

ARGUMENTS AS BOXING GLOVES

Ethics of philosophical polemics in Middle Platonism

Résumé. — Dans les œuvres de Plutarque de Chéronée, en particulier ses traités anti-épicuriens *Aduersus Colotem* et *Non posse suauiter uiui secundum Epicurum*, on peut trouver beaucoup de renseignements sur les règles éthiques à suivre pour polémiquer correctement. Plutarque n'a certainement jamais érigé en système l'éthique de ses polémiques philosophiques, mais il a adopté une série relativement cohérente de critères précis, dont il explique de façon plus ou moins détaillée la pertinence et la valeur. L'étude de ces critères montre que l'idéal de Plutarque est une discussion bienveillante, structurée et raisonnée, reposant sur une argumentation compétente et sur la recherche de la vérité.

Cet article s'intéresse aux règles qui définissent une polémique philosophique correcte, ainsi qu'à la manière dont Plutarque lui-même en fait usage dans ses traités anti-épicuriens. Avant toute chose, selon Plutarque, une bonne discussion philosophique doit remplir au préalable plusieurs conditions intellectuelles, telles que le respect minimal des règles du raisonnement logique et la connaissance approfondie du sujet traité. En second lieu, ces règles intellectuelles se doublent d'un ensemble d'exigences morales : la discussion dans son ensemble doit être parfaitement exempte de l'influence pernicieuse des sentiments.

Dans ses polémiques contre l'épicurisme, Plutarque montre comment Colotès et son maître Épicure enfreignent souvent ces règles intellectuelles et morales. Reste à savoir, toutefois, si Plutarque lui-même respecte ses propres règles dans son attaque contre la philosophie épicurienne. Une analyse approfondie montre qu'effectivement, il respecte souvent avec loyauté ses propres exigences intellectuelles et morales, mais que, malgré ses efforts pour montrer l'exemple, ses attaques polémiques sont parfois aussi en désaccord avec ses propres règles.

1. Homonoia or Eris as patroness of philosophy?

If philosophy indeed has its beginning in wonder (Plato, *Tht.*, 155d2-4), this wonder also gave rise to a great deal of harsh disputes and bitter controversies. From the very beginning, philosophy and its ardent followers have been embraced by the goddess Eris. The Presocratics already confidently opposed traditional myths and widespread convictions and ideals. In Xenophanes' view, for instance, his own worth towers above that of victorious athletes because his wisdom is better than their strength (Athenaeus, 10, 413f-414c = fr. 21 B 2 DK). Heraclitus' contempt for the great multitude, the poets, and even his philosophical predecessors, can be

felt in many extant fragments of his work ¹. And Parmenides appears in his poem as the only one whom the goddess teaches the truth about being and non-being, whereas all other people, “knowing nothing, wander two-headed” (Simplicius, *In Ph.*, 78.2 = fr. 28 B 6.4-5 DK). Examples can be easily multiplied. Socrates continuously quarrelled with the sophists and with anyone who boasted about his knowledge. Aristotle attacked all of his philosophical predecessors, in the first place his own master Plato – whom he loved – in the name of the truth (which he loved even more). Again, Epicurus engaged in a polemic with his predecessors, including his teacher Nausiphane ², and he was, in his turn, vehemently criticised by both Academics and Stoics, who also tried to refute each other. Throughout its history, then, the domain of philosophy was a battlefield rather than a shrine dedicated to wisdom.

The same holds true for Post-Hellenistic philosophy, where the different schools went on to fight one another, and when the Platonists finally emerged victorious over their opponents, their mutual disagreements remained the source of much inner school polemic. Meanwhile, the rise of Christianity opened up a new domain for polemical attacks, where each argument raised further questions and objections.

The situation hardly differed in Middle Platonism (ca. 80 B.C. – ca. 220 A.D.) ³, the period that I would like to discuss in this contribution. Examples abound of polemical attacks, both against fellow members of one’s own school and against other schools ⁴. There is, however, a remarkable element which several of these controversies have in common: the polemicists frequently deal with the question of how one should ideally

1. A convenient survey is to be found in W. K. C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy. Volume I: The Early Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 412-413.

2. For Epicurus’ relation to previous thinkers, see esp. D. SEDLEY, “Epicurus and his Professional Rivals”, in J. BOLLACK, A. LAKE (eds.), *Études sur l’épicurisme antique*, Lille, 1976, p. 119-159. For his polemics with Nausiphane, see also F. LONGO AURICCHIO, A. TEPEDINO GUERRA, “Per un riesame della polemica epicurea contro Nausifane”, *SicGymn* NS 33 (1980), p. 467-477.

3. The classic study of Middle Platonism is J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, London, 1977. Much material can also be found in H. DÖRRIE, M. BALTES, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, 7 vols., Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt, 1987-2002. A good survey of the Latin tradition is S. GERSH, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. The Latin Tradition*. Volume I, Notre Dame, 1986.

4. To give but a few examples: Plutarch’s numerous polemical treatises against Epicureanism and Stoicism, Nicostratus’ critic of Aristotle’s *Categories*, Numenius’ work *On the Divergence of the Academics from Plato*, Atticus’ treatise *Against Those Who Profess to Interpret Plato’s Doctrines through Those of Aristotle*, the anti-Epicurean speeches of Maximus of Tyre, or Celsus’ *True Account*.

carry on polemics. They try to formulate some general rules and criteria which the polemicist should observe in his attacks, the do's and don'ts of the polemical game.

Of course such rules were not entirely new. In Plato's dialogues can already be found reflections on the importance of consistency⁵, on the persuasiveness of the argument from *consensio omnium* (*Grg.*, 471e2-472c4), or on the limited value of an *argumentum ex auctoritate* (*Chrm.*, 161c3-7; cf. also *Plt.*, 260b10-11 and *Phdr.*, 275b5-c2), and during the dialectical discussions, Socrates often watches over the correct development of the argument. Other important contributions are Aristotle's logical and rhetorical works and early Stoic logic. Middle Platonists certainly did not need to lay down their rules *ab ovo*, but could take advantage of a rich and fruitful tradition. On the other hand, the gradual growth of well defined traditions of philosophical schools could not but make its influence felt in the domain of polemics, where sudden and isolated attacks of one thinker against another more and more had to yield to trench warfare between members of different schools⁶. It is not surprising, then, that in such a context an ethics of philosophical polemics was more fully developed, nor that different authors came to (partly) different conclusions, which were closely connected with their philosophical convictions and with the precise purposes and targets of their works.

