that affect a claim to have reconstructed the complete system from the fragments printed here?
Reference: Intro VII
- 10 **A standard of belief.** What would justify accepting the poet’s assurance that his words contain truth, given his warning about limited human understanding? Formulate a standard that could also expose his own error.
Reference: B 2–4; B 114

THEME 02 / QUESTIONS 11–20

The four roots & the problem of change

READ On Nature, Book I; B 14 in Fragments of Uncertain Place.

Begin with the vocabulary of this edition: roots, mixture, separation, and mortal things. Ask what changes, what endures, and what our names conceal.

- 11 Why “roots”?** What does calling the four constituents “roots” suggest about their relationship to the things formed from them? What might disappear from the argument if we silently replaced that word with another?

Reference: B 6–7; Intro V–VI
- 12 Divine names.** What can the descriptions of Zeus, Hera, Aidoneus, and Nestis establish about the roots? Where do the identifications discussed in the Introduction go beyond what the three surviving verses explicitly say?

Reference: B 6; Intro V
- 13 Nothing from nothing.** What is the argument against something coming from what in no way is? Does its force depend on observation, on the meaning of being, or on an assumption the reader must grant?

Reference: B 11–12
- 14 Birth as a name.** If birth is really mixture, what exactly is mistaken in ordinary speech? Why does the speaker nevertheless continue to use the customary language of birth and death?

Reference: B 8–9; Intro VI
- 15 What survives death?** Does the persistence of what composes a person establish the persistence of that person? What would have to be added to the argument before this became a claim about individual survival?

Reference: B 11–12; B 15
- 16 A full universe.** What work is done by denying that any part of the All is empty or superfluous? How could mixture and movement occur within such an account without something entering from outside?

Reference: B 13–14; B 17.30–35
- 17 Equality and difference.** What does “equal and of like age” allow us to say about rank among the principles? How can equal standing coexist with different offices, different characters, and alternating dominance?

Reference: B 17.18–35
- 18 The painter’s palette.** How does the painter’s use of a few pigments explain the diversity of things? Does the analogy also commit the explanation to a painter-like maker, or does that exceed its stated purpose?

Reference: B 23
- 19 The same, yet otherwise.** In what sense can the roots become now one thing, now another, while remaining continuously the same? Distinguish a change of arrangement from a change in what the constituents themselves are.

Reference: B 17.34–35; B 21
- 20 The place of gods.** Why do the lists of things produced by mixture include long-lived gods alongside plants, animals, and humans? What distinction, if any, follows between these gods and the enduring roots?

Reference: B 6–7; B 21; B 23

THEME 03 / QUESTIONS 21–30

Love, Strife & the Sphere

READ On Nature, Book I; Introduction V on the disputed cosmic cycle.

Keep cosmic description and moral evaluation in view together. Do not assume that every joining is beneficial or that every separation is simply a failure.

- 21 Recognising Love.** Why must Love be looked upon with the mind rather than merely with astonished eyes? How does the appeal to familiar thoughts of affection support a claim about the whole cosmos?
Reference: B 17.20–26
- 22 The body as evidence.** How does the joining and dispersal of bodily limbs make Love and Strife intelligible? Is the body evidence for the cosmic account, an illustration of it, or both?
Reference: B 20
- 23 Affinity and difference.** Why do some things fit well together while others remain hostile? Does Love erase their differences, or make a relation possible between things that retain distinct characters?
Reference: B 22
- 24 A double birth.** How can the coming together of all things both produce and destroy mortal things? Explain each movement without treating “more Love” as automatically equivalent to “more individual life.”
Reference: B 17.1–13
- 25 Perfect unity.** What has happened to the distinctions between sun, earth, and sea in the Sphere? Why is this condition described as rejoicing in solitude rather than as a deprivation?
Reference: B 27–28
- 26 A god without limbs.** What is gained by denying the Sphere human limbs and bodily organs? How does the absence of faction or quarrel help describe a unity that is nevertheless spoken of as divine?
Reference: B 27a; B 29
- 27 Why change returns.** Why does Strife rise when its appointed time is fulfilled? Does the oath explain how change begins within the god, or name a necessity whose mechanism remains unexplained?
Reference: B 16; B 30–31
- 28 An incomplete withdrawal.** Why does the formation of countless mortal things occur while Strife has only partly withdrawn? What does this suggest about the conditions in which differentiated life can exist?
Reference: B 35.6–17; B 36
- 29 Reconstructing the cycle.** Which stages of the cycle can you establish directly from these verses? Where does arranging them into one or two world-formations require a further interpretive decision?
Reference: B 17; B 26; B 35; Intro V
- 30 Are the powers good and evil?** Does praising Love and condemning Strife settle the moral value of every mixture and separation? Test your answer against the emergence of living bodies and their eventual loss of distinctness.
Reference: B 17; B 20; B 35

