THE EPICUREAN CRITICISM OF SOCRATES

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THREE SOURCES of anti-Socratic invective appear in our ancient texts: (1) The original accusation of Meletus and the public feeling which lead to the accusation.[1] The basis of this charge seems to be that Socrates, anti-democratic himself, was responsible for the education and thus the excesses of Critias and Alcibiades.[2] Polycrates the Sophist composed a Κατηγορία Σωκράτους in the late 390s which concentrated on this political charge. Such charges or a defence against them appear only in fourth-century literature, e.g., Xenophon's *Apology* and *Memorabilia*, Plato's *Apology*, or in such oddities as Libanius' *Apology of Socrates* from the fourth century A.D.[3] Charges of anti-democratic behavior had become irrelevant after the time of the great democracy. (2) The biographical tradition beginning with Aristoxenus' *Life of Socrates*.[4] "Seething with hatred and malignity," he collected or invented a mass of derogatory information: Socrates was extremely lustful but did no harm because he confined himself to married women and prostitutes (fr. 54a and b); he was quick to anger (fr. 56), and so on. This tradition seems to have little in common with the original accusations against Socrates in 399, but rather owes its liveliness to the widespread polemic between philosophical schools in addition to strains of fanaticism, personal aversion, conceit, and a delight in racy stories on the part of Aristoxenus himself. (3) The polemic of the Epicureans, on which I wish to concentrate. The Epicureans are often said to be characterized by βλασφημία and κακηγορία, abusive and defamatory language, as Plutarch puts it (*Non posse* 1086 f).[5] The evidence for this abusive language is two-fold: first, the

[1]Text of the indictment in Xenophon *Mem.* 1.1.1. For a general discussion of the motives behind the prosecution see C. Phillipson, *The Trial of Socrates* (London 1928); more recently E. Havelock, "Why was Socrates Tried?" in M. E. White (ed.), *Studies in honour of Gilbert Norwood* (Toronto 1952) 95–108.

[2]"You executed Socrates the Sophist because he was shown to have educated Critias" (Aeschines *In Tim.* 173).

[3]For Polycrates, see Isocrates 2.5; also J. Humbert, *Polycratès, L'Accusation de Socrate et le Gorgias* (Paris 1930) and A. H. Chroust, *Socrates. Man and Myth* (London 1957), especially chapter 4 for the contents of Polycrates' attack. For Libanius' response to Polycrates see R. Foerster (ed.), *Libanius: Opera* 5 (Leipzig, 1909) 1–5.

[4]Fragments of Aristoxenus are in F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles*[2] 2 (Basel 1967). For a general treatment of this particular tradition, especially insofar as it concerns Plato see I. Düring, *Herodicus the Cratetean* (Stockholm 1941) 132 ff., and L. Woodbury, "Socrates and Archelaus," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 299–309. Aristoxenus was a "sensation-seeker and a muck-raker" (Woodbury 303).

[5]Translations from Plutarch's *Non posse* and *Adv. Colotem* will be those of B. Einarson and P. DeLacy in the Loeb edition (Cambridge and London 1967).

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eight insulting names which Plutarch says Epicurus and Metrodorus applied to other philosophers (*ibid.*); secondly, Epicurus' insults as reported by Timocrates, an opponent of Epicurus (D.L. 10.7–8): "Plato's school he called the 'toadies of Dionysius;' their master himself the 'golden' Plato."[6] None of this is extraordinarily abusive by ancient standards. In any event, however obscure the reasons for the hostility displayed by Aristoxenus and the tradition coming from him, the Epicureans on their side did in fact have substantive reasons for criticizing Socrates, as I intend to show. Their opposition was based on a fundamental difference of opinion concerning the role of the philosopher and his behavior towards his students.

To the Epicureans the philosoper possessed wisdom which could bring salvation from irrational fears and desires if the disciple could only be convinced of the truth of his master's teachings—note Lucretius' pleas to Memmius in *De Rerum Natura* (1.50 ff.; 5.8 ff.).[7] The contrast between this view and Socrates' detachment, his efforts to make his hearers think for themselves, could not be more clear. This contrast seems to have been recognized by the Epicureans themselves, who proceeded to criticize Socrates for his errors, not primarily of doctrine, but of character and method. That their opposition was to the character and methods of Socrates in particular, not to the doctrines which he shared with Plato and the Academy (in the philosophic tradition), is shown by the moderation and brevity of Colotes' attack on Plato in his work *On the Point that Conformity to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers Actually Makes it Impossible to Live*, quoted *passim* by Plutarch in *Adversus Colotem*, and by the paucity of hostile references to Plato in Epicurus and by their generality: "flatterer of Dionysius" comes from the general anti-Platonic tradition; "golden" seems vague enough to cover any reference to haughtiness of manner or style.[8]

We should not be surprised that Epicurus would attack another philosopher on personal grounds despite the mildness of character which seems to have been his most endearing trait (D.L. 10.9–11). Sextus Empiricus quotes him as saying that a wicked man (πονηρός) has such

[6]Translations from Diogenes Laertius will be those of R. D. Hicks in the Loeb edition (Cambridge and London 1925).

