Aëtius Placita 2.4

Εἰ ἄφθαρτος ὁ κόσμος

Witnesses

Ps. Plutarch 2.4, Eusebius 15.35, ps. Galen 47, Cyril c. Jul. 2.15, Qustā Ibn Lūqā 2.4
Stobaeus 1.20.1cf, 21.6cf
Theodoret 4.16, cf. 1.63, 4.68
Cf. Dox. Pasq. XV

Analysis

1. A now turns to the philosophical question that is most often raised in relation to the cosmos, i.e. what is its genesis (or where did it come from) and will it endure forever? The title of the chapter only mentions the latter topic, but it soon emerges that both subjects are covered. The questions can be treated both in relation to time (temporal beginning or no beginning at all, future destruction or indestructibility) or causation (genesis by means of a cause or spontaneous). Again we shall see that both aspects are dealt with. The subject of the cosmos’ genesis has already been raised by A at P 1.4 Πῶς συνέστηκεν ὁ κόσμος, in which the origin of the cosmos is described at some length in atomist terms.121 There is also an obvious link with the chapter Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς (= P 1.24), as noted by S.122 That chapter treats the subject of generation and decay in general terms, but cannot avoid reference to the universe/cosmos on two occasions (§1 τὸ πᾶν, §2 κοσμοποιοῦσι). We note too that there is a parallel chapter for living beings as microcosms, P 5.19 Περὶ ζῴων γενέσεως, πῶς ἐγένοντο ζῷα, καὶ εἰ φθαρτά (in which the first two doxai in P in fact allude to the question whether the cosmos is γενητός).

The present chapter has proved one of the most difficult in the entire book to reconstruct. The reason is at least twofold. The question of

121 On this chapter see Part I sect. 2 text at nn. 30–32, and in sect. 10 (on the important parallel in Ach). We argue that this chapter has been integrated into the introductory part of the compendium and is not just an alien intrusion as Diels thought.
122 On this chapter see the analysis of Mansfeld (2002a).
the genesis and destruction of the cosmos is such a standard topic in doxographical literature that it was very tempting and easy for P and others to introduce their own modifications and adaptations. Moreover S has scattered his material even more than usual. The result is that we have had to introduce more speculative elements into our reconstruction than we might wish. Nevertheless the task of trying to determine how A compiled and organized his chapter will prove to be a most instructive exercise.  

2. The text in P reads as follows:

δ’. Εἰ ἄφθαρτος ὁ κόσμος

P2.4.1 Πυθαγόρας καὶ οἱ Στοικοὶ γενητόν ὑπὸ θεοῦ τὸν κόσμον καὶ φθαρτὸν μὲν ὄσον ἐπὶ τῇ φύσει, αἰσθητοῦ γὰρ εἶναι διότι καὶ σωματικῶν, οὐ μὴν φθαρμόμενον γε προνοία καὶ συνοχή θεοῦ.

P2.4.2 Ἐπίκουρος φθαρτόν, ὡς καὶ γενητόν, ὡς ζῷον ὡς φυτόν.

P2.4.3 Ἑνωσάμην ἀγένητον καὶ ἀίδιον καὶ ἄφθαρτον τὸν κόσμον.

P2.4.4 Ἀριστοτέλης τὸ ὑπὸ τὴν σελήνην τοῦ κόσμου μέρος παθητόν, ἐν ὃ καὶ τὰ περίτεχνα κηραίνεται.

P thus presents a compact list of four doxai. It starts with a surprise because, although the subject in the title concerns the cosmos’ destructibility, the first doxa begins by speaking about its creation by God, before turning to the familiar Platonic doctrine of its conditional indestructibility. But according to the mss. of P this doctrine is attributed to Pythagoras and the Stoics, not to Plato. Clearly, odd things have happened to this chapter.

E writes out the chapter in full and records one very significant variant: he adds the name-label Plato to the first doxa in the order Pythagoras–Plato–the Stoics. The same name-label is also recorded by G in his paraphrase, but he deletes the Stoics. Cyril and Q follow P in having just the two names. So we have the following result:

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Diels DG 11, followed by the later editors Mau and Lachenaud, thought that E preserved the right reading here as far as P (but, note well, not

123 A preliminary version of our analysis and reconstruction has been published in Runia (2005).