

# Placita by Aetius

Post by “Bryan” of March 25, 2024 at 7:57 PM

“In 2020 the editors of the present volume produced for the first time a complete reconstruction and edition of the text in a single column based on all the ancient evidence. This edition is the basis for the text and translation produced for the Loeb Classical Library.”

I wanted to share these quotes from Harvard's new (2023) translation of Placita.

Aetius, Placita. Text and translation by Jaap Mansfeld and David Runia:

(1.3.16) “Epicurus, the son of Neocles, the Athenian, who philosophized in the line of Democritus, said that the principles of the things that exist are bodies that are observable by reason, not containing any void, ungenerated, indestructible, unable to be crushed or have their parts modified or be qualitatively altered. These bodies are observable by reason; and they move with the void and throughout the void. The void itself is unlimited in size, and the bodies are unlimited in number. The bodies possess these three characteristics, shape, size, weight. Democritus stated that there were two, size and shape, but Epicurus added to these a third, weight. “For it is necessary,” he says “that the bodies are moved by the blow caused by weight, since they will otherwise not be moved.” The shapes of the atoms are inconceivably many, but not unlimited in number. They cannot have the form of a hook or a trident or bracelet, for these shapes are easily crushed, whereas atoms are impassible and unable to be crushed. They have their individual shapes, which observable by reason. The term atom is used, not because it is a smallest particle, but because it cannot be cut, being as it is impassible and not containing any void. As a result, when he speaks of an atom, he means what is uncrushable and impassible, not containing any void. That there is such a thing as an atom is clear. For there are elements that always exist, that is to say figures <without void>, and the unit.”

(1.5.4) “Metrodorus,\* the teacher of Epicurus says that it is equally absurd that a single stalk should have sprung up on a large plain and that a single cosmos should have done the same in the Infinite. That the kosmoi are infinite in their multiplicity is clear from the fact that the causes are infinite in number. For if the cosmos is limited, while all the causes from which the cosmos originated are infinitely many, then necessarily the kosmoi are infinitely many. After all, where the causes are without limit, there the products [or: effects] are infinite in number or without limit also. These causes are either the atoms or the elements.”

\*Metrodorus of Chios, not Metrodorus of Lampsacus

(1.7.25) "Epicurus says that the gods are human in form and are all observable by reason only because of the fine particles of which the nature of their images consists. The same philosopher says there are four other classes of natures that are indestructible: the indivisibles, the void, the infinite, and the similarities; these natures are called homoiomereiai (things with like parts) and elements."

(1.8.2-3) "Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Stoics say that demons are psychic beings; the heroes too are souls that have been separated from their bodies; and they (sc. the demons) are good if the souls are good, but wicked if the souls are wicked. But Epicurus admits none of these as demonic."

(1.12.5) "Epicurus says that the bodies are inconceivably many [or: inconceivable in number], and that the first bodies, which are simple, possess heaviness. He also says that they atoms at one time move perpendicularly, at another time with a serve. But the bodies that move upward do so through impact or rebounding."

(1.15.9) "Epicurus and Aristarchus say that the bodies in the dark do not have color."

(1.18.3) "Leucippus, Democritus, Demetrius, Metrodorus, and Epicurus say that the atoms are infinite in number, and the void infinite in size."

(1.20.2) "Epicurus says that all these terms are to be used interchangeably: void, place, and space."

(1.22.1-6) "Epicurus says [time] is a concomitant, that is an accompaniment of motions [or changes]."

(1.23.4) "Epicurus says there are two kinds of motion, that which occurs perpendicularly and that which occurs through rebounding."

(1.29.3) "Epicurus says that chance is a cause that is unstable in relation to persons, times and places, <and that all things occur> by necessity, through choice, and by chance."

(2.1.5) "Epicurus says that the distance between the kosmoi is unequal."

(2.2.5) "Epicurus, however, says that it is possible that the kosmoi are like a ball, but that it is possible that they make use of other shapes as well."

(2.3.1-2) "All other philosophers say that the cosmos is ensouled and administered by providence. But Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus say that it is constituted out of atoms by an unreasoning natural force."