[7]For irrational fears and how to overcome them see David Konstan, *Some Aspects of Epicurean Psychology* (Leiden 1973) 3–34. Philodemus' Περὶ παρρησίας (discussed below) concerns this topic.

[8]Plato's relationship with the Sicilian tyrant is mentioned in unflattering terms by Diogenes Laertius (3.29-30), citing Aristippus' Περὶ παλαιᾶς τρυφῆς; cf. 3.34, a *bon mot* of Molon. Few fragments of Epicurus himself name Plato: 88, 235, 238 Usener. The only two hostile references are the ones I have quoted. I certainly do not wish to imply that the Epicureans had no other criticisms of the Platonists' metaphysics or epistemology. There simply are no abusive attacks against these, as there are against Socrates.

habits that he cannot attain wisdom (fr. 114 Usener).[9] In other words if Socrates' habitual behavior is such that he cannot attain wisdom—to which in fact he said he had not attained—*ipso facto* he cannot teach wisdom. Therefore later Epicureans tried to discourage Socratic habits and methods and to encourage their own.

I shall first discuss several passages in Epicurean writings which criticize Socrates, then I shall show the reason for their opposition and what their own methods were.

In his work mentioned above Colotes criticizes a number of philosophers for expounding doctrines which violate good common sense.[10] He asks why Socrates puts food into his mouth instead of into his ear, and why he eats food instead of grass (*Adv. Col.* 1108b), concluding with the accusations that Socrates' words were charlatans or imposters (ἀλαζόνας . . . λόγους) because what he said in the dialogues was one thing, but what he did was quite different (1117d).

The doctrine attacked here is Plato's, briefly criticized in the section of the essay immediately preceding (1115c–1116e). Colotes had said, "But Plato says that it is idle to regard horses as being horses and men men" (1115c). Plutarch's defence makes it clear that Colotes is criticizing Plato for considering the visible world around us, the world of δόξα, as unreal, and for postulating a world of the νοητόν, i.e., of the Forms, as real (1115d ff.). Hence what appears as a horse may or may not actually be one; the sense of impression has nothing to do with "reality." Such an opinion is of course the very opposite of the Epicurean position; compare *ad Hdt.* 38: "It is necessary to test everything in the light of our sense impressions (κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις)."

Considering how fundamental this disagreement is, we might have expected a more extensive or lively criticism from Colotes. Instead the jeers and the ridicule at the practical effects of Plato's opinion are directed at Socrates, whose words prompted Colotes' attack. Socrates states that the true philosopher tries to get away from the body and turn to the soul,

[9]This quotation comes from a letter Περὶ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων in which Epicurus criticized the behaviour of many philosophers and from which later writers quote. Fragments are nos. 114, 171, 172, 237 Usener; D. L. 10.6, 136 and a few fragments from Herculaneum. See W. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos* (Leipzig 1906) 16–24, for a complete study. Crönert believes that the letter is not by Epicurus. In any event it shows one basis used by the later Epicureans for criticizing Socrates.

[10]For common sense as a criterion, see Epicurus *ad Hdt.* 38: "The primary significance (πρῶτον ἐννόημα) of each word must be maintained" and "We must stick to our actual experiences (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα πάθη)." How closely Epicurus held to the former precept can be gathered from his crabbed and obscure language, full of neologisms (e.g., στοιχείωσις, στοιχείωμα). It is nevertheless true that for Epicurus how things appear to us is the ultimate measure of reality. See D. Clay, "Epicurus' Last Will and Testament," *AGPh* 55 (1973) 252–280, especially 261–264.

regards the senses as inaccurate and indistinct, and sees the soul as deceived by the body in any investigation of truth. In short Socrates declares that the philosopher must use the light of the mind to attain a knowledge of true being (*Phaedo* 66a)—precisely Plato's doctrine attacked by Colotes. Since Socrates does not admit the reality of the world around us, he should logically not distinguish between grass and food, between high and low water, and so on.