THEME 04 / QUESTIONS 31–40

Heavens, earth & natural explanation

READ On Nature, Book I: the passages on earth, sea, weather, sun, and moon.

Treat these explanations as claims made in the poem, not as modern scientific conclusions. Ask what each passage explains and what evidence its explanation requires.

- 31 **A beginning without creation.** What can “the beginning” mean in a system that denies coming-to-be from nothing? How would you distinguish the beginning of a visible world from the beginning of its constituents?
Reference: B 38; B 12; B 17
- 32 **Unseen depths.** What is the objection to confident claims about boundless earth and aither? Is the speaker rejecting the particular account, the evidence offered for it, or the habit of speaking beyond experience?
Reference: B 39; B 2
- 33 **Above and below.** How do subterranean fire and aither extending beneath the earth complicate a simple picture of separate regions? What may we infer about the world’s arrangement, and what do these brief verses leave unstated?
Reference: B 38; B 52; B 54
- 34 **The earth’s sweat.** What does calling the sea the earth’s sweat make intelligible? Compare that image with salt compacted by the sun: where does a vivid resemblance become a proposed account of a process?
Reference: B 55–56
- 35 **The language of the sky.** What work is done by a sharp-darting sun, a gentle moon, and an undaunted face? Do these descriptions add agency to the explanation, or characterise appearances without settling their causes?
Reference: B 40–41; B 44
- 36 **Borrowed light.** How do the moon’s light “not her own,” the ray striking her circle, and her gaze toward a lord fit together? Which part of your explanation is stated, and which connects separate fragments?
Reference: B 43; B 45; B 47
- 37 **Light and obstruction.** How does the account of earth making night compare with the moon cutting off rays? What common explanatory pattern can be identified without pretending that the surviving passages form a complete astronomical theory?
Reference: B 42; B 48–49
- 38 **Weather and divine names.** What changes when weather is described through Iris or through cloud-gathering air? Must divine naming and physical description be rival explanations, or can these verses sustain both at once?
Reference: B 50; B 149; B 38
- 39 **Chance within order.** How could a particular event happen by chance in a cosmos whose powers receive appointed turns? Distinguish the ordering of the whole cycle from the meeting of particular things.
Reference: B 53; B 30; B 17
- 40 **What makes an explanation strong?** Which account is strongest: borrowed moonlight, night caused by obstructed light, or salt produced by compaction? State your criterion of explanatory strength, then ask whether a rival example satisfies it better.
Reference: B 45; B 48; B 56

THEME 05 / QUESTIONS 41–50

The emergence of life & living bodies

READ On Nature, Books I–II; relevant reports in Fragments of Uncertain Place.

Move from detached parts to organised bodies, then examine the explanations of their composition. Keep the printed verses distinct from reconstructions reported in the Introduction.

