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 κατηγορία, 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).


⁴ Fragments of Aristoxenus are in F. Wehrli, Die Schule des Aristoteles³ 2 (Basel 1967). For a general treatment of this particular tradition, especially insofar as it concerns Plato see I. Düring, Heroicus 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).


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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 Aristoxyenous 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 philosopher 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 παρηγοιαίας (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 παλαιάς τροφής; 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.
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habits that he cannot attain wisdom (fr. 114 Usener). 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. 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 ὄντα, as unreal, and for postulating a world of the νομοδότος, 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,

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9This 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.

10For 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, στοιχεῖωμα). 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,’ APh 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 Antignous 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 conse-
quences 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 flouts 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”—δογματεύειν τε καὶ οὐκ
ἀποφήσειν (D.L. 10.121; fr. 562 Usener). Boasting of one’s ignorance is
also the mark of a traditional Greek villain, the dissembler (ἐφων). 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. Many of the references treat Socrates as a standard example, e.g., of the persecuted philosopher, and are far from hostile. Several are more controversial.

A hostile characterization is found in De viiiis (ed. C. Jensen [Leipzig 1911]). The remains of this treatise, the last twenty-four columns of the roll, concern the fault of arrogance, ἓπερηφανία. Philodemus appends to his discussion a letter of Ariston of Keos which is likewise a guide to relieving the fault of arrogance: περὶ τοῦ κοινῆς ἓπερηφανίας ἐπιστολὴν (De vit. col. 10.11–13). Ariston’s letter is directed toward those who have become arrogant through gifts of fortune (διὰ τῆς ἓπερηφάνειας; 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 subdivides this vice into several categories (coll. 16.27–24.21):

2) The independent individualist, ὁ αὐθέκαστος, 17.17–19.2.
3) The know-it-all, ὁ παντειδημῶν, 20.3–37.

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


12 For example De rhetoria (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 (ὑπεροπτης), 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 (σεμνοπρεσετάτος) 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 (τύφου) 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

¹⁴Rather 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,' βρεβθείς; the scholiast glosses as ἄλαξσονεύει) 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.

¹⁵A general description of Aristo’s eiron can be found in O. Ribbeck, "Über den Begriff des ἐλευφ," 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). 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, ἡδόν, ἀφελή, γενναῖον, ἀνδρείον (22.30–32) can be found as follows: τὸν χρηστὸν Θεόδωρον (Phaedrus 266e), ὃς ἡδόν εἶ (Gorg. 491e), ὃ γενναῖε Πώλε (Gorg. 473d), ἀνδρείος γὰρ εἶ (Gorg. 494d). In Xenophon’s Oeconomics Socrates does attribute his knowledge of economics to Aspasia (Oec. 3.14–15) and to Ischomachus (Oec. 7.2 ff.). For the self-deprecation 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 archetypal eiron, deprecating himself, claiming to know nothing, flattering others.

Philodemus also considers the eiron to be “a type of imposter” (ἀλαξίων; De vit. 21.37–38) because he conceals what he thinks. Ἀλαξίων and εἰρων 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 εἰρων, dissembler, and ἀλαξίων, 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 ἀλαξίων λόγους (Adv. Col. 1117d). His words say one thing, while he does another—the perfect description of

16The text reads: καὶ τί δεῖ τὰ πλεῖον λέγειν; ἀπαντά γὰρ τὰ Ἀθηναῖκα μυθολογίατα συλλέγον ... (end of column). I assume something like τοιαῦτα πολλὰ κατέστασε 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 εὔτελος, so Philodemus must have cut short his discussion of the eiron with this comment on Socrates.

17In context, not all of these are flattering: ἡδός 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 *eirōn* and ἀλαζὼν 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.

Philodemus 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 πλοῦτον* by Metrodorus (coll. 12–21). 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.”

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

19S. Sidhaus, “Eine erhaltene Abhandlung des Metrodor,” *Hermes* 41 (1906) 43–58, identified this section as part of Metrodorus’ *Περὶ πλοῦτον*.

20The text to this point is as follows: ... *προσαγορεύειν τὸν δὲ μετ’ ἐμφάσεως καὶ πτωχὸν, ἀλλὰ δοξαστικὸς, οὐ προληπτικὸς κατὰ συνήθειαν.* I assume τὸν μὲν πλούσιον preceded, following Sudhaus and Jensen ad loc. The Epicurean doctrine of *πρόδηλησ* (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 (πραγματικῶν), 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’ (καλοκαγαθία), they discovered that five minas are not enough” (5.14–27). 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.

Philodemus also points out the unreality of the dialogue. He criticizes Socrates for “pretending to teach Critobulus the economic art as if he (Crito) 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 Ἱππί...
oikovomias 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 eironia (Cicero Brutus 292; fr. 231 Usener). Cicero considers Socrates’ eironia to be facetiam 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 ἀλαζῶν). 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 eironeia.24 Eironeia is not always bad; Cicero considered it witty and urbane; Aristotle in his definition of eironia (Eth. Nic. 1127a23-b34) does not seem to be offended by the self-deprecatiors, 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-deprecatiors 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 eironia: τὴν ἡμετέραν βραδύτητα καὶ εἰρωνείαν (Phil. 1.7.37). The self-deprecation that has come to be associated with eironia 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

23The 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.

24In 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 Eironia,” Hermes 76 (1941) 339–358. A more recent review in Lief Bergson, “Eiron und Eironia,” Hermes 99 (1971) 407–422.


26In 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 eironia 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 (ἐπωνυμεῖται) to avoid being taken for a spy (Av. 1211). In Plato, Thrasy-machus accuses Socrates of employing his “usual eironia” because he does not want to answer an objection (Resp. 1.337a).

The usual motivation for eironia 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’ eironia; the good philosopher upgraded eironia. For the Epicureans eironia retained its original bad sense, and the bad word downgraded Socrates.

Why is the behavior of an etron 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 παρμηθίαις (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 (σωτήρα 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

27The Stoics apparently condemned eironia for this same reason: τὸ εἰρωνεύομαι φαύλων εἶναι φαύς, οὐδέρα ἔλειθερον καὶ σπουδαῖον εἰρωνεύομαι (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 εἰρωνεύομαι was a technical term for Socratic discourse; see VA 1.17.

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 secretly (λαθραϊσχγαεῖν) 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.”

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 (δεί μνημονεύων [ad Hdt. 35.11]) to provide a firm basis for thought and action.

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. 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

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29De Witt, CP 31 (1936) 211. Compare Epicurus’ maxim: “Never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy” (Sent. Vat. 41, Bailey’s translation).
30See D. Clay (above, note 10) for a study of Epicurus’ aims and his methods for ensuring the faith of his disciples.
31For 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 παρπησία, which for Philodemus seems to be the most important quality of the sage in his society.

We may conjecture that the importance of παρπησία 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 παρπησία.) 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' eironέα 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-deprecation; 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 παρπησίας, 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 παρπησίας 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

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 *ἀφιλαί*, 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.\(^3\)

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