Now the logical consequences of this refusal to attribute reality to the perceptible world around us should be the same as the consequences of refusing to take a position at all on what is reality. The latter position is ἐποχή, suspension of judgement, and is attributed to the Sceptics, chiefly to Pyrrho of Elis. That Sceptics were expected in some circles to live up to their profession is shown by Diogenes Laertius (9.62) on Pyrrho: "He led a life consistent with this doctrine (i.e., agnosticism and suspension of judgement), going out of his way for nothing, taking no precautions, but facing all risks as they came, whether carts, precipices, dogs, or what not, and generally leaving nothing to the arbitrament of the senses." This testimony from Antigonus of Carystus, roughly a contemporary of Colotes (both third century B.C.), indicates that Colotes could have felt justified in criticizing Socrates for not following the practical consequences of his doctrine. Socrates' words are imposters; he himself is an imposter, because he lives as if the world around us were real; he follows the clues offered by sight, whereas to be consistent he should ignore this illusion and follow what is really real, whatever the consequences. Thus the basic fault of Socrates is not wrong belief but the inconsistency between his belief and his practice.

Colotes' second criticism of Socrates, that he flaunts the boast that he does not even know himself (*Adv. Col.* 1118c, referring to *Phaedrus* 230a), adds to the characterization of Socrates. Again he is charged with ignoring the obvious; for the Epicurean, man can be defined by pointing to a man and saying "man is this kind of shape here combined with animation" (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.267; fr. 310 Usener). Socrates can see men all around, yet he insists he does not know what he is. More important is the attack implied in the word "flaunting;" not only is Socrates in error, but he boasts of his error and ignorance. This pride in his ignorance is a personal quality which puts Socrates outside the company of truly wise men, according to Epicurus, who states "the wise man will dogmatize, not suspend judgement"—δογματιεῖν τε καὶ οὐκ ἀπορήσειν (D.L. 10.121; fr. 562 Usener). Boasting of one's ignorance is also the mark of a traditional Greek villain, the dissembler (εἴρων). An *eiron's* acts are also rejected by the Epicurean, as I shall now show.

The most comprehensive body of Epicurean comment on Socrates is

in the works of Philodemus of Gadara.[11] Many of the references treat Socrates as a standard example, e.g., of the persecuted philosopher, and are far from hostile.[12] Several are more controversial.

A hostile characterization is found in *De vitiis* (ed. C. Jensen [Leipzig 1911]). The remains of this treatise, the last twenty-four columns of the roll, concern the fault of arrogance, *ὑπερηφανία*. Philodemus appends to his discussion a letter of Ariston of Keos which is likewise a guide to relieving the fault of arrogance: *περὶ τοῦ κουφίζειν ὑπερηφανίας ἐπιστολήν* (*De vit.* col. 10.11–13). Ariston's letter is directed toward those who have become arrogant through gifts of fortune (*διὰ τύχην ὑπερηφάνων*, 10.14–15). Philodemus adds that arrogance can arise from other causes, including philosophy itself, as in the cases of Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Socrates (10.15–25). The subsequent discussion shows in what way each of these is arrogant.

Ariston/Philodemus[13] subdivides this vice into several categories (coll. 16.27–24.21):

1) The self-willed person, *ὁ αὐθάδης*, 16.29–17.17.
2) The independent individualist, *ὁ αὐθέκαστος*, 17.17–19.2.
3) The know-it-all, *ὁ παντειδήμων*, 20.3–37.
4) The person who affects an air of grandeur, *ὁ σεμνοκόπος*, 21.1–37.
5) The dissembler, *ὁ εἴρων*, 21.37–23.37.
6) The belittler, *ὁ εὐτελιστής*, 24.1–21.

Arrogance infects each of these: for example, "The self-willed person seems to have a character mixed from conceit, arrogance, disdain, and including a lot of thoughtlessness" (16.29–33; similar statements in 19.4 and 20.33). Similarly: "At all times they criticize the person who affects an air of grandeur on the grounds that he pretends to have the aforementioned (i.e., grandeur) and pretends to be a noble among the crowd both through his speech, which they call grandiloquence, and by

[11]For a general survey of Philodemus' life and works see R. Phillipson, *RE* 19.2 (1938) 2444–2482. More recent work by M. Gigante, *Ricerche Filodemee* (Naples 1969), a collection of essays.

[12]For example *De rhetorica* (ed. S. Sudhaus [Leipzig 1892]) 1.266, coll. 29, 30: "His virtue did not help Socrates in his trial." The other references to Socrates in *De rhet.* are similar. Other non-controversial references in the rest of Philodemus are: *De rhet.* 1.261, 11; 265, 10; 267, 12; 342, 14; 351, 15; 2.110, 11; 180, 10; 208, 30; 223, 13; 278, fr. 20; 286, 2; *De piet.* (ed. Gomperz) 95, 25; 107, 7; 150, 4. I discuss all "controversial" passages.

[13]I shall refer to this hybrid as Philodemus from here on, since as editor he must agree with the letter's contents. For a discussion of the letter see C. Jensen, "Ariston von Keos bei Philodem," *Hermes* 46 (1911) 393–406.

the expression on his face, and by the rolling motion of his eyes,[14] and by his way of life" (21.3–13).