- 41 Parts before wholes.** What makes a wandering eye an eye when it has no forehead, or an arm an arm without a shoulder? Does naming a part already imply the whole to which it could belong?
Reference: B 57–58
- 42 Meeting by chance.** How does the chance meeting of parts relate to the activity attributed elsewhere to Cypris? Must chance and divine workmanship exclude one another, or could they describe different aspects of formation?
Reference: B 59; B 61; B 73
- 43 A coherent creature.** What separates a creature’s many parts from a functioning whole? Do the descriptions of double-faced and mixed creatures supply a criterion, or mainly make the problem of bodily organisation visible?
Reference: B 61; B 71
- 44 Whole-natured forms.** Why are the first earth-born forms called whole-natured when they lack the familiar frame, voice, and sexual member? What sort of wholeness is present before these distinctions appear?
Reference: B 62
- 45 Selection or sequence?** Do the printed verses describe an ongoing process of selection, or a sequence of formations and combinations? Separate their claims from the later interpretation discussed in the Introduction.
Reference: B 57–62; Intro V
- 46 Cypris as craftswoman.** What does moistening earth and giving forms to fire to harden explain about bodies? Where does the craftsman-like image help us follow a process, and where does it leave causal questions open?
Reference: B 73; B 75
- 47 Bone, blood, and flesh.** How do the proportions described for bone compare with the near-equal mixture associated with blood and flesh? Is a substance identified by its ingredients alone, or also by their measured relation?
Reference: B 96; B 98
- 48 Sexual differentiation.** What explanatory work do heat and cold perform in this account of sexual differentiation? Which claims appear to be observations, and which are inferences from the theory? What evidence would those inferences require?
Reference: B 63; B 65; B 67
- 49 Across kinds of life.** What is achieved by comparing olives with eggs and by calling hair, leaves, feathers, and scales “the same things”? Is the sameness one of material, function, origin, or some combination?
Reference: B 79; B 82
- 50 An explanation at second hand.** When bodily generation is preserved as Aristotle’s prose in B 92 or Theon’s report in B 153a, how should we separate Empedocles’ explanation from the argument made by the preserving author?
Reference: B 92; B 153a; Intro VI–VII

THEME 06 / QUESTIONS 51–60

Perception, thought & intelligence

READ On Nature, Books I–II: the eye, breathing, effluences, and thought.

Ask how a perceiver belongs to the same world as what is perceived. Then test whether a physical account of thinking also explains knowledge and error.

- 51 Things reaching us.** How do effluences make sense of tracking an animal that is no longer visibly present? What must pass from the object to the perceiver for this account to work?
Reference: B 89; B 101
- 52 The eye as lantern.** Match the lamp, its screens, and escaping light to the parts of the eye described here. Which elements of seeing does the comparison explain, and which would need a further account?
Reference: B 84
- 53 An organ of affection.** What does Aphrodite’s fashioning of eyes with “rivets of affection” add to the lantern account? Is successful perception itself presented as a kind of joining?
Reference: B 84; B 86–87
- 54 Learning from a water-catcher.** How does the girl’s bronze water-catcher make the relation between air and liquid intelligible? What must correspond between vessel and body before the analogy can support an explanation of breathing?
Reference: B 100
- 55 The reach of an analogy.** The breathing passage begins by speaking of all things. How far does the example justify that scope? What additional evidence would be needed to extend the account beyond the body it describes?
Reference: B 100; B 102
- 56 Like knows like.** Why should earth be known by earth and love by love? Does knowing Strife require having Strife within oneself, and would that make understanding something different from approving it?
Reference: B 109
- 57 Blood and thought.** What is meant by saying that the blood around the heart is thought? Read this alongside the account of blood’s mixture: does bodily composition explain the occurrence of thinking, its content, or both?
Reference: B 105; B 98
- 58 A changing thinker.** If changes in a person bring changes in thinking, how can anyone distinguish improved understanding from merely different opinion? What standard of truth could the poet’s own assurances supply?
Reference: B 106; B 108; B 114
- 59 “All things” think.** How broadly should “all things” be read in the claims about thought and intelligence? What differences between kinds of awareness are stated, and which would we be supplying ourselves?
Reference: B 103; B 107; B 110.10
- 60 Attention as cultivation.** What are the “things” said to remain with the attentive learner and to leave the distracted one? Is this a claim about memory, character, the realities known, or their interdependence?
Reference: B 110

THEME 07 / QUESTIONS 61–70

The daimon: exile, identity & return

READ On Nature, Proem: B 115–126; The Purifications: B 127, B 146–147.

Use daimon or spirit, as this edition does. Do not settle its nature by silently substituting a later account of the soul.