(2.4.13) "Epicurus says that the cosmos is destroyed in a multitude of ways, for example as an animal and as a plant and in numerous other ways."

(2.7.3) “Epicurus says that of some kosmoi the limit is rare but of others it is dense, and of these limits some are in motion, while others are unmoved.”

(2.13.14) [at the end of the section regarding the substance of planets and stars] “Epicurus does not reject any of these views, holding fast to what is possible.”

(2.20.14) “Epicurus says that [the sun] is an earthy concentration inflamed by the fire in its cavities in the manner of a pumice stone or sponge.”

(2.21.5) “Epicurus says that [the sun] is the size that it appears, or just a little larger or smaller.”

(2.22.4) “Epicurus says that all the above-mentioned shapes [of the sun] are possible.”

(3.4.3 & 5) “Epicurus says that [clouds] accumulate from atoms; and that hail is formed in round shapes and rain gradually acquires its form in its lengthy descent.”

(3.15.6 & 11) [of earthquakes] “Metrodorus says that no body that is in its proper place moves, unless one were actually to push it forward or drag it down; therefore, the earth does not move either, as it is located in its natural place, though some places collapse because of the trembling... Epicurus says that it is possible that the earth moves when it is thrown upward and as it were struck from beneath by thick and humid air that lies beneath it; but it is also possible that, as it is full of holes in its nether parts, it is shaken by the wind that is dispersed through its cavernous hollows.”

(4.3.11) “Epicurus says that it is a mixture of four ingredients, namely of a fiery quality, an aerial quality, a pneumatic quality, and of a fourth quality that is nameless; this last, for him, is the perceptive part. Of this the pneuma brings about movement, the air rest, the warm component the perceptible warmth of the body, while the anonymous component bring about the perception in us humans, for perception is not present in any of the elements that have names.”

(4.4.7) “Democritus and Epicurus say that the soul is bipartite, having the rational part established in the breast, and the irrational part diffused through the whole compound of the body.”

(4.5.6) “[Definitions of the regent part in accordance with top-down division between head and chest (or brain and hear) and subsidiary top-down division of locations in head or chest...]

(4.7.4) “Epicurus, Democritus, and Aristotle say that the soul is mortal, perishing together with the body.”

(4.8.2) “Epicurus: ‘Sense/sensation is the bodily part that is the faculty, and the sensory recognition that is the activity’”

“τὸ μὀρίὸν ἔστιν ἡ αἰσθησις, ἡτις ἔστιν ἡ δύναμις, καὶ τὸ ἐπαίσθημα, ὅπερ ἔστι τὸ ἐνέργημα.”

ἡ αἴσθησις = τὸ μὀρίὸν = ἡ δύναμις; & τὸ ἐπαίσθημα = τὸ ἐνέργημα

(4.8.10) “Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say that sensation and thought arise in the soul from images that approach from outside, for neither of these can occur to anyone without the image falling upon him.”

(4.9.5 - 6) “Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false; and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only, namely with regard to objects of thought; but the impression does so in two respects, for there is impression of both sense objects and objects of thought. Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Epicurus, and Heraclides say that the particular sensations of their own object occur in accordance with the matching sized of the pores, each of the sense objects corresponding to each sense.”

(4.9.12) “Epicurus says that the pleasures and pains actually belong with the sense objects.”

(4.9.20) “And Epicurus [says] that the wise man is knowable only to another wise man”

(4.13.1) “Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus believe that the visual sensation is the result of the penetration of images.”

(4.14.2) “Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say the reflections in mirrors come about through the manifestations of the images, which move away from us but arise on the mirror that sends them back.”

(4.19.4 - 5) “Epicurus says voice/sound is a stream sent out from entities that speak, reverberate, or make noises. This stream is broken up into small particles of the same shape (“of the same shape” is said of globular with globular, and of irregular and triangular with what is of the same kind). When these fall upon the ears, the perception of voice results. This is clear from a comparison with the skins that let out water and the fullers who blow air into garments. Democritus says that the air too is broken up into corpuscles of the same shape, and these roll along with the small particles of voice/sound, “for jackdaw sits beside jackdaw” and “God always brings like to like.”\* Thus on beaches the same pebbles are seen in the same spots, the rounds ones in one place and the elongated ones in another. Also in the case of people using sieves, similarly shaped things gather together to the same place, so that beans and lentils are separate.