Of the four philosophers mentioned by Philodemus three clearly fall in the categories of self-willed or the one who affects grandeur. Heraclitus was famous for his arrogance and disdain: "He was lofty-minded beyond all other men and overweening (ὑπερόπτης), as is clear from his book in which he says: 'Much learning does not teach understanding: else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, or again, Xenophanes and Hecataeus'" (D.L. 9.1). Like the self-willed man who "can live in solitude" (*De vit.* 18.10–11), Heraclitus also "became a hater of his kind and wandered on the mountains."

The stories about Pythagoras emphasize his grandeur: "Indeed his bearing is said to have been most dignified (σεμνοπρεπέστατος) and his disciples held the opinion about him that he was Apollo come down from the far North. There is a story that once, when he was disrobed, his thigh was seen to be of gold . . ." (D.L. 8.11).

Empedocles' fault is similar: "Diodorus of Ephesus, when writing of Anaximander, declares that Empedocles emulated him, displaying theatrical arrogance (τῦφον) and wearing stately (σεμνήν) robes" (D.L. 8.70). In short, these three were self-willed, arrogant, high-and-mighty.

The fourth philosopher, Socrates, belongs among the *eirones*, the hypocrites who claim to be less than they are. This fault of character is treated at length, and practically the whole text has survived (*De vit.* 21.37–23.37).[15] The *eiron* does not say what he thinks: "He praises what he criticizes elsewhere" (22.3). "He commonly belittles and criticizes himself and those like him" (22.4–5); for example, if anyone praises him and asks him to speak, he replies, "What do I know except that I know nothing" or "What reputation do I have?" (22.17–23). He overflows with praise for others: "Blessed is so-and-so because of his character, or his wealth, or his luck" (22.25–27). He adds complimentary adjectives to proper names: "Handsome Phaedrus, wise Lysias" (22.27–32). If he contributes anything wise, he attributes it to others, just as Socrates attributes his knowledge of economics to Aspasia and Ischomachus (22.32–35). He depreciates himself: "You are right in looking down on me, ignorant as I am; I look down on myself," or "Would that I were young

[14]Rather a peculiar trait, but twice to my knowledge this rolling of the eyes is attributed to Socrates: first in Aristophanes *Nub.* 362—"You (Socrates) stalk arrogantly (lit. 'with high steps,' βρενθύει; the scholiast glosses as ἀλαζονεύει) and toss your eyes from side to side;" the second is Plato *Symposium* 221a, where Aristophanes' line is applied to Socrates in the retreat from Potidaea. For Aristophanes at least rolling the eyes was a ploy of the sophist to increase his majesty, precisely the point made by Philodemus.

[15]A general description of Ariston's *eiron* can be found in O. Ribbeck, "Über den Begriff des εἴρων," *RhM* 31 (1876) 381–400, especially 395–398.

and not so old, so that I might take lessons from you" (23.12–16). Further examples follow, then Philodemus adds: "What need to say more? The person who compiled the Socratic dialogues (has supplied us with enough examples)" (23.35–37).[16] This last comment is by Philodemus himself abridging Ariston's list of examples; for similar statements indicating abridgment compare: "That is enough to say on this topic" (16.27–28), and "What need to say any more about such ranters and ravers" (20.26–27).

Philodemus was correct in taking the *eiron's* statements as typical of Socrates. Many of the statements can be paralleled in the dialogues: "I know that I know nothing" (22.2) is attributed to Socrates in Plato's *Apology* 21d and in Diogenes Laertius 2.32. The list of flattering epithets, χρηστόν, ἡδύν, ἀφελῆ, γενναῖον, ἀνδρεῖον (22.30–32) can be found as follows: τὸν χρηστὸν Θεόδωρον (*Phaedrus* 266e), ὡς ἡδὺς εἶ (*Gorg.* 491e), ὦ γενναῖε Πῶλε (*Gorg.* 473d), ἀνδρεῖος γὰρ εἶ (*Gorg.* 494d).[17] In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* Socrates does attribute his knowledge of economics to Aspasia (*Oec.* 3.14–15) and to Ischomachus (*Oec.* 7.2 ff.). For the self-depreciation typical of the *eiron* see Socrates' last speech in the *Euthyphro* (16a) for one example of many. There can be no doubt that Socrates is regarded as the archeypal *eiron*, depreciating himself, claiming to know nothing, flattering others.

Philodemus also considers the *eiron* to be "a type of imposter" (ἀλαζών; *De vit.* 21.37–38) because he conceals what he thinks. Ἀλαζών and εἴρων are also combined in Aristophanes, where both become flattering descriptions of the sophist. In *The Clouds* Strepsiades is so hard-pressed by expenses that he is willing to do anything to appear bold, quick-witted, and so on; he recites twenty-one characteristics of the sophist who can make wrong seem right (*Nub.* 445-451). To become such a sophist, he is willing to hand himself over to Socrates, who presumably already has these twenty-one virtues. Among these terms are εἴρων, dissembler, and ἀλαζών, imposter, cheat. Neither word is defined in the text, but clearly the true sophist can be both an *eiron* and *alazon*.

