

ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURE IN EPICUREAN GROUPS

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ANCIENT writers afford us but little information concerning the internal organization and working of philosophical schools, such matters being universally known at the time and seemingly unworthy of mention. It happens, however, that the Herculean roll containing the *περὶ παρησίας* of Philodemus, in spite of its fragmentary state, throws a fairly ample light on the procedure followed in Epicurean groups. Such information, of course, is not directly revealed but must be deduced from the tacit assumptions of the author. For example, since the practice of accepting fees as a token of gratitude for the correction of faults is defended in the case of Epicurus (frag. 55), it may be inferred that fees were collected on this basis in Epicurean circles generally. In these pages the notation of A. Olivieri (Teubner, 1914) will be followed, that is, Arabic numerals for isolated fragments and Roman numerals for columns where the sequence of fragments is preserved.

It goes without saying that any member of an Epicurean group who possessed the requisite self-confidence was at liberty to migrate elsewhere and undertake to organize a group of his own. In so doing, however, his relationship to prospective followers was predefined in a peculiar way, because Epicureanism was primarily a cult of the founder and his way of life and only secondarily a system of thought. Even more important than the so-called Principle Doctrines was this voluntary pledge (45, 8-11), "We will be obedient to Epicurus, according to whom we have made it our choice to live."¹ Underlying this is the tacit assumption that Epicurus had discovered the one and only true way of life, and that there could be only one discoverer; subsequent leaders could only guide and direct their followers along that road. In other words, the leaders were themselves followers, and their adherents were followers of followers. They differed from one another only in the degree of their advancement toward wisdom.

¹ Seneca *Epistles* xxv. 5: "Sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus."

It was part of the system that the head of the school should be treated with veneration since he was presumed to be far advanced in wisdom. The proper disposition of the follower toward him is well described in a surviving fragment (40): he was to be regarded as a father-confessor; mistakes and shortcomings were to be frankly disclosed to him in confidence; followers were to place themselves in his hands as their sole guide in right thinking and right conduct; they were to regard him as their savior and to declare in the words of Homer (*Iliad* x. 246-47), "With such a one as this for my comrade we should both return safe even out of a flaming fire, because he is exceeding clever to devise." It may be mentioned that the Epicureans, like other ancient moralists, employed quotations from the poets to support their particular doctrines. In this instance the young Epicurean seeking wisdom under the leadership of the sage is compared to Diomedes setting out enthusiastically on his nocturnal adventure with his trusted friend Ulysses.

The *sapiens* is not sustained in his position by any rigid scheme of offices. One member stands higher than another only by virtue of superiority in wisdom. The word "better" (*κρείττων*) denotes one farther advanced in wisdom (44, 7-8). The word "master" does not occur. The basis of the system is good will, voluntary co-operation, and friendship. Metrodorus and Hermarchus, who had stood close to Epicurus in Athens, were called "guides" or "leaders" (*καθηγεμόνες*²), but in this essay of Philodemus a synonym of less dignity from the same root is regularly employed (*καθηγηταί*). It is manifest from the contexts that this term denotes the teachers, though the latter word is avoided as being out of harmony with the spirit of Epicureanism, the adherents of which were not taught but led or guided. It may be mentioned that Plutarch describes an incident of school life in which the person in charge is called *καθηγητής*.³ Since in our essay the word occurs regularly in the plural, it may be assumed that the scholars are divided into small groups, each in charge of a leader.

The effective principle in the organization is, of course, love, *φιλία*, which Roman writers narrowed materially by rendering it *amicitia*. The leader is to be regarded as the best of all friends (41, 4-8). Friendship

² Philodemus *De ira* xlv. 1-14 (Teubner: C. Wilke, 1914).

³ *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* xxxi (70 E).

expresses itself in the form of mutual concern for the good of one another, good will, and gratitude. Everyone is to be imbued with a feeling of responsibility (*κηδεμονία*) for the good of all. In one passage (26, 4-7) we read, "Let us keep before our eyes the superiority of the admonition that is actuated by a concern for the good of the admonished [*κηδεμονική ρουθέτησις*]." A main objective is to create an atmosphere of good will and to strengthen it; one caption (25, 3-8) in the essay reads, "How through correction we shall heighten the good will of the students [*κατασκευαζόμενοι*] toward ourselves in spite of the very process of correction." No less important than good will is gratitude, of which the Epicureans established what was almost a cult. Even the *sapiens* will be grateful for a reminder from another *sapiens* (VIII^a, 1-2 and VIII^b, 12-13). He will be grateful also for criticism from a *φιλόσοφος* or a *φιλόλογος*, even though not belonging to his own group (X^a, 1-5 and X^b, 11-13).