Maximus of Tyre⁷ frequently blames the philosophers for their disagreements and quarrels which prevent him from obtaining certainty (15, 2; 26, 2; 29, 7). Looking for a way to decide between countervailing arguments, he is confronted with an embarrassing difficulty:

Ἐνταῦθα δὲ τίς ἡμῖν παρέσται δικαστῆς καὶ τίνι ψήφῳ τὰ ληθῆς κρινοῦμεν; Λόγῳ; ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν ἔχοις εἰπεῖν λόγον ὅτῳ οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροις τὸν ἐναντίον. Πάθει; ἀλλ' ἄπιστος ὁ δικαστῆς. Πλήθει;

5. See, e.g., the famous passages *Phd.*, 100a5-7 and 101d3-6, with the discussion of R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Oxford, 1952², p. 126-136.

6. That the different philosophical schools had meanwhile ceased to exist as institutions (see J. GLUCKER, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, Göttingen, 1978) did not make any difference on this point.

7. For Maximus' somewhat problematic place in Middle Platonism, see M. B. TRAPP, *Maximus of Tyre. The Philosophical Orations. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes*, Oxford, 1997, p. XXII-XXX (esp. p. XXV: "Maximus is not a Platonist, because to him philosophical '-isms' are an aberration from what philosophy really ought to be, and has been in more favoured times. He is a spokesman for Philosophy, not for any one narrow sectarian interest. At the same time, however, it is clear that Plato and his doctrines are extremely important to the *Orations*."). Cf. also W. KROLL, H. HOBEIN, "Maximos von Tyros, Sophist", in *RE XIV.2*, Stuttgart, 1930, 2560-2561; J. DILLON, *o.c.* (n. 3), p. 399-400; G. L. KONIARIS, "On Maximus of Tyre: Zetemata (II)", *ClAnt* 2 (1983), p. 232-243.

ἀλλὰ πλείους οἱ ἀμαθέστεροι. Δόξη; ἀλλὰ τὰ χεῖρω ἐνδοξότερα (33, 1).

But in our case who will sit as juror for us, and by what process of voting will we decide on the truth? Reasoned argument? But there is no argument you can give me to which an answer cannot be found. Emotional response? An untrustworthy juror! A majority vote? The majority are fools. Reputation? It is inferior things that enjoy the higher reputation. (Translation M. B. Trapp.)

The conclusion can only be that there does not exist a standard criterion that can be used to settle any philosophical problem. Since each criterion turns out to be problematic, the solution should be sought elsewhere.

The solution which Maximus proposes is as simple as it seems: just avoid philosophical polemics all together, as they in the end obscure what really matters, that is, the good (26, 2). This straightforward ideal is reflected in Maximus' own irenic attitude. Philosophy has nothing to do with the courtroom (25, 6), and words are no weapons (24, 1)⁸. In line with this position, Maximus tries to reconcile traditional opponents⁹, and often seeks to preclude possible disagreements by avoiding technical terms and showing himself, just like Plato (21, 4), tolerant in terminological matters, preferring content to linguistic subtleties (27, 8; 32, 7; cf. also 34, 4 and 40, 6).

It is clear that such irenic criteria pour a lot of oil on the troubled waters of philosophical polemics. However, Maximus can only buy the rest and unanimity of which he dreams at the price of oversimplifying generalisations and superficiality. His criteria are more rooted in his selfpresentation as a moderate and wise man¹⁰ than in his sincere attempts to obtain the truth, and may rather be understood against the background of the so-called 'Second Sophistic' than from a purely philosophical perspective.

Just like Maximus, Numenius of Apamea strongly regrets the great discord among his colleagues and advocates an irenic approach in philosophical discussions, but contrary to Maximus, he in the first place focuses on

8. Cf. Cicero's position, discussed by P. R. SMITH, "A Self-Indulgent Misuse of Leisure and Writing? How Not To Write Philosophy: Did Cicero Get it Right?", in J. G. F. POWELL (ed.), *Cicero the Philosopher. Twelve Papers*, Oxford, 1995, p. 301-323.

9. E.g., Plato and Homer (17, 3: περι Ὀμήρου σκοπῶμεν ἀδεκάστως μάλα, οὐθ' ὅστις Πλάτωνι χαίρει ἀτιμάζων Ὀμηρον, οὐθ' ὅστις Ὀμηρον θαυμάζει μεμφόμενος Πλάτωνι: οὐ γὰρ διακεκλήρωται οὐδὲ ἀπέσχισται ἐκάτερον θατέρου, ἀλλ' ἕξεστίν που καὶ τὰ Πλάτωνος τιμᾶν καὶ θαυμάζειν Ὀμηρον; cf. also 26, 3 and – more in general – 4, 1).

10. On Maximus' *persona* in his speeches, see M. B. TRAPP, *o.c.* (n. 7), p. LI-LV.

his own school. In his treatise *On the Divergence of the Academics from Plato* (frs. 24-28 des Places), he primarily tries to safeguard the unity of the Platonic tradition. In such a context, he does not hesitate to present the concord among the Epicureans and Pythagoreans as an ideal (Eusebius, *PE*, 14, 5, 2-3 = fr. 24), which he opposes not only to the dissension in the Stoic and Socratic schools (14, 5, 4-6) but also to the discord of the Platonists themselves (14, 5, 1-2). If Numenius' perspective in this work is somewhat more differentiating about the philosophical schools than that of Maximus, it is also more specific, in that Numenius' irenic ideal in the end only concerns his own Platonic school¹¹. The achievements of the other schools are only indirectly relevant as a mirror in which the Platonists can discover good or bad examples of philosophical consensus.

This more limited perspective directly entails a much greater belief in the capacities of reason. On this point, Numenius is less defeatist than Maximus. Important is a thorough knowledge of the matter under discussion (14, 6, 9 and 10 = fr. 25) and moral behaviour during the discussion, which becomes evident in respect for one's predecessors (14, 5, 7 = fr. 24) and refusal to speak disparagingly of them (14, 5, 2). In another work, he underlines the importance of a systematic and orderly approach (11, 18, 1 = fr. 11, from his treatise *On the Good*).

Inside his own school, Numenius finally adopts a reconciliatory attitude similar to that of Maximus, arguing that Plato's doctrines are perfectly in line with those of Pythagoras¹² and even with the Old Testament¹³. On the other hand, he never in the extant fragments tries to establish connections with Epicurean or Stoic tenets, which illustrates the same preoccupation with his own school (even though this, of course, may be due to the specific context of his treatise). Whereas Maximus dreamt of putting an end to all philosophical controversies, Numenius more realistically pursued concord within the more confined circle of his own school.