The fact that an *eiron* can be a type of *alazon* makes possible Colotes' complaint that Socrates puts out ἀλαζόνας λόγους (*Adv. Col.* 1117d). His words say one thing, while he does another—the perfect description of

[16]The text reads: καὶ τί δεῖ τὰ πλείω λέγειν; ἅπαντα γὰρ τὰ Σωκρατικὰ μνημονεύματα συλλέγων . . . (end of column). I assume something like τοιαῦτα πολλὰ κατέταξε followed. Whatever the continuation, clearly Philodemus is saying that the records of Socrates supply enough examples that he does not have to continue the list. The next column (24) begins with a discussion of the εὐτελιστής, so Philodemus must have cut short his discussion of the *eiron* with this comment on Socrates.

[17]In context, not all of these are flattering: ἡδύς is said by Callicles. Philodemus certainly ignored the context.

the *eiron*, agreeing entirely with Philodemus: "He praises what he criticizes elsewhere" (*De vit.* 22.1–3). The words εἴρων and ἀλαζών can apparently be used interchangeably in a charge of hypocrisy.

With this knowledge of how Philodemus characterizes the *eiron*, we can see that Plutarch's defense of Socrates is not a defense at all to the Epicurean (*Adv. Col.* 1117d–e). Plutarch assumes that Socrates' claim that he knows nothing and is always searching for the truth proves his sincerity and consistency, since the dialogues portray him always questioning and investigating. His claim also proves his right to be called a philosopher, since philosophers do in fact go around searching for truth—in contrast to Epicurus, who receives sacred offerings just like a god (*Adv. Col.* 1117e; fr. 130 Usener). For the Epicurean this claim, openly flaunted, is proof of his insincerity, his *eironeia*, because this sort of statement is just what an *eiron* would say (*De vit.* 22.20–22). As for Socrates' right to be called a philosopher, we shall see below why his disclaimer of knowledge disqualifies him from the title of philosopher.[18]

Socrates appears again in Philodemus' Περὶ οἰκονομίας (ed. C. Jensen [Leipzig 1906]). This text contains a review of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (coll. 1–6), and of ps.-Aristotle's *Oeconomica* (coll. 7–11), concluding with a tract Περὶ πλούτου by Metrodorus (coll. 12–21).[19] The section on Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* seems to be a repetition of the Xenophontic Socrates' arguments along with Philodemus' reactions to them. This fact allows a very fragmentary and lacunose text to be restored and understood.

The best preserved section, coll. 4–6, reviews Xen. *Oec.* 2.1 ff., in which Socrates declares that he is richer than Critobulus despite the fact that his property is five minas while Critobulus' is one hundred times as much. Philodemus attacks Socrates' judgement: "How can one with five minas be rich and one with five hundred be poor? How can five be enough for one, but not for the other? Should we call one 'poor,' the other 'rich,' because of their way of life?" (4.26–34). According to Philodemus, the reason Socrates can make such a statement is that he is accustomed to "name things, here the obviously poor man, according to his opinion, not according to a pattern built on common perceptions.[20] Socrates always

[18]Note that only Epicurus and Metrodorus were called σοφοί; Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 1117c, Cicero *Fin.* 2.3.

[19]S. Sidhaus, "Eine erhaltene Abhandlung des Metrodor," *Hermes* 41 (1906) 43–58, identified this section as part of Metrodorus' Περὶ πλούτου.

[20]The text to this point is as follows: . . . προσαγορεύειν τὸν δὲ μετ' ἐμφάσεως καὶ πτωχόν, ἀλλὰ δοξαστικῶς, οὐ προληπτικῶς κατὰ συνήθειαν. I assume τὸν μὲν πλούσιον preceded, following Sudhaus and Jensen *ad loc.* The Epicurean doctrine of πρόληψις (basic text D. L. 10.33, fr. 255 Usener; on this controversial topic see J. M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* [Cambridge 1972] 26–30, and [exhaustively] A. Manuwald, *Die Prolepsislehre Epikurs* [Bonn 1972] and bibliography there) implies that one's mental

holds to what is not factual and commonsensical (*πραγματικόν*), as in this case, believing that five minas are enough for the necessities of life and for the natural desires of men, and in believing that prosperity in life is useless, and in not wanting more, since he has set his limit at five minas, contrary to all good sense" (5.1–14). It is important to note in this passage that Socrates is being criticized for wrong doctrine and for an incorrect epistemology, i.e., proceeding from *a priori* assumptions instead of sticking to facts. None of his personal qualities aggravates the error.

