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Epicurean Case-Studies in Aelian's Fragments

The primary purpose of this paper, "Epicurean Case-Studies in Aelian's Fragments," is to illustrate Aelian's attitudes toward Epicureanism and the methods he uses to denigrate the philosophy and those who practice it. The fragments of Aelian's *Divine Manifestations* and *Divine Providence* provide vivid descriptions of individuals, or caricatures, who incur divine displeasure and are afflicted with physical ailments because of their adherence to Epicurean philosophy.

Aelian's attitude toward Epicureanism is based on the prevalent but false accusation that Epicureans are atheists and, while his hostility is not unique, the physical ailments he describes which afflict Epicureans are unattested elsewhere. He describes Epicureans as womanish and even goes so far as to describe an Epicurean who, certainly metaphorically, if not actually, loses his penis through his adherence to the philosophy. From Fragment 10 in Hercher's edition: "There was a man (if indeed we can even call him a man) who enfeebled his soul through the words of Epicurus and became a woman, castrated and a womanish man, (οJ clouvnh" te kai; guvnni')." This same Epicurean violates religious protocol and becomes ill: "But when his shameful act was dared, a kind of terror overcame him and he suffered a malady which lasted a long time and consumed him." Yet another Epicurean's illustration shows the clear connection between Epicureanism and atheism: "There was a man named Euphronios, a bad spirited man, and he took joy in the scurrilous words of Epicurus and from these he derived two evils: atheism and intemperance." (Frag. 89) The prevalent attitude in Aelian considers Epicureanism dangerous to the individual practicing the philosophy and to his associates as well. Emphasizing this attitude is the fact that the aforementioned Euphronius becomes ill but recants his adherence to Epicurean philosophy and is saved.

Aelian offers a unique commentary on Epicureanism towards the end of its existence as a practiced philosophy in the ancient world. Analogies will be made between other detractors of Epicureanism: Plutarch and Athenaeus. In comparison to Plutarch's criticisms, which challenge the entire philosophical system of Epicureanism, Athenaeus and Aelian both neglect Epicureanism as a complete philosophical system, choosing to base their criticisms only on the ethical aspect of Epicureanism which ascribes pleasure as the highest goal. Neither Athenaeus nor Aelian mentions Epicurus' own definition of pleasure (sound reasoning, investigating the reasons for every choice and avoidance, *Ep. Men.* 132). Athenaeus centers his criticisms on the notion that pleasure is over-indulgence in food and transforms any Epicurean, whether a character out of New Comedy, Epicurus himself, or a contemporary of the deipnosophistai, into a glutton. Aelian, while he displays knowledge of Epicurean atomism, which he rejects because it disallows divine providence (Frag. 61), illustrates Epicureans as sexually deviant or criminal due to their indifference to the powers of the gods and popular conceptions of the gods.