A very interesting figure in the context of this study is Atticus. Especially the extant fragments from his polemical work *Against Those*

11. Quite typically, Numenius was far less irenic towards other philosophical schools, and even towards Arcesilaus, Carneades, and their followers, who in his view corrupted the Platonic tradition with their scepticism. Cf. also M. FREDE, "Numenius", in *ANRW* II, 36, 2, Berlin - New York, 1987, p. 1049: *Die Schrift meldet also gewisse Vorbehalte gegen die Alte Akademie an, ist aber vor allem durch ihre antiskeptische, antiaristotelische und antistoische Einstellung gekennzeichnet.*

12. Eusebius, *PE*, 9, 7, 1 (= fr. 1a), 11, 10, 9 (= fr. 7); 14, 5, 7 (= fr. 24: ὁ δὲ Πλάτωνος πυθαγορίσας) and 14, 5, 8-9; Calcidius, *In Tim.*, 295 and 296 (= fr. 52).

13. Origen, *Cels.*, 1, 15 (= fr. 1b) and 4, 51 (= fr. 1c and 10a); Eusebius, *PE*, 9, 8, 1-3 (= fr. 9) and 11, 10, 14 (= fr. 8: τί γάρ ἐστι Πλάτων ἢ Μωσῆς ἀττικίζων; cf. J. WHITTAKER, "Moses Atticizing", *Phoenix* 21 [1967], p. 196-201).

Who Profess to Interpret Plato's Doctrines through Those of Aristotle contain a great deal of relevant material. As appears from the title, Atticus' main purpose is to restore the purity of the Platonic doctrine. Just like Numenius, he thus focuses his attention primarily on his own school.

But Atticus states somewhat more explicitly what Numenius left unsaid (in the extant fragments). Observing that he addresses members of his own school, who are friends, he assures that he will carry on the discussion in a friendly and peaceful way, and using mild arguments (Eusebius, *PE*, 15, 6, 6 = fr. 4: πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἔνδον ἡμῖν ὑποφθεγγομένους, ἅτε φίλους ὄντας, φιλιῶς τε καὶ μεθ' ἡσυχίας πράξειν ἐλέγχοις διακριθεῖμεν ἄν). This important passage indirectly introduces amiable mildness as one of Atticus' normative criteria for a good polemical debate. Moreover, it also implies that rules for discussion may differ inside and outside the school. Towards fellow Platonists, one should adopt an irenic attitude which aims at mutual friendship and concord. Atticus does not discuss the proper attitude towards members of the other philosophical schools, but the suggestion seems to be that more violent attacks are in place.

As far as philosophical discussions inside the school are concerned, Atticus elaborates several additional rules, both at the intellectual and the moral level. Among the first are the demand of careful exegesis by remaining close to Plato's text¹⁴, of clarity¹⁵, and of basing one's arguments on reason¹⁶. The second ban shameful tenets¹⁷ and, especially, arguments motivated by contentiousness¹⁸. Even if most of these rules can easily be generalised, it is important to note that they are all closely connected with Atticus' specific philosophical goal, and serve to discredit Aristotle and his followers.

The foregoing brief survey shows that several Middle Platonists gave attention to the problem of how to carry on a philosophical discussion. Nowhere in the extant fragments of their works do they present a formal-

14. Proclus, *in Ti.*, 3, 247, 12-15 (= fr. 14) and 3, 234, 9-18 (= fr. 15); see also M. BALTES, "Zur Philosophie des Platonikers Attikos", in H.-D. BLUME, F. MANN (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie*, Münster, 1983, p. 38-39 on Atticus' philological ἀκρίβεια. According to C. MORESCHINI ("Attico: una figura singolare del medioplatonismo", in *ANRW II*, 36, 1, Berlin - New York, 1987, p. 478), *questa peculiarità dell'esegesi di Attico è effettiva e reale [...], e rappresenta uno dei punti di contrasto con la tradizione platonica che abbiamo definito 'normativa'*.

15. Eusebius, *PE*, 15, 9, 13 (= fr. 7); cf. also *PE*, 15, 6, 3 (= fr. 4) and Simplicius, *in Cat.*, 30.16-17 Kalbfleisch (= fr. 41).

16. Eusebius, *PE*, 15, 8, 5 and 6 (= fr. 6).

17. Eusebius, *PE*, 15, 11, 4 (= fr. 7 bis).

18. Eusebius, *PE*, 15, 8, 11 (= fr. 6); 15, 9, 7 (= fr. 7); cf. also 15, 9, 14.

ised and coherent set of rules. They usually confine themselves to loose remarks which are closely connected with, and find their origin in, their own philosophical purpose. Precisely for this reason, however, assembling and evaluating these remarks is of paramount importance, since such an analysis may throw more light on the argumentative criteria which the respective thinkers followed themselves, on what they considered to be a good intellectual debate, and on the crucial question of whether they themselves followed their own rules. A fair evaluation of their arguments should take into account these standards. By confronting, in a systematical way, the philosophical polemics of an author with his own rules for a good discussion, we may reach a historically more correct interpretation of his polemical writings, a more nuanced and fair evaluation of his position and method of working, and a better insight into the general intellectual background against which the philosophical polemics of this period should be understood.

It is not my intention, however, to provide such a systematic interpretation of all the above mentioned thinkers. In the remainder of this article, I shall focus my attention on Plutarch of Chaeronea, as it is in his works, especially in his anti-Epicurean treatises *Aduersus Colotem* and *Non posse suauius uiui secundum Epicurum* (henceforward: *Non posse*) that by far the most information about such ethical rules for a good polemic can be found. First of all (section 2), I shall examine the different rules which he formulates and their mutual relation. Just like the other Middle Platonists mentioned above, Plutarch never elaborated a systematic ethics of philosophical polemics, but he adopted a fairly coherent series of clear criteria, the relevance and importance of which he explains more or less in detail. Secondly (section 3), I shall analyse the way in which he uses these rules in the anti-Epicurean treatises. I hope to show here that they should not be regarded as brief digressions or *Fremdkörper* but that they constitute themselves an important part of Plutarch's polemical argument. In other words, a great deal of Plutarch's polemics against Colotes can only be understood in the light of his own rules for a good philosophical discussion. Finally (section 4), I will turn to the important question of whether Plutarch observes his own rules in his attack on Epicurean philosophy. It is clear that this can cast a new light on Plutarch's polemical writings, in that they can for the first time be evaluated on the basis of Plutarch's own criteria. It may be mentioned in passing that such an analysis may also be fruitful for Plutarch's anti-Stoic writings (the question then being: does Plutarch even observe his own rules in polemical treatises where he is much less explicit about the right way to carry on a philosophical debate?). In this

article, however, I prefer to confine myself to Plutarch's anti-Epicurean works, in which the problem is explicitly thematised.