A few lines further on in the treatise, however, Philodemus goes on to say: "From the reports of what was said by Ischomachus and agreed to by Socrates concerning management and 'comfortable living' (*καλοκἀγαθία*), they discovered that five minas are not enough" (5.14–27).[21] Philodemus' train of thought seems to be this: (1) Socrates always has his own standard of judgement, in this case that poverty does not depend on how much money one has. (2) Now, however, he agrees with the precepts of Ischomachus on how to increase one's wealth; in fact Socrates may have attributed what were his own opinions on estate management to Ischomachus (*De vit.* 22.32–35 cited above). (3) Therefore Socrates does agree that increasing one's estate is desirable. The last point contradicts the first point. Actual practice, possession of only five minas, and his precepts, how to gain wealth, do not correspond, and we have the strange spectacle of the unwordly philosopher being forced to put his worldly precepts into the mouth of another.[22]

Philodemus also points out the unreality of the dialogue. He criticizes Socrates for "pretending to teach Critobulus the economic art as if he (Critobulus) were going to learn so much in one session" (6.11–16). Then he goes on in a hopelessly fragmentary section to point out that Socrates has never managed an estate, is poor himself, yet can give instructions on management (6.18–35). Although nowhere in this treatise does Philodemus call Socrates an *eiron*, we can see that Socrates' role in *Περὶ*

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image of a thing is derived from sense impressions. In this case our conception of "poor" should derive from what we see as visibly (*μετ' ἐμφάσεως*) poor. Socrates on the contrary starts from a preconceived opinion, *δόξα*, and argues from that opinion. Philodemus thus reverses the meaning of *δόξα* from its use in Platonic writings, where it means in effect "that which appears to the senses," "untrustworthy," "mere opinion." For the Epicurean "that which appears" is the truth; conceptions derived from phenomena are a basis of knowledge. Anything else is error.

[21]The text after *ἐμάνθανον*, "they discovered," is very fragmentary. I follow the suggestion of Jensen *ad loc.*: "citato teste Ischomacho Philodemus demonstrare conatur inepte Socratem dixisse quinque minas sufficere ad parandum ea quae opus essent ad bene vivendum."

[22]That Xenophon was aware of this paradox is clear from *Oec.* 19.15, where Socrates declares in surprise that Ischomachus has taught him about farming by a series of questions, i.e., by the Socratic method!

οἰκονομίας is consistent with his characterization in *De vitiis* as an *eiron*. He is reluctant, as an *eiron*, to say what he thinks, so he must, as a teacher, attribute his knowledge to others.

Epicurus' only surviving comment on Socrates is a criticism of his *eironeia* (Cicero *Brutus* 292; fr. 231 Usener). Cicero considers Socrates' *eironeia* to be *facetam et elegantem* and he does not agree with Epicurus, who criticized it. Again personal qualities, not philosophical doctrines, are the target.[23]

In short the Epicurean considers Socrates to have the undesirable traits of an *eiron*: he flatters others, conceals what he really thinks, does not practice what he preaches (this latter trait subsumed under the category ἀλαζών). What motives does the *eiron* have for acting this way?

To determine first the motives of the *eiron*, and second, why this behavior is inappropriate to the role of philosopher, we must disentangle the various senses of the word εἰρωνεία.[24] *Eironeia* is not always bad; Cicero considered it witty and urbane; Aristotle in his definition of *eironeia* (*Eth. Nic.* 1127a23-b34) does not seem to be offended by the self-depreciators, who "are not too noticeable and obviously strike one as cultivated,"[25] in contrast to the boasters who are crude. His mention of Socrates as the model *eiron* cannot be taken as a criticism of Socrates.[26]

Rather different are the *eirones* of Theophrastus *Char.* 1, Demosthenes *Phil.* 1.7.37, and of Aristophanes. These persons are not self-depreciators for the sake of urbanity and wit; instead they are persons who are reluctant to get involved in affairs; they wish to keep to their own business. Theophrastus' *eiron* will "never confess to anything he is doing, but will always say that he is thinking about it," or "hearing, he will affect not to have heard; seeing, not to have seen" (Jebb's translation). Demosthenes describes the reluctance of the Athenians to act against Philip as *eironeia*: τὴν ἡμετέραν βραδύτητα καὶ εἰρωνείαν (*Phil.* 1.7.37). The self-depreciation that has come to be associated with *eironeia* can be used as an excuse for not joining in affairs. Indeed Philodemus' *eiron* seems to have this motive: "He says the least, puts difficulties in his own

[23]The other reference to Socrates in Usener is from Plutarch's *Non posse* 1086 f. quoted above, cited from Epicurus and Metrodorus. Whether Epicurus himself used the insulting words remains unclear. See note 9 above.