The first objective is to create a disposition (*διάθεσις*) amenable to correction. This applies more specifically to the youngest recruits, denoted in the essay as *κατασκευαζόμενοι*. They are subject to re-proof and admonition from all members of the group, even from one another. They learn to regard superior wisdom with respect, to control their tongues and their tempers, to confess their faults, and to be open and frank in all their conduct. Slyness and secretiveness (*λαθροπραγείν*) are to be considered the worst of all offenses against friendship (41, 1-4). On account of their youth they are treated with gentleness so that they will learn to submit to correction (2, 1-7), because the wise man knows beforehand that the young are prone to be stiff-necked (71) and easily irritated (31, 1-3). Their characters become the subject of detailed study, as will be exemplified presently.

Upon enrolment the lad was exhorted to spurn all other knowledge (music, rhetoric, and geometry) as alienating him from the pursuit of happiness (18, 1-2). Seemingly, part of his early guidance comes from the *φιλόλογος*, who is regularly mentioned after the *σοφός* and *φιλόσοφος* (VIII^a, 7-9 and X^a, 1-2). That the *φιλόλογος* is a junior may also be inferred from the mistakes against which he is warned, namely, interpreting the misconduct of students as a personal affront to himself and resorting to a blustering, high-keyed, insulting, belittling, and sarcastic style of correction (37). That the *φιλόλογος* was a

teacher seems reasonable not only from contexts in this essay but also from a statement of the grammarian Phrynichus that the word denotes one primarily interested in education.⁴ That his sphere was instruction in literature seems clear from the word itself. It is erroneous to assume that the Epicureans scorned this study. Epicurus found a basis in a very hedonistic passage of the *Odyssey* (x. 5–11) for declaring pleasure to be the highest good,⁵ and references to tragedy and comedy are not infrequent in the essay before us and in other Epicurean writings.

That the *σοφός* and *φιλόσοφος* stood in the closest relationship to each other is made clear by their mention together and without the *φιλόλογος* (1, 7 and 35, 2–3). It need not be doubted that the *φιλόσοφος* was one who was relatively far advanced in philosophy and stood to the chief as a sort of associate professor, while the *φιλόλογος* was an assistant professor. Touching the problem of perfection, the writer of this essay does not assume that it is attainable at all, as the following extract will show (46, 5–11): “For how will he [*sc. sapiens*] hate the one who commits pardonable mistakes, remembering that he is not perfect himself and that all men are accustomed to err?” This principle, of course, is democratic and diminishes the interval between the head of the school and his associates.

Lower than the *φιλόσοφος* in respect of advancement in wisdom is the class which Philodemus regularly denotes by “we.” At first blush this might seem to be a plural of modesty, denoting the head of the school and his closest associates; but this assumption is ruled out by the following (35, 1–4): “Above all things we will seek to admonish, though not like the *σοφός* and the *φιλόσοφος*.” Closer scrutiny makes it certain that the *συνηθεῖς* or *familiares*, the ranking members of the group, are the class denoted. That these, in turn, are more advanced in wisdom than the majority becomes clear from one of those underlined captions that occur here and there in the roll (56, 1–3): “Whether we who are advanced in respect of power of reasoning [*λογισμός*] will make a failure of it.” Incidentally, the answer is that they will not, though to miss the mark occasionally is not impossible because of the inability of human beings to be adequately on their

⁴ Liddell and Scott, 8th ed., *s.v.* II, 2.

⁵ Ettore Bignone, *Atene e Roma*, XII (1934), 15–16.

guard continually. These *familiares*, however, even if falling considerably short of the highest attainable perfection, may be assumed to have attained to a disposition (*διάθεσις*) amenable to correction, which is the preliminary objective of the system.

If a disposition amenable to correction is desirable on the part of students, still more desirable is a disposition rightly adapted to the administration of correction on the part of the leaders. Proper correction will come from one "actuated by good will, devoting himself intelligently and diligently to philosophy, steadfast in principle, careless of what people think of him, immune from any tendency to demagoguery, free from spitefulness, saying only what fits the occasion, and not likely to be carried away so as to revile, jeer, belittle, injure feelings, or resort to tricks of wanton acquiescence or flattery (I^b, 2-13)." The opposite will be expected of one "with an unbridled tongue, prone to blame others, light-minded so as to be incensed at slight affronts, bickersome, truculent, or bitter (II^a, 1-7)." This is but part of the extant description, but it would seem adequate.