2. Plutarch's rules for a good philosophical polemic

2.1. Rem tene, uerba sequuntur: *intellectual rules for a good debate*

First of all, a good philosophical discussion presupposes in Plutarch's view the fulfilment of several intellectual conditions. If these intellectual demands obviously influence the course of the debate, they ultimately aim at an end that lies outside the debate, that is, the truth. The whole discussion should indeed be regarded as a search (ζήτησις) for the truth, a search moreover which requires great efforts, since in most philosophical domains the truth is extremely difficult to reach¹⁹. Everyone should in an independent and critical way look for the truth²⁰, and the many silences in the discussions of the *Quaestiones conuiuales* strikingly illustrate the intellectual efforts which this process requires²¹.

(a) The first intellectual demand is basic *respect for the rules of logical reasoning*. Each speaker can freely choose his own starting points, but once he has made this fundamental choice and presented his arguments for it, he should accept all of its implications (*Adu. Colot.*, 1111C). Any conscious refusal to do so is sheer impudence (1111B: ἀρνεῖσθαι δὲ συνορῶντα τὴν ἀτοπίαν ἀναισχυντότατον) and evidently disqualifies the speaker's arguments. It is clear that this demand works at a formal level, being concerned with the general and abstract rules of reasoning and argumentation. The ideal behind it is perfect consistency of one's doctrines (ἡ τῶν δογμάτων ὁμολογία; *De Stoic. rep.*, 1033A).

However, it is important to note at this stage already that this demand of consistency also has important practical consequences. Since the speaker's theoretical starting points have direct implications for his actions, his consistency should also appear in his own life (ἡ τῶν δογμάτων

19. For the Academic sceptical background of Plutarch's zetetic philosophy, see esp. the first *Quaestio Platonica* (999C-1000E), with the excellent analysis of J. OPSOMER, *In Search of the Truth. Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism*, Brussel, 1998, p. 127-212.

20. See G. ROSKAM, "From Stick to Reasoning. Plutarch on the Communication between Teacher and Pupil", *WS 117* (2004), p. 93-114, on Plutarch's conception of the ideal student and teacher.

21. See L. VAN DER STOCKT, "Aspects of the Ethics and Poetics of the Dialogue in the *Corpus Plutarcheum*", in I. GALLO, C. MORESCHINI (eds.), *I Generi letterari in Plutarco. Atti del VIII Convegno plutarcheo. Pisa, 2-4 giugno 1999*, Napoli, 2000, p. 96-97.

ὁμολογία ἐν τοῖς βίοις; *ibid.*). The puzzling ambivalence in this phrase²² illustrates the complex intertwining of intellectual and moral demands in Plutarch's thinking²³, and thus from the very beginning also shows that Plutarch's standards will be high and extremely difficult to satisfy.

(b) The formal demand of respect for the rules of logical reasoning is balanced by a second demand with regard to content. Important in this respect is a key passage near the beginning of *Non posse*:

Δεῖ τοὺς λόγους ἕκαστον ὦν ἐλέγχει καὶ τὰ γράμματα μὴ παρέργως διελθεῖν, μηδὲ φωνὰς ἀλλαχόθεν ἄλλας ἀποσπῶντα καὶ ῥήμασιν ἄνευ πραγμάτων ἐπιτιθέμενον παρακρούεσθαι τοὺς ἀπειροῦς (1086D).

One must study with care the arguments and books of the men one impugns, and must not mislead the inexperienced by detaching expressions from different contexts and attacking mere words apart from the things to which they refer. (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy, slightly modified.)

What is central in this passage is the same demand of *knowledge of the matter under discussion* which we also found in Numenius' fragments. The speaker's words should always rest on a thorough familiarity with the relevant literature. Dilettantism or superficiality is altogether wrong. This is perfectly illustrated by an interesting passage from Plutarch's *Quaestiones conuiuales*, where young students attack Epicurus for having introduced in his *Symposium* a discussion about the right time for coition and blame him for his excessive intemperance (653BC)²⁴. Their criticism, however, is immediately rejected. Their knowledge of traditional literature is obviously superficial, since they prove to be unfamiliar with Xenophon's *Symposium* (653C) and Zeno's *Republic* (653E), and moreover, they have not even carefully read Epicurus' *Symposium* itself. As a result, they cannot but keep silent during the rest of the discussion (653E), while the company goes on by precisely doing what they found so licentious, that is, examining this problem at a dinner-party.

22. On this ambivalence, see M. BALDASSARRI, *Plutarco. Gli opuscoli contro gli Stoici. Volume I: Delle contraddizioni degli stoici. Gli stoici dicono cose più assurde dei poeti. Traduzione, introduzione e commento con appendice critico-testuale*, Trento, 1976, p. 53-54 and esp. G. BOYS-STONES, "Thyrsus-Bearer of the Academy or Enthusiast for Plato? Plutarch's *de Stoicorum repugnantibus*", in J. MOSSMAN (ed.), *Plutarch and his Intellectual World. Essays on Plutarch*, London, 1997, p. 47-48.

23. See also *De prof. in uirt.*, 79F-80A (τῶ χρησθαι ποιούντες τὰ δόγματα), with the analysis of G. ROSKAM, *On the Path to Virtue. The Stoic Doctrine of Moral Progress and its Reception in (Middle-)Platonism*, Leuven, 2005, p. 276.

24. For the social and literary background of this *Quaestio*, see I. CHIRICO, *Plutarco. Conversazioni a tavola. Libro terzo. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Napoli, 2001, p. 247-249.

The key passage from *Non posse* quoted above contains two additional criteria which both presuppose knowledge of the matter under discussion and further refine it. Firstly, the polemicist should give evidence of *intellectual honesty*. He should not isolate words from their context (cf. also *De sera num.*, 548C), nor focus on *obiter dicta*, but deal with views which his opponent really defends and which are to be found everywhere in his writings (cf. *Adu. Colot.*, 1108D and 1114C). This intellectual honesty further requires to introduce the opponent's views in the way in which he himself presents them (1120E: ἔδει δὲ ὡς ἐκεῖνοι διδάσκουσι δηλοῦν τὸ γινόμενον), not in a way which is in advance biased by polemical presuppositions.

Secondly, the polemical debate should be about the matter itself rather than about mere words (cf. *Adu. Colot.*, 1114D). This does not imply of course that one should lightly pass over the specific use and meaning of terms – diligent attention (ἐπιμέλεια) remains important as a general standard (1114F), and in his careful attention to words, Plutarch is usually closer to Atticus than to Maximus of Tyre²⁵. Nevertheless, in most cases terminological questions are in the end of secondary importance. The final goal of the philosophical debate is not a display of sophisticated ingenuity (εὐρησιλογία)²⁶ but looking for the truth.