- 61 The offence and its penalty.** Why might bloodshed and a false oath belong under the same decree? What relationship between bodily action, truthful speech, and divine membership would make the penalty intelligible?
Reference: B 115.1–8
- 62 A world that expels.** What is conveyed by air, sea, earth, and sunlight passing the exile from one to another? Are they punishers, places of embodiment, or descriptions whose relation the fragment leaves open?
Reference: B 115.9–14
- 63 Necessity and Grace.** How does Grace's loathing of unbearable Necessity complicate the decree of exile? Does the brief surviving statement suggest resistance, mercy, or simply a tension we cannot resolve?
Reference: B 115–116
- 64 Who says "I"?** What remains the same when the speaker says he has been a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a fish? Is memory enough to establish that identity, or is something further required?
Reference: B 117
- 65 An alien tunic.** What does flesh as an alien tunic suggest about embodiment? How much can this image establish about the daimon's nature, given the Introduction's warning against translating it simply as "soul"?
Reference: B 126; Intro V–VI
- 66 The unfamiliar place.** How do weeping, lost blessedness, darkness, and the roofed cave shape the experience of embodiment? Which features support a literal place, a moral condition, or a combination of these readings?
Reference: B 118–121
- 67 A world of opposites.** Why are figures such as Quarrel and Harmony, Growth and Decay, and Silence and Utterance gathered together? Do they organise the exile's world, describe experiences within it, or resist a single scheme?
Reference: B 122/123
- 68 Significant forms of life.** Why might lions, laurels, and the human callings listed in B 146 mark significant forms of life? What supplies their value, and how much of that explanation is actually preserved?
Reference: B 127; B 146; Intro V
- 69 The meaning of return.** What is gained by sharing hearth and table with the immortals and escaping human grief? Is the goal belonging, knowledge, freedom from suffering, or a condition joining all three?
Reference: B 146–147
- 70 Responsibility through change.** What must persist for offence, punishment, and return to concern the same daimon? Which parts of such an account are present, and which does the Introduction explicitly leave unresolved?
Reference: B 115; B 117; B 126; Intro V

THEME 08 / QUESTIONS 71–80

Kinship, violence & purification

READ The Purifications; B 139 in On Nature, Book II; B 115 in the Proem.

Follow the movement from recognising kinship to changing conduct. Distinguish the grounds given for a prohibition from reasons a reader might independently add.

- 71 A failure to see.** Why is slaughter presented as heedlessness or a failure to recognise what is happening? What would someone have to understand before an apparently ordinary meal became an act of mutual devouring?
Reference: B 136; B 117
- 72 The changed son.** What makes the father's sacrifice of his transformed son especially disturbing? Is the decisive wrong bodily suffering, destroyed kinship, ignorance, or an action whose pious language conceals its character?
Reference: B 137
- 73 Piety that becomes impiety.** How can a prayer accompany the act the poet condemns as an evil feast? What standard allows him to judge a recognised act of worship rather than accept its participants' description?
Reference: B 137; B 128
- 74 Worship without blood.** What do images, perfumes, incense, and libations offer in place of slaughter? Does the passage reject worship itself, or distinguish forms of offering according to the relation they establish?
Reference: B 128.4–10
- 75 The reign of kindliness.** What kind of common life is imagined when beasts and birds are gentle toward humans? Does the passage make peace depend on human conduct, animal conduct, or a transformed relation between them?
Reference: B 128; B 130
- 76 The speaker's remorse.** What is the force of wishing that death had come before cruel devouring? How does the speaker's participation in wrongdoing affect the authority and emotional weight of his condemnation?
Reference: B 139; B 136
- 77 Why these plants?** How might the laurel's place among living forms help explain its prohibition? Does the same reasoning explain the ban on beans, or does that rule remain less fully accounted for in the printed verses?
Reference: B 127; B 140–141
- 78 A law for all.** What would make a law extend through aether and boundless light rather than depend on a city's custom? Does the fragment state the law's content, or chiefly assert its scope?
Reference: B 135
- 79 Fasting from wickedness.** How does "to fast from wickedness" alter the meaning of abstinence? Can correct outward behaviour coexist with the condition of mind criticised elsewhere, and what would genuine purification require?
Reference: B 144–145; B 136
- 80 Testing the ethical foundation.** As a test of the argument, suppose transmigration were set aside. Which ethical claims would retain support in these passages, and which would lose the basis the poet gives them?
Reference: B 115; B 117; B 128; B 136–137

THEME 09 / QUESTIONS 81–90

Divine mind, poet & teacher

READ On Nature, Book III; the addresses and invocations in both named poems.

Examine claims to divine knowledge without resolving them in advance. Distinguish what the speaker asserts, how he argues, and what he asks the listener to become.