The technique of correction itself is worked out to considerable detail. The treatment of it exemplifies that process of elaboration to which the original doctrines of founders like Epicurus were subjected by successive teachers. Ethical correction became a specialty of the Epicurean schools and developed its own vocabulary. It is simple (*ἀπλή*, 10, 4; 35, 8), that is, straightforward and direct, or mixed (*μικτή*, 58, 7-8), that is, compounded of reproof, generous praise and exhortation (68, 3-7). It is a many-sided fine art (*ποικίλη φιλοτεχνία*, *ibid.* 1-2). It may be administered by the *sapiens*, by one of the *familiares*, or even by one of the fellow-students; it must not be applied incessantly or for all offenses, nor for the chance mistake, nor in the presence of people not concerned, nor discursively, but sympathetically and without insult or abuse (79, 4-11). Some students may be better admonished without the knowledge of the leaders (*καθηγηταί*, 8, 4-8). Cases occur where it seems unwise to administer reproof before the group (35, 7-11), but elsewhere mention is made of students who are reproofed before their fellow-students for wearing Greek cloaks (31, 4-8). Reporting of misdemeanors committed by fellow-students is approved as an act of genuine friendship, and failure to report will stamp a man as "an evil friend and a friend to evil" (50).

Tale-bearing, however, is carefully distinguished and discouraged (*ibid.*).

Just as the *Characters* of Theophrastus is a logical sequel to the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, so the observation of the characters of students is a natural sequel to this elaborated system of correction. Students are recognized as impressionable, or wilful and more in need of a check (7, 1-5), weak and incapable of being cured by correction (59, 9-11), or of ugly dispositions (86, 1-2). Some lack previous guidance or have been given up as incorrigible (84, 8-12). Others, born beyond the reach of those influences that create a disposition amenable to good will and friendship, and lacking the example of leaders for imitation over a long space of time, will be lazy and dilatory and never show great improvement (V). Students imitate the faults of their leaders along with their virtues (43, 3-4); no example of this survives in our text, but Plutarch in a similar passage mentions that they imitated Aristotle's lisp and Plato's stoop.⁶ Among other points mentioned are these, that some young people are irritated by correction (31) and that those who feel the need of showing off before crowds and of having honors from the many are especially hard to save (34, 3-8).

The analogy between this system of corrective ethics and the practice of medicine is frequently emphasized. It was to the advantage of the student, they taught, to have just such a disposition (*διάθεσις*) toward the sage as he had toward the physician. Students were urged to bear in mind, for example, how utterly disgraceful it would be never to make trial of the admonition of the sage, just as if they should take it upon themselves to assume entire charge of their health and under no circumstances to make use of physicians (39, 7-14). Again, if the sage should err and correct a student for a mistake of which he was innocent, to assume that similar correction would never be needed on other occasions would be to commit the same error as a physician who, having once given a patient a purge through a false diagnosis, never afterward purged him in other illnesses (63). Once more, urging the necessity of repeated corrections, the authors cite the practice of physicians who, accomplishing nothing by one enema, administer another (64, 6-12). Lastly, just as a physician will continue to attend a patient who may reasonably be considered incapable of cure, so the

⁶ *Op. cit.* ix. (53 C-D).

ethical monitor will not halt in his ministrations if his admonitions fail to meet with response (69).

This, then, was the organization of the Epicurean brotherhood: σοφός, φιλόσοφοι, φιλόλογοι, καθηγηταί, συνηθείς and κατασκευαζόμενοι. These differed from one another only in the varying degrees of their advancement toward wisdom, and none attained so near to perfection as to be immune from error. Each looked to those above him as his leaders, and all looked beyond their immediate leaders to Epicurus as their model. All were commanded to cultivate a feeling of gratitude toward him for having discovered the true way of life and to their fellow-adherents for assisting them to follow it. 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 the true philosophy.⁷ Lastly, the leaders were genuine psychiatrists, engaged in purifying men of their faults just as the physician purified their bodies of disease.

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⁷ *Vatican Collection*, 41; C. Bailey, *Epicurus* (Oxford, 1926).