These intellectual rules have important, albeit elementary, implications for the polemicist's language and style. They do *not* have direct consequences for purity of style or degree of literary embellishment²⁷, to be sure, but a discourse which respects the rules of logical argumentation presupposes at least a certain degree of discursive reasoning, which precludes bestial roaring (*Adu. Colot.*, 1117A; cf. also 1125BC) and excessive praise (*De aud.*, 45F; *Non posse*, 1091C). A thorough knowledge of the matter under discussion, on the other hand, implies a serious debate devoid of scurrility and buffoonery (*Adu. Colot.*, 1108B) and empty talk (*Non*

25. On the place of the philological component in Plutarch's philosophy and Plato-egesis, see J. OPSOMER, "Ζητήματα: structure et argumentation dans les *Quaestiones Platonicae*", in J. A. FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, F. PORDOMINGO PARDO (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Aspectos formales. Actas del IV simposio español sobre Plutarco. Salamanca, 26 a 28 de Mayo de 1994*, Salamanca, 1996, p. 73-75.

26. A vice for which the Stoics are often blamed; see *De aud. poet.*, 31E and *De comm. not.*, 1070E on Chrysippus, and 1072F on Antipater. See also *De Stoic. rep.*, 1033B: ὁ γὰρ λόγος τοῦ φιλοσόφου νόμος ἀυθαίρετος καὶ ἴδιός ἐστιν, εἴ γε δὴ μὴ παιδιὰν καὶ εὐρησιλογίαν ἔνεκα δόξης ἀλλ' ἔργον ἄξιον σπουδῆς τῆς μεγίστης, ὥσπερ ἐστιν, ἡγοῦνται φιλοσοφίαν.

27. Elsewhere, Plutarch makes clear that one may appreciate literature without regarding it as an end in itself; see, e.g., *Con. praec.*, 142AB; *De aud.*, 42CD; L. VAN DER STOCKT, *Twinkling and Twilight. Plutarch's Reflections on Literature*, Brussel, 1992, p. 122-132.

posse, 1088B; cf. *Adu. Colot.*, 1114A). In short, the polemicist's general use of language and style should be in perfect conformity with the intellectual demands discussed above.

2.2. *Sine ira et studio: moral rules for a good debate*

Those intellectual rules are completed by a set of moral demands. If the former ultimately aim at a goal outside the debate (viz. the truth), the latter have their final end in the debate itself. They have to guarantee that the discussion proceeds along the lines of morally acceptable behaviour. Their goal, in short, is virtue, and more specifically virtuous conduct during the debate.

Such virtuous conduct requires that the whole discussion is entirely free from the pernicious influence of the passions. There is no place for anger (*Adu. Colot.*, 1108A), cowardice (1120C), jealousy (*Non posse*, 1086F; cf. *Adu. Colot.*, 1121EF), ambition (*Non posse*, 1100AB; cf. *De lat. uiu.*, 1128A-C), or self-conceit (*Adu. Colot.*, 1119BC), and possible harsh opponents such as Heracleides, who may damage this ideal, are filtered away before the discussion starts²⁸. Once again, the discussions in Plutarch's *Quaestiones coniuales* may serve as paradigmatic examples. Different speakers develop their points of view in perfect tranquillity, with rational arguments, and in a relaxed atmosphere of amicable collaboration. Only rarely do passions disturb the peaceful and orderly speeches or is the argument interrupted by abrupt interventions²⁹.

The anti-Epicurean writings, where moral rules for a good debate are thematised at different places (though sometimes only indirectly), and the *Quaestiones coniuales*, where basically the same moral demands are illustrated by the actual *πρᾶξις* in Plutarch's circle, together provide a good picture of Plutarch's ideal. This picture is further confirmed and completed by an interesting passage from *De profectibus in uirtute*, which deserves to be quoted in full:

Ἐπισκοπεῖν ἀναγκαῖον εἰ χρώμεθα τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς μὲν χρηστικῶς, πρὸς ἑτέροους δὲ μὴ δόξης εἰκαΐας ἕνεκα μὴδ' ἐκ φιλοτιμίας, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἀκοῦσαι τι καὶ διδάξαι βουλόμενοι, μάλιστα δ' εἰ τὸ φιλόνεικον καὶ δύσερι περὶ τὰς ζητήσεις ὑφεῖται καὶ

28. *Non posse*, 1086E. Elsewhere too, Plutarch takes care to remove such possible nuisances; see also *Sept. sap. conu.*, 149B; *De def. or.*, 413D; *De sera num.*, 548AB; R. FLACELIÈRE, "Plutarque et l'épicurisme", in *Epicurea, in memoriam Hectoris Bignone. Miscellanea philologica*, Genova, 1959, p. 210; K.-D. ZACHER, *Plutarchs Kritik an der Lustlehre Epikurs. Ein Kommentar zu Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum: Kap. 1-8*, Königstein, 1982, p. 19; F. ALBINI, *Plutarco. Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum. Introduzione, Traduzione, Commento*, Genova, 1993, p. 11.

29. See L. VAN DER STOCKT, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 94.

πεπαύμεθα τοὺς λόγους ὥσπερ ἰμάντας ἢ σφαίρας ἐπιδούμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τῷ πατάξαι καὶ καταβαλεῖν μάλλον ἢ τῷ μαθεῖν τι καὶ διδάξαι χαίροντες· ἡ γὰρ ἐν τούτοις ἐπιείκεια καὶ πραότης καὶ τὸ μὴ μετ' ἄγωνος συνίστασθαι μήτε διαλύεσθαι μετ' ὀργῆς τὰς κοινολογίας μηδ' οἷον ἐφουβρίζειν ἐλέγχοντας ἢ χαλεπαίνειν ἐλεγχθέντας ἰκανῶς προκόπτοντός ἐστιν (80BC).

It is imperative that we consider carefully whether, as for ourselves, we employ our discourse for our own improvement, and whether, as it affects others, we employ it, not for the sake of momentary repute, nor from motives of ambition, but rather with the wish to hear and to impart something; but most of all must we consider whether the spirit of contention and quarreling over debatable questions has been put down, and whether we have ceased to equip ourselves with arguments, as with boxing gloves or brass knuckles, with which to contend against one another, and to take more delight in scoring a hit or a knockout than in learning and imparting something. For reasonableness and mildness in such matters, and the ability to join in discussions without wrangling, and to close them without anger, and to avoid a sort of arrogance over success in argument and exasperation over defeat, are the marks of a man who is making adequate progress. (Translation F. C. Babbitt.)