[24]In what follows I owe much to O. Ribbeck (above, note 15), who first pointed out that *eiron* is basically a pejorative word and that the "urbane" sense, as applied to Socrates, was a specialized use. For opposition to this thesis, unconvincing because it is based too much on Aristotle, see W. Büchner, "Über den Begriff der *Eironeia*," *Hermes* 76 (1941) 339–358. A more recent review in Lief Bergson, "*Eiron* und *Eironeia*," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 407–422.

[25]Translation by M. Ostwald in Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (Indianpolis 1962) 107.

[26]In fact his definition of an *eiron* is modeled on Socrates; see L. Bergson (above, note 24) 413.

way" (*De vit.* 23.9–11) or "He cannot understand what is said clearly" (23.16–22). Similar statements are at 22.22–23, 23.28–32.

In Aristophanes *eironeia* and its cognates are used in a similar way: Strepsiades wants to be an *eiron* to escape involvement in a law-suit (*Nub.* 445 ff.). Iris, the messenger of the gods, is accused of dissembling (εἰρωνεύεται) to avoid being taken for a spy (*Av.* 1211). In Plato, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of employing his "usual *eironeia*" because he does not want to answer an objection (*Resp.* 1.337a).

The usual motivation for *eironeia* thus seems to be a sly desire to escape from some obligation, to avoid trouble to oneself. Its use as a word of abuse apparently comes from the belief that if everyone attends only to his own affairs, the community affairs, e.g., defence, will be neglected. This meaning is especially clear in Demosthenes.[27] The "witty and urbane" sense comes entirely from later admiration of Socrates' *eironeia*; the good philosopher upgraded *eironeia*. For the Epicureans *eironeia* retained its original bad sense, and the bad word downgraded Socrates.

Why is the behavior of an *eiron* inappropriate for a philosopher and on what basis did the Epicureans rest their criticism of this behavior and of Socrates?

The fundamental attitudes of the Epicureans toward philosophy and toward the role of the philosopher *vis-à-vis* his confraternity are outlined in Philodemus' Περὶ παρρησίας (ed. A. Olivieri [Leipzig 1914]).[28] The philosopher is in charge of a group of students who are "in preparation" (κατασκευαζόμενοι). He heals them of mental disease and error just as a doctor heals bodily disease (fr. 39). The philosopher is regarded by his students as their only savior (σωτῆρα μόνον) or as a hero under whose guidance they will be safe (40.8–10). To promote the treatment the sage should "without any equivocation show to the person in his charge his mistakes and he should point out his shortcomings" (40.1–5). He can be blunt if necessary, taking the risk that this is the correct course for

[27]The Stoics apparently condemned *eironeia* for this same reason: τὸ εἰρωνεύεσθαι φαύλων εἶναί φασιν, οὐδένα ἐλεύθερον καὶ σπουδαῖον εἰρωνεύεσθαι (Stobaeus *Ecl. eth.* p. 222H.; 108, 12 Wachsm.; see Usener, *Epicurea* 348). Philostratus contrasts Apollonius' style with Socrates' and Aristotle's, saying that Apollonius made oracular utterances, speaking with authority like a king or lawgiver, compared with the earlier philosophers. For Philostratus εἰρωνευόμενος was a technical term for Socratic discourse; see *VA* 1.17.

[28]See N. De Witt, "Organization and Procedure in Epicurean Groups," *CP* 31 (1936) 205–211, or "Epicurean *Contubernium*," *TAPA* 67 (1936) 55–63, for an exaggerated but still useful description of Philodemus' school. Comments on De Witt's article by M. Gigante, "Philodème: Sur la liberté de parole," *Actes du VIII Congrès, Assoc. Guillaume Budé* (Paris 1968) 196–217 (also in Italian in his *Ricerche Filodemee* [Naples 1969]), correct the exaggerations but add other errors. I use "confraternity" for the Epicurean συσχολάζοντες (Περὶ παρρ. fr. 75.4) and συμφιλοσοφοῦντες (D. L. 10.17).

students who will not otherwise listen (10.3–7). In short the philosopher's job is to help those under his guidance in any way possible. Philodemus adds: "It follows by necessity that acting/thinking secretively (λαθραιοπραγεῖν) is the most unfriendly of acts; the one who does not bring everything out into the open will be hiding these from the most excellent of friends" (41.1–10), the most excellent of friends being the philosopher. De Witt summarizes the intent of the confraternity thus: "All aimed to habituate themselves to receive admonition kindly and to administer it frankly and gently. All were to be animated by good will, and everyone was urged to become an apostle, never ceasing to proclaim the doctrines of true philosophy."[29]

Philodemus' concern for his students recalls that of his master, Epicurus, for his will (D.L. 10.16-22) and Diogenes Laertius' comments (10.9) are witness to his concern and love for his fellow-philosophers. As a result of this concern he wished to leave behind his teachings in an easy-to-remember, summarized form, as he states in *ad Hdt.* 35–36, where he also makes it clear that the principal teachings should be memorized (δεῖ μνημονεύειν [*ad Hdt.* 35.11]) to provide a firm basis for thought and action.[30]