\* “the first of these quotes is a proverb, the second a quotation from Homer.”

(4.23.1 -3) [On bodily affections and whether the soul experiences pain along with these] “The Stoics say that the affections are in the places that have been affected, but the sensations of them are in the ruling part. Epicurus says that both the affections and the sensations are in the places that have been affected, for the ruling part is free from affection. Strato says that both the affections and the sensations exist together in the ruling part, not in the affected places.”

(5.1.2) "Xenophanes and Epicurus reject divination"

(5.5.1) "Pythagoras, Epicurus, and Democritus say that the female releases semen as well as the male, for she has concealed testicles.\* For this reason she also has desire for sexual intercourse."

\* "This refers to the ovaries."

(5.16.1) "Democritus and Epicurus say that the embryo is nourished in the womb through the mouth. For this reason as soon as it is born it moves with its mouth to the breast. For, they say, in the womb too there are nipples and mouths through which it is fed."

(5.19.5) "Democritus and Epicurus say that the living beings have come into being first in a composition of elements lacking in form, with the aid of the life-generating moisture."

(5.20.2) "Democritus and Epicurus <do not include> the heavenly beings as living beings."

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### Post by "TauPhi" of March 25, 2024 at 9:18 PM

This is great. Thank you [Bryan](#)

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### Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2024 at 9:28 PM

Thank you Bryan! Very very interesting

#### [Quote from Bryan](#)

(4.9.5) "Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false: and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only

And yes that is part of what I need on the "[all sensations are true](#)" part - the sensations are always "true" but the opinions about what the sensations mean certainly are not always true.

## Post by “Bryan” of March 25, 2024 at 10:53 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And yes that is part of what I need on the "[all sensations are true](#)" part - the sensations are always "true" but the opinions about what the sensations mean certainly are not always true.

Yes, errors in our thinking come from internal processes rather than external sources. This is despite the fact that our thoughts are triggered by external images impacting the mind. While our understanding starts with external stimuli, it is how our mind handles these stimuli internally that can lead to mistakes.

[Epicurus DL X 51b] (Yonge) "And, on the other side, error could not be possible, if we did not receive some other motion also, a sort of initiative of intelligence connected, it is true, with direct representation, but going beyond that representative. These conceptions being connected with direct perception which produces the representation, but going beyond it."

(Epicurus Book 28, Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 6 inf.) "I also frequently reflected that if, when I raised difficulties which someone might have turned against us, he should claim that what used to be assimilated from ordinary language was the same as used to be practiced in the written work, many might well conclude that in those days false opinion was represented in that language, whether through an empirical process, an image-based process, or a theoretical process, or through a non-empirical process, not following one of our current divisions, but simply arising from an internal movement; but that now, because the means of expression is adapted to additional ends, discrimination provides a lead towards the truth. However, let no one ever try to get even with you by linking with you any trace of this suspicion; but [turn] to the entire faculty of empirical reasoning...

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

(Aetius 4.8.10) "Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say that sensation and thought arise in the soul from images that approach from outside, for neither of these can occur to anyone without the image falling upon him."

(Aetius 4.9.5 - 6) "Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false; and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only, namely with regard to objects of thought; but the impression does so in two respects, for there is impression of both sense objects and objects of thought. Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Epicurus, and Heraclides say that

the particular sensations of their own object occur in accordance with the matching sized of the pores, each of the sense objects corresponding to each sense.”

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 26, 2024 at 5:57 AM

We ought to add to this thread: What does "Placita" mean and who (and when) was Aetius?

And what would be a good link (or links) for someone wanting to read up on this further?

[Aetius \(philosopher\) - Wikipedia](#)

**Aetius** (/eɪˈiːʃiəs/; [Greek](#): Ἀέτιος) was a 1st-<sup>[1]</sup> or 2nd-century AD<sup>[2]</sup> [doxographer](#) and [Eclectic philosopher](#).