Once again, a good debate turns out to be free from passions such as ambition, anger, and contentiousness, which interfere with an unbiased search for the truth. One should avoid that the discussion degenerates into a man-to-man combat in which arguments are used as weapons (cf. also *De Stoic. rep.*, 1036AB), and instead adopt an attitude of reasonableness (ἐπιείκεια) and mildness (πραότης). It is important to note that this positive formulation implies much more than merely omitting passions. It refers to a high ideal³⁰ which presupposes many efforts. Indeed, mildness is not a natural disposition but the result of a long and arduous process of training and habituation³¹, and moreover, the ideal which Plutarch discusses in this chapter of *De profectibus in uirtute* develops reflections elaborated in the previous chapters³². This is obviously not an ideal which can be reached in one day. Furthermore, the moral ideal of reasonableness and mildness is in this context closely connected to an intellectual ideal, for the goal that should be pursued is learning (μαθεῖν) and teaching (διδάξαι), so that the ideal of φιλαλήθεια remains important in the background. Here as well, moral demands appear to contribute to the final

30. On the virtue of πραότης in Plutarch's works, see esp. H. MARTIN, "The Concept of Praotes in Plutarch's *Lives*", *GRBS* 3 (1960), p. 65-73 and J. DE ROMILLY, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*, Paris, 1979, p. 275-305; on its limits, see G. ROSKAM, "Plutarch on Self and Others", *AncSoc* 34 (2004), p. 250-273.

31. See, e.g., *De tranq. an.*, 468EF; H. MARTIN, *o.c.* (n. 30), p. 70; J. DE ROMILLY, *o.c.* (n. 30), p. 296.

32. G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 23), p. 280-281.

end of the discussion (viz. the truth), although virtue of course also remains an end in itself.

The moral ideal of mildness in discussion is further combined with two others which have to counterbalance one another. On the one hand, one should show respect for one's opponent (*Adu. Colot.*, 1120C and 1124C); on the other hand, this respect should not preclude frankness (παρρησία), and one should not hesitate to refute erroneous views (*Non posse*, 1086E and *Adu. Colot.*, 1108BC)³³.

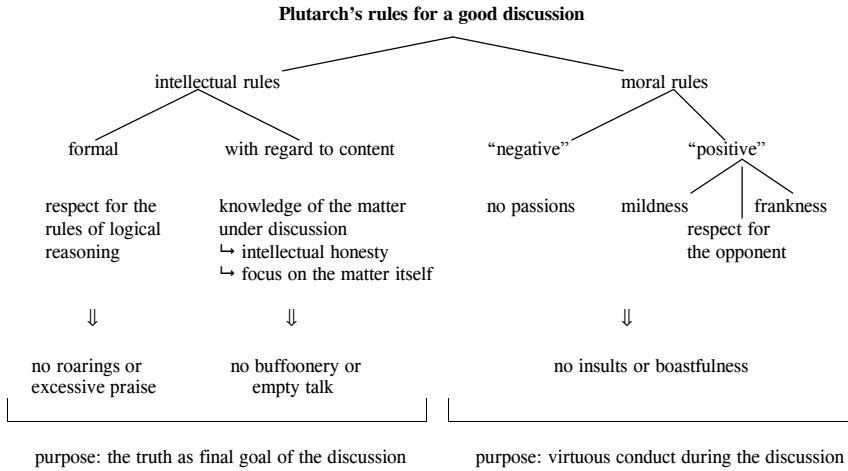
As in the case of Plutarch's intellectual rules, his moral demands likewise make their influence felt in the domain of language and style. One should avoid excessive self-praise and boastfulness (*Non posse*, 1088B and 1090A) motivated by ambition, and omit insults which run counter to the demand of respect for one's opponent and which have nothing to do with frankness. In Plutarch's own terms: "abusive and defamatory language puts a great distance between [the speakers] and wisdom, since 'envy has no place in the choir divine'³⁴ nor jealousy so feeble that it is powerless to conceal its mortification" (*Non posse*, 1086F; transl. B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy). A good intellectual and moral discussion, then, requires a sober and rational language and style. Or, in other terms, language should always serve virtue and truth³⁵.

By way of conclusion, Plutarch's intellectual and moral rules for a good debate can schematically be presented as follows:

33. For Plutarch's view on the good use of frankness, see esp. the second part of his treatise *De adulate et amico* (65F-74E). In the anti-Epicurean treatises, Plutarch merely emphasises the importance of justified frankness, without going into further detail.

34. The reference is to Plato, *Phdr.*, 247a7, also quoted in *Quaest. conu.*, 679E and fr. 31 Sandbach.

35. Cf. also L. VAN DER STOCKT, "Plutarch on Language", in P. SWIGGERS, A. WOUTERS (eds.), *Le langage dans l'Antiquité*, Louvain, 1990, p. 194: "Plutarch's sincere and continuous interest was in truth and virtue. If we cannot learn about them except through the medium of language, then let language first of all serve this purpose. This is exactly the spirit in which Plutarch abundantly used the medium of language himself: to promote understanding and virtue".



3. Colotes as *exemplum e contrario*

The above scheme remains to a certain extent artificial, to be sure, in that Plutarch never connected its different elements with each other. A Platonist such as Plutarch may perhaps have appreciated the method of dihaeresis and synopsis on which it is based, but that does not alter the fact that the final result remains mine, and it may well be objected that it has only be obtained by divorcing different elements from their context and thus breaking one of Plutarch's own rules. Such an objection, however, would not be entirely fair, because the most important rules are explicitly thematised and explained by Plutarch. Nonetheless, since it is true that several of them are indeed only briefly discussed and are closely connected to Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemic, it makes sense to have a look at this broader context and examine how the rules function within Plutarch's concrete argumentation.

Such a study immediately encounters a certain ambivalence. Plutarch's general rules for a good debate often find their origin in his polemic against Colotes, but at the same time also constitute this polemic. They both generate and are generated by Plutarch's attack. This field of tension is important for a good understanding and correct evaluation of Plutarch's treatise *Aduersus Colotem*. The treatise is not merely a defense of different philosophers against Colotes. Plutarch's defense rather takes the shape of a counterattack, and it is within the framework of this counterattack that the rules for a good discussion are formulated. The focus is not (primarily) on Colotes' opponents, but on his own interpretation and presentation of his

philosophical predecessors. This focus by itself stimulates Plutarch's introduction and discussion of some general insights about the correct way of dealing with authors and texts, insights which are opposed to Colotes' approach. Always again indeed, Plutarch tries to show how Colotes, and his master Epicurus, break several basic rules for a good discussion.

