

Aetius and his "Placata"

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2024 at 3:09 PM

Starting a new thread on this 1st or 2nd century AD philosopher [Aetius](#) and his "Placata." Thanks to Bryan for this info and link to a reasonably priced edition of Aetius from Loeb. As Bryan says "It is a primary source in Greek, from around 50 AD, and mentions Epicurus over forty times."

<https://www.amazon.com/Placita-Loeb-Classical-Library-Aetius/dp/067499759X>

I am ordering a copy, and in the meantime I was able to find this example from its translation section:

Quote

§16 Epicurus, the son of Neocles, the Athenian, who philosophised 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 its 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 not be moved (sc. otherwise)'. The shapes of the atoms are incomprehensibly many, but not unlimited in number. They cannot have the form of a hook or a trident or a bracelet, for these shapes are easily crushed, whereas atoms are impassible and unable to be crushed. They have their individual shapes, which are 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. (P9,S19, cf. Tvi)

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2024 at 3:15 PM

Not sure what to make of this "*teacher of Epicurus*" remark but perhaps the commentary will explain whether it's an error or means something like "teacher of Epicurean philosophy."

Quote

§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. (P4,S3)

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2024 at 3:34 PM

I'm going to have to break away from this thread for a while, but if anyone gets an impression of Aetius' own personal views, knowledge, and credibility, please post.

It would be good to get a fix as soon as possible on whether Aetius is a crusading anti-Epicurean in the mold of Cicero and Plutarch, or someone who is more "neutral" (if that's possible) in his reporting and analysis. I gather than he's probably a Stoic or similar, but what I've read so far seems to be sort of like Diogenes Laertius in at least appearing to report differing views "fairly."

Post by "Don" of October 10, 2024 at 5:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"teacher of Epicurean philosophy."

That makes the most sense.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2024 at 6:52 PM

I've now read through most of the material and I don't see any of it that brands Aetius as a raving anti-Epicurean, so I wouldn't think he would be tempted to misrepresent Epicurus generally (or at least, not more than seems commonly the case).

My first impression is that the whole thing is a fairly small-"a" "academic" recitation of the various positions, not an argumentative piece at all. Early on I noticed some references to some theories about the gods (I think by Plato?) as nonsensical, but not much else in terms of forceful commentary. I don't see that wikipedia brands Aetius as belonging to a particular school, so it will remain interesting to me to try to determine where his preferences are found.

Also do we know anything about the meaning of his name? I doubt it means anything but I see the better known but significantly later ancient by this name was a Roman general:

Flavius Aetius^[a] (also spelled **Aëtius**,^[b] Latin: [a:'ɛtiʊs]; c. 390 – 454) was a [Roman](#) general and statesman of the [closing period of the Western Roman Empire](#). He was a military commander and the most influential man in the Empire for two decades (433–454). He managed policy in regard to the attacks of [barbarian federates](#) settled throughout the West. Notably, he mustered a large Roman and allied (*foederati*) army in the [Battle of the Catalaunian Plains](#), ending a devastating invasion of Gaul by [Attila](#) in 451, though the Hun and his subjugated allies still managed to invade Italy the following year, an incursion best remembered for the ruthless [Sack of Aquileia](#) and the intercession of [Pope Leo I](#).

Aetius has often been called the "[Last of the Romans](#)". [Edward Gibbon](#) refers to him as "the man universally celebrated as the terror of Barbarians and the support of the Republic" for his victory at the Catalaunian Plains.^[4] [J.B. Bury](#) notes, "That he was the one prop and stay of the Western Empire during his life time was the unanimous verdict of his contemporaries."^[5]

Post by “Don” of October 10, 2024 at 7:43 PM

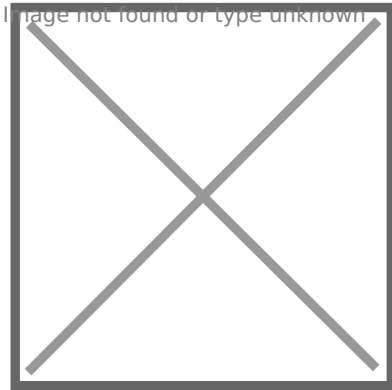
[Aetius \(philosopher\) - Wikipedia](#)

Post by “TauPhi” of October 10, 2024 at 8:00 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I don't think it is possible to know anything about Aetius' position on anything. It's not even certain if such person ever existed. Take a look here (I just skimmed through the text so I can't vouch for its quality nor factual reliability).



[Did the doxographer Aëtius ever exist? \[the original 1983 paper, now see the detailed 2016 refutation of Diels's Aëtius hypothesis and of Mansfeld and Runia's attempt to save it: "The origin and transmission of the doxographical](#)

The original 1983 manuscript of the paper "Did the doxographer Aetius ever exist?" published in microfiche form in: Philosophie et Culture, ...
www.academia.edu

Never mind the author of 'Placita', the work seems very interesting. Thanks, [Bryan](#) for mentioning it.

Post by "Godfrey" of October 10, 2024 at 8:25 PM

Not sure if this paper is on here somewhere; it critiques Placita 2.29:

[\(33\) Aëtius, Achilles, Epicurus and Lucretius on the Phases and Eclipses of the Moon \(final draft version\) | Frederik Bakker - Academia.edu](#)