None of Aetius' works survives today, but he solves a mystery about two major compilations of philosophical quotes. There are two extant books named [De Placita Philosophorum](#) (Περὶ τῶν ἀρεσκόντων φιλοσόφοις φυσικῶν δογμάτων, "Opinions of the Philosophers") and [Eclogae Physicae](#) (Ἐκλογαὶ φυσικαὶ καὶ ἠθικαί, "Physical and Moral Extracts"). The first of these is [Pseudo-Plutarch](#) and the second is by [Stobaeus](#). They are clearly both abridgements of a larger work. [Hermann Diels](#), in his great *Doxographi Graeci* (1879), discovered that the 5th-century CE theologian [Theodoret](#) had full versions of the quotes which were shortened in the abridgements. This means that Theodoret had managed to procure the original book which Pseudo-Plutarch and Stobaeus had shortened. He calls this book "*Aetiou tēn peri areskontōn sunagōgēn* (Ἀετίου περὶ τῶν Ἀρεσκόντων Συναγωγήν)"<sup>[3][4]</sup> and therefore we ascribe the original *Placita* to Aetius.

Diels claimed that Aetius himself was merely abridging a work which Diels (1879) called *Oldest Tenets* or, in Latin, *Vetusta Placita*. Unlike Aetius, whose existence is attested by Theodoret, the *Vetusta Placita* is Diels' invention and is generally disregarded by modern classicists<sup>[5]</sup>

Quotes which are ascribed to Aetius in scholarly essays were actually discovered in either the abridgements of Pseudo-Plutarch or Stobaeus, or Theodoret's full quotes in rare cases, or finally one of several ancient authors who provided corrections to misquotes in one of these works.

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## Post by “Bryan” of March 26, 2024 at 12:09 PM

**Placita** means "pleasing things," or "preferred things" but in a philosophical context, it means "tenets," "opinions," or "views." **Τὰ Ἀρέσκοντα** (Ta Areskonta) literally means "the preferred things" or "things that are pleasing." This matches the meaning of "Placita." The transition from "the pleasing things" to "tenets" or "opinions" makes sense in a philosophical context, where what pleases or satisfies intellectual criteria becomes a tenet or an accepted view. An expanded name may possibly have been (from Ps. Plutarch) **Περὶ τῶν ἀρεσκόντων φιλοσόφους φυσικῶν δογμάτων** "Regarding the physical theories preferred by philosophers." The authors in the Loeb edition say, "In all probability, therefore, the lost original work had the title Περὶ τῶν ἀρεσκόντων, On the Placita (the Latin equivalent is De placitis)."

I will add some related quotes from the authors of this Loeb edition:

"The original treatise is incompletely preserved and has to be reconstructed from evidence in two main authors (with further assistance from a third). Diels had produced his reconstruction in two columns and was thus unable to provide a single authoritative text. For this reason it was never translated into any modern language, with the exception of a double column Italian version (Torraca, I dossografi greci)."

"The name of the author of the compendium can be deduced from cross-references in Theodoret. Three times the bishop refers by name to the sources for the information he has on the doctrines of the philosopher, on one occasion also adding the titles of the works he used."

"No ancient author with the name Aetius is known who can plausibly be connected with the compendium. As for the date of the work, the latest time of the composition, i.e., its *tempus ante quem*, is furnished by Ps. Plutarch's Epitome, which from the evidence of the Christian apologist Athenagoras, must have been completed by about AD 150. For the earliest time of composition, i.e., its *tempus post quem*, we have to use the evidence of its content. The last philosopher to be mentioned is the Peripatetic philosopher Xenarchus of Seleucia, whose death occurred in the final years BC."

"The Placita shows evidence of the beginnings of the Middle Platonist movement, which is to be dated to the period 50 BC to AD 50"

"As for the place of composition, the work itself gives no clues of any kind. Alexandria has been suggested, but this is no more than an educated guess. All that can be said is that the author must have had access to a considerable body of information on the doctrines of ancient philosophers."

Placita (Loeb Classical Library) <https://a.co/d/hibjIEJ>

Aëtiana V: An Edition of the Reconstructed Text of the Placita With a Commentary and a Collection of Related Texts (Philosophia Antiqua, 153) (English, Greek and Latin Edition)

<https://a.co/d/767F1uL>