3.1. *Colotes the idiot: failure to observe the intellectual rules*

(a) The general demand to observe the rules of logical reasoning is formulated in the context of Plutarch's discussion of Colotes' attack against Democritus. In Plutarch's view, the latter far surpasses Colotes and his master on this point. Democritus indeed posited indestructible atoms without quality as first principles, and then drew the obvious conclusion that qualities are merely by convention³⁶. In Plutarch's eyes, this position is problematic³⁷ yet logically consistent: Democritus' mistake is not due to wrong argumentation but to his erroneous starting point (1111AB). Epicurus, on the other hand, accepts the hypothesis of atomism, but not the consequences which, according to Plutarch, it directly entails, and thus proves guilty of the greatest shamelessness (1111B). This, moreover, turns out to be a typical feature of Epicurus' thinking. Plutarch goes on to list a whole series of parallel examples: Epicurus does away with providence but claims to leave piety untouched, he chooses friendship for the sake of pleasure but assumes the greatest pains on behalf of his friends, and he accepts the hypothesis of an infinite universe while arguing that he does not do away with 'up' and 'down' (1111B). In short, Plutarch regards Epicurean philosophy as a set of mutually irreconcilable tenets³⁸.

This interesting passage thus shows that the general demand of respect for the rules of logical reasoning is closely connected to a traditional eristic strategy which so often occurs in Plutarch (and in other ancient polemicists), that is, the argument from inconsistency. That the inconsistencies which Plutarch here mentions are far less problematic in Epicurus' per-

36. For a discussion of Democritus' position see, e.g., C. BAILEY, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, New York, 1964, p. 178sqq.; C. C. W. TAYLOR, *The Atomists Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, Toronto - Buffalo - London, 1999, p. 175-179.

37. That Plutarch prefers the doctrine of the four elements (which is prominent in his treatise *De primo frigido*) to atomism appears from *De sup.*, 164F; *De Is. et Os.*, 369A; *Quaest. conu.*, 721D and esp. *Adu. Colot.*, 1110E-1112C. Plutarch's refutation of atomism is discussed at length in J. BOULOGNE, *Plutarque dans le miroir d'Épicure. Analyse d'une critique systématique de l'épicurisme*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2003, p. 85-106.

38. Cf. also *Adu. Colot.*, 1121E, and his lost work Περὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ἐναντιωμάτων (Lamprias catalogue n. 129).

spective need not detain us³⁹. What is important here is the function of the general rule in Plutarch's polemic. It is not Plutarch's first aim to defend Democritus' views against Colotes. He rather tries to demonstrate that Colotes and his master are even more wrong than Democritus, and to that purpose makes use of his general rule: Democritus and Epicurus both defend wrong tenets, to be sure, but in addition to this, Epicurus also proves a clumsy thinker.

One may add that Plutarch frequently attacks Epicurus for flaws in his reasoning. Even the first two tenets of the Κύριαι δόξαι are not blameless in this respect. Epicurus' fundamental argument that the gods are not constrained by either anger or favour (ΚΔ, 1) is reoriented towards the more Platonic alternative that, because it is God's nature to bestow favour, it is not his nature to be angry (*Non posse*, 1102E). Epicurus thus failed to understand the correct causal relation between both components. His second tenet (ΚΔ, 2) likewise contains a logical mistake, in that it omits a necessary premiss (fr. 123 Sandbach). All this sufficiently shows that the Epicureans are unable to elaborate a careful rational argumentation. Their writings are full of shriekings and disconnected exclamations. In short, they only reach the level of the beasts⁴⁰.

As has been said, the demand of logical coherence also has implications for concrete practice: the ὁμολογία τῶν δογμάτων should be apparent ἐν τοῖς βίοις (*supra*). Accordingly, Plutarch himself raises the question, near the end of *Aduersus Colotem*, which concrete results Epicurus' doctrine has yielded, and further specifies that he does not look for great accomplishments (such as tyrannicide, legislation, etc.), but will be satisfied with ordinary public services (such as embassies or euergetic contributions) (1126E). In the light of (ancient) ethics, Plutarch's question is highly pertinent: ethical doctrines should be evaluated on the basis of their practical results. Moreover, Plutarch's specification suggests that he makes

39. For the Epicurean interpretation of piety, see esp. Philodemus' treatise *De pietate*; cf. also G. D. HADZSITS, "Significance of Worship and Prayer among the Epicureans", *TAPhA* 39 (1908), p. 73-88 and D. OBBINK, "The Atheism of Epicurus", *GRBS* 30 (1989), p. 198-201; cf. also M. WIFSTRAND SCHIEBE, "Sind die epikureischen Götter 'Thought-Constructs?'", *Mnemosyne* Ser. IV, 56 (2003), p. 703-727. That the utilitarian basis of Epicurean friendship does not a priori exclude pain is shown by D. K. O'CONNOR, "The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship", *GRBS* 30 (1989), esp. p. 177-181 (on the problem whether the sage would die for a friend). For Epicurus' view on the infinite universe and the problem of 'up' and 'down', see, e.g., E. ASMIS, *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, Ithaca - London, 1984, p. 277-280; A. A. LONG, D. N. SEDLEY, *The Hellenistic Philosophers. I: Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 46.

40. *Non posse*, 1091C and *Adu. Colot.*, 1117A; cf. also *De aud.*, 45F; *Adu. Colot.*, 1119F and 1125BC.

reasonable and moderate demands. Yet it is precisely this specification which makes Plutarch's question also strongly biased, since it strongly overemphasises the importance of a parameter which Epicurus himself regards as insignificant. The benefits of Epicureanism are first of all to be found in the sphere of one's private life, rather than in the public sphere⁴¹.

Elsewhere, Plutarch is even more straightforward, arguing that Epicurus' views promote wickedness. With his war against gods and godlike men, Epicurus implanted self-conceit and boasting in his followers (*Adu. Colot.*, 1119BC), his excessive praise utterly corrupts the youth (1124BC), and in general, his doctrines promote a bestial life (1124E). It is clear, then, that Epicurus' philosophy has pernicious consequences for practical life. Conversely, concrete life forces Epicurus to ignore the practical consequences of his view. This is pointed out by Plutarch in *Non posse*, 1102BC: Epicurus merely participates in common rites, and writes his books on the gods and on piety, out of fear of the multitude. His actions are inconsistent with his doctrines, an inconsistency which, moreover, entails pain rather than pleasure. In short, consistency between words and deeds is extremely difficult to reach in Epicureanism, and whenever present, brings about utmost depravity, whereas consistency between the doctrines themselves is frequently damaged by flaws in Epicurus' argumentation and by his blatant refusal to accept the implications of his philosophical hypotheses.