- 81 Beyond sight and touch.** Why does the inability to see or grasp the divine matter for persuasion? How should this passage be read beside the instruction to use every available faculty?
Reference: B 133; B 3.9–13
- 82 Mind without a human body.** What is excluded by the description of sacred, unutterable mind? Compare its denial of human limbs with the Sphere passage: does similarity of wording establish that the same subject is described?
Reference: B 134; B 29
- 83 Divine and human thought.** Can the divine mind darting through the ordered world be understood through the same account as thought in blood? What supports continuity between them, and what supports a difference?
Reference: B 134; B 105
- 84 An exile and a god.** How can the speaker call himself both an exile from god and an immortal god among humans? What possible readings deserve testing before we assume a chronological story of spiritual development?
Reference: B 115; B 112; Intro IV
- 85 Grandeur or self-questioning?** Does the question in B 113 undercut the self-presentation of B 112, or intensify the claim to superiority? Which features of the wording support each possibility?
Reference: B 112–113
- 86 Unwelcome truth.** Why is conviction described as grievous and ill-received? How can the difference between divine understanding and dark opinion be established without simply accepting the teacher's own declaration?
Reference: B 114; B 132
- 87 Pausanias and the city.** Compare the individual addressee with the civic audience praised for good works and hospitality. How do these relationships change the responsibilities of the teacher and the expectations of the hearer?
Reference: B 1; B 111–112
- 88 Promises of power.** Are the promised remedies, control of weather, and return from Hades reasons to trust the teaching, results still to be achieved, or assertions of status? What evidence does the fragment itself provide?
Reference: B 111; Intro I
- 89 Why invoke the Muse?** What does the renewed appeal to Calliopeia contribute to an account of the gods? Compare it with the earlier request for holy speech: what can inspiration supply that argument alone does not?
Reference: B 131; B 3.1–8
- 90 An exceptional knower.** Is the extraordinary understanding described in B 129 a model ordinary readers can approach, or an authority they cannot test? Compare its reach with the limits placed on human knowing in the Proem.
Reference: B 129; B 2

THEME 10 / QUESTIONS 91–100

The whole book under examination

READ Cross-read the fragments; use Introduction IV–V to locate unresolved questions.

For each final prompt, offer a claim, name the passages supporting it, and state the strongest objection. Leave a question open when the surviving text cannot decide it.

- 91 **What is most real?** Offer a definition of what most fully exists in this account. Can it accommodate roots, Love and Strife, mortal compounds, and gods without making them all exist in precisely the same way?
Reference: B 6–8; B 17; B 21
- 92 **Sameness across transformation.** Compare the continued identity of roots through mixture with the speaker's identity through different lives. Are these the same kind of persistence? What would be required to explain one by the other?
Reference: B 17.27–35; B 117; B 126
- 93 **The best world for whom?** Would a world wholly under Love necessarily be best for each living individual? Set the Sphere beside the flourishing of bodies and the peaceful life under Cypris before defending an answer.
Reference: B 20; B 27–29; B 128–130
- 94 **The hardest problem of survival.** What becomes of a wandering daimon at the extremes of cosmic unity and separation? Formulate the difficulty precisely, then distinguish a possible solution from one established by the surviving fragments.
Reference: B 17; B 27–30; B 115; Intro V
- 95 **Knowledge and blessedness.** How does the claim that all things have intelligence fit with the special blessedness of divine understanding? What kind of difference would make the two claims compatible without emptying either of force?
Reference: B 103; B 110; B 132; B 134
- 96 **When authorities conflict.** How should a reader proceed if an appeal to the senses, an argument, and a sacred declaration seem to diverge? Derive a method from the book, then use it to question the book itself.
Reference: B 2–4; B 17; B 114; B 133
- 97 **Could the argument lose its poetry?** Choose the painter, lantern, or water-catcher comparison and state its argument without imagery. What becomes clearer, and what explanatory or persuasive force is lost? Why might the teaching return over familiar ground?
Reference: B 23–25; B 35; B 84; B 100
- 98 **One undertaking or separate projects?** What changes when exile and purification are read inside an account of nature rather than apart from it? Identify a gain and a difficulty without treating this edition's arrangement as proof of original sequence.
Reference: Intro III–IV, VII; B 115–126; B 139
- 99 **A change in living.** What single practice could count as taking this teaching seriously: disciplined attention, abstention from harm, or service to others? Defend your choice from the wording, then explain what your choice leaves out.
Reference: B 110; B 112; B 136; B 144
- 100 **Your account, and its limit.** State your strongest account of how cosmic mixture, the wandering daimon, and purification belong together. Give three fragment references, the best objection, and one question the surviving text cannot settle.
Reference: B 17; B 115; B 136; B 146; Intro V