

Diogenes of Oinoanda's Criticism of Plato's Psychology

The discovery of Diogenes of Oinoanda's Epicurean treatises (c. 2nd century CE)—preserved in the largest ancient Greek inscription recovered so far, originally totaling about 25,000 words—allows us to follow the development of Epicureanism further than was previously possible. Though fragmentary, the extant portions of the inscription at Oinoanda sets forth many of the core doctrines of Epicureanism, personal letters of Diogenes, as well as refutations of rival philosophies. While the most frequent opponent of these attacks is the Stoics, as one might expect, Plato is also a recurring target. This paper investigates specifically Diogenes' statements about Plato's understanding of the nature of the soul, revealing two conclusions. First, in fragment 38 (part of longer sequence concerning psychology), Diogenes is critical of the notion that a soul can exist “by itself” (καθ' ἑαυτήν), a phrase which recalls Plato's *Phaedo*. By closely analyzing this passage, as well as corresponding passages in Plato and Epicurus, I conclude that Diogenes likely had some familiarity with Plato's own work, in addition to his more natural study of Epicurus' writings. Second, his criticism of Plato's claim that the soul is incorruptible (ἀφθάρτος) in fragment 39 and NF 155 is worth considering, especially due to his word choice: ἀφθάρτος appears only in Epicurean writings, or in Platonic writings defending against Epicurean attacks. Thus, Diogenes' use of this word is a way of self-consciously inscribing himself in the Epicurean tradition as an anti-Platonic polemicist. By carefully considering Diogenes' criticisms of Plato's psychology, we may therefore gain a greater understanding of what literature Diogenes was familiar with as well as the ways in which Epicurean philosophers presented themselves.

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