For Philodemus, the use of παρρησία, "frankness," is a manifestation of concern and true friendship, for not only does the philosopher help his students by pointing out their errors and shortcomings, but he can also be helped by frankness directed toward him: the sages "will inflict biting words on each other in a most kindly and healing manner, and they will recognize the kindness shown in giving this help" (Περὶ παρρ. col. 8a9–b5). The philosophers must be open to each other and willing to exchange truths without restraint. Such friendship and the mutual exchange of help deriving from it seem to have been the essence of Epicurean confraternities, along with a corresponding rejection of outside influence which could be disruptive.[31] If anyone in the group has wisdom or can help his fellows, he must speak out frankly; withholding wisdom or advice would be the end of true philosophic friendship: κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων. Epicurus' maxim, "Of all things which wisdom provides to make life happy, much the greatest is the possession of friendship" (*Sent.* 27, Bailey's translation) shows the value he placed on friendship, and his

[29]De Witt, *CP* 31 (1936) 211. Compare Epicurus' maxim: "Never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy" (*Sent. Vat.* 41, Bailey's translation).

[30]See D. Clay (above, note 10) for a study of Epicurus' aims and his methods for ensuring the faith of his disciples.

[31]For orders to reject outside influences see Περὶ παρρ. col. 18.1–2; compare De Witt (above, note 28) 207, and the frequent attacks on Epicurus' lack of culture and education (fr. 227, 228, 229a, b Usener). For the importance of friendship for Epicurus see A. J. Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods* (Oxford 1955) 27–50.

other maxims, "Friendship . . . has its origins in the need for help" (*Sent. Vat.* 23) and "The man who is always looking after his own interests is not a friend . . ." (*Sent. Vat.* 39) show that he would consider the withdrawal typical of the *eiron* to be contrary to true friendship.

The *eiron*, Socrates, does not receive help or advice from others; no one in the dialogues is his equal. He does not give help or advice in frank openness, rather his statements are tongue-in-cheek, sly. Neither in his receiving nor in his giving help does Socrates practice παρρησία, which for Philodemus seems to be the most important quality of the sage in his society.

We may conjecture that the importance of παρρησία for the Epicureans lay in their desire to avoid alienating their students by refusing to be open and direct and to encourage the search for truth by letting everyone have his say. Their students were also their friends, and openness between friends was always considered a virtue. (See Plutarch's *Quomodo adulator* 59b ff., likewise concerning παρρησία.) The slyness which they thought characterized Socrates would put a distance between philosopher and student, a distance inimical to Epicurean friendship.

For a specific example of Socrates' *eironeia* and a comparable modern reaction to it, consider the *Euthyphro*, in which Socrates pretends to need help from Euthyphro in understanding what piety is (=self-depreciation; *Euthyphro* 5a–b; 7a) and in which he refuses any overt comment on Euthyphro's outrageous prosecution of his father (=withdrawal, lack of concern). Both actions violate Epicurean feeling; the first is equivalent to flattery, the antithesis of the frankness advocated in Philodemus' Περὶ παρρησίας, frankness through which moral and philosophical education is best carried out; the second is an abdication of duty on the part of the philosopher, who has a responsibility to help his students, or in fact anyone he meets. (Περὶ παρρησίας contains directions on how to use frankness to noblemen, older persons, women, and so on; it is not limited to students in the formal sense.) The Epicureans would echo the objections raised by an imaginary opponent in an essay by Gregory Vlastos: "I don't believe you (Socrates) really care for that man's soul, for if you did, how could you have let him go with his head still stuffed with his superstitions?"[32] The sage is neglecting his duty, indulging in his own vice.

This rejection of Socrates' philosophical "style," not a rejection of his particular doctrines, is at the bottom of the Epicureans' attack on him. Socrates and Epicurus had fundamentally different attitudes toward their students, the former trying to elicit the students' own thoughts and

[32]Gregory Vlastos, "The Paradox of Socrates," in Gregory Vlastos (ed.), *The Philosophy of Socrates* (New York 1971) 13. Vlastos goes on to explain how Socrates might have defended himself.

to develop dialectical abilities in them, the latter trying to inculcate an ethical, scientific system that had brought him, and could bring them, happiness. Any disagreement in doctrine paled before the magnitude of the difference in method.

I have tried to show that Socrates was considered an *eiron* by Epicurus and his followers, Colotes and Philodemus. *Eirones* were not considered "cultivated" by the Epicureans, who maintained the traditional picture of the *eiron*. Rather *eirones* were considered ἄφιλοι, unfriends, those who refuse help, and as hypocrites, not saying what they think or practising what they preach. Socrates, as the classic *eiron*, was criticized in just these terms.[33]

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