(b) A good polemicist should not only observe the rules of logical reasoning but also give evidence of thorough familiarity with his opponent's doctrines. In this respect, too, Colotes falls short of the ideal. Again and again, Plutarch blames the Epicurean for his complete ignorance of the doctrines which he discusses. He proves unfamiliar with Democritus and Protagoras (*Adu. Colot.*, 1109A), has misunderstood Empedocles (1113B), is unable to judge accurately the scope and meaning of one of Stilpo's little puzzles (1119CD) or to follow Plutarch's technical reply to the traditional ἀπραξία argument (1122B), and even maintains that Plato's doctrines were followed by Aristotle, Xenocrates, Theophrastus, and all the Peripatetics, thus obviously showing that he has not read any of them (1115A-C). In this way, he gives evidence, in Plutarch's view, of unscrupulous irresponsibility (εὐχέρεια), ignorance (ἄμαθία), and recklessness (θρασύτης) (1115C). It is clear, then, that in other passages, where Plutarch praises his opponent

41. Even though the Epicureans occasionally argued that their doctrine was of great benefit to the whole community; see Philodemus, *Rhet.*, II, 155, fr. XIII, 9-19 Sudhaus and *Rhet.*, III, col. XIV^a, 30 – col. XV^a, 31 Ham., with the analysis of G. ROSKAM, *Live Unnoticed* (Λάθε βιώσας). *On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine*, Leiden - Boston, 2007, p. 121-125.

for his remarkable erudition and wisdom (1115D and 1121F), the tone is one of sharp sarcasm. The most salient example of this sarcasm is to be found in 1117D:

Καὶ δῆτα καὶ προθεῖς ὁ Κωλώτης τὰ σοφὰ ταῦτα καὶ καλὰ περὶ τῶν αἰσθήσεων, ὅτι σιτία προσαγόμεθα καὶ οὐ χόρτον, καὶ τοὺς ποταμούς, ὅταν ὦσι μεγάλοι, πλοίοις διαπερῶμεν, ὅταν δὲ εὐδιάβατοι γένωνται, τοῖς ποσίν, ἐπιπεφώνηκεν, κτλ.

Again Colotes, after laying down these profound and noble truths about the senses, that ‘we eat food, not grass, and when rivers are high we cross by boat, but when they have become fordable, we cross them on foot’, follows up with this, etc. (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy.)

Colotes’ admirable wisdom turns out to be of an extremely ordinary kind. The only correct views which he defends are such obvious truisms. The rest of his arguments, which presuppose at least some erudition, proves to be highly problematic.

Plutarch’s continuous emphasis on Colotes’ ignorance does not merely disqualify the Epicurean on an intellectual level, but also yields an additional advantage, in that it provides further polemical opportunities. Just like the above mentioned demand of logical coherence, the demand of familiarity with the relevant material can directly be connected with a general eristic strategy, viz. the retort which turns the speaker’s own words back upon himself (ἢ ἀντεπιστρέφουσα ἀπάντησις). Plutarch explains the power of such retorts in his *Political Precepts*:

Αἱ δ’ ἀντεπιστρέφουσαι μάλιστα τοιαῦται. καθάπερ γὰρ τῶν βελῶν ὅσα πρὸς τὸν βαλόντα φέρεται πάλιν ῥώμη τινὶ δοκεῖ καὶ στερεότητι τοῦ πληγέντος ἀνακρουόμενα τοῦτο πάσχειν· οὕτω τὸ λεχθὲν ὑπὸ ῥώμης καὶ συνέσεως τοῦ λοιδορηθέντος ἐπὶ τοὺς λοιδορήσαντας ἀναστρέφειν ἔοικεν (810EF).

Retorts which turn his own words back upon the speaker are especially good in this way. For just as things which are thrown and return to the thrower seem to do this because they are driven back by some force and firmness of that against which they are thrown, so that which is spoken seems through the force and intellect of him who has been abused to turn back upon those who uttered the abuse. (Translation H. N. Fowler.)

In this context, Plutarch especially has in mind short and quick-witted replies peppered with a great deal of humour. He refers to those fine samples of political eloquence which the statesman needs in order to put a political opponent to silence. After having provided several concrete examples, Plutarch concludes that such retorts are also useful in other domains of one’s life (811A: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἔχει τινὰ χρεῖαν καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον βίον).

And indeed, in Plutarch's anti-Epicurean treatises can be found more than one beautiful illustration. The same principle there returns in a completely different context, in which acute and sharp rhetoric has to yield to a more theoretical argumentation. This may result in a less charming and humorous approach, to be sure, but basically, the technique remains the same. Plutarch confronts his opponent with his own words, showing that Colotes is guilty of the charges he formulated himself against others.

This strategy is of paramount importance throughout the whole corpus of *Aduersus Colotem*. If Democritus' tenet that an object is no more of one description than of another indeed makes it impossible to live, Epicurus' doctrine, which comes to the same conclusion, does so too (1109AB; cf. 1109E), and the same holds true for the second doctrine attacked by Colotes, that qualities are by convention (1110EF). The implications of Empedocles' doctrine that would prevent us from living also appear in Epicurus' philosophy (1112A), Parmenides' conviction that the universe is one is paralleled in Epicurus' discussion of the universe as one (1114A), and Plato's distinction between being and becoming returns in the Epicurean distinction between unchanging atoms, on the one hand, and their conjunctions which are subject to change, on the other hand (1116C). If Socrates may be accused of distrusting the clear evidence obtained by sense-perception, one of Epicurus' doctrines⁴² shows that he is vulnerable to the same accusation (1117F). If Stilpo's puzzle questioned the common practice of predicating, Epicurus runs into much greater difficulties by only accepting vocables and facts, while doing away with the intermediate class of the things signified (1119F-1120A). The unwelcome implications of the Cyrenaic theory of sense-perception can be applied to the Epicurean one as well (1121AB). Finally, the Epicurean objection to Arcesilaus that it is impossible to refuse assent to plain evidence, conflicts with Epicurus' refusal to accept divination, providence, etc. (1122F-1123A). All of these cases entail the same conclusion: if the doctrines of Colotes' opponents make life impossible for us, the Epicurean ones do exactly the same.

This brief survey conveniently shows the omnipresence of the polemical technique of ἀντεπιστρέφουσα ἀπάντησις in *Aduersus Colotem*. Given the fact that it indeed systematically returns in Plutarch's discussion of each philosopher, we may conclude that we cut to one of the most important strategies in Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemical approach. This strategy, moreover, does not merely condition Plutarch's general polemical purpose

42. Viz. that only the sage is unalterably convinced of anything (fr. 222 Us.); for a short discussion see R. WESTMAN, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes. Seine Schrift „Aduersus Colotem“ als philosophiegeschichtliche Quelle*, Helsingfors, 1955, p. 195-196.

(viz. a counterattack on Colotes rather than a defense of his opponents) but also brings about a significant increase in scale. For indeed, it is frequently as a result of this strategy that Plutarch's attack is not merely limited to Colotes himself but also includes his masters Epicurus and Metrodorus. More often than not, Plutarch indeed refers not to Colotes' own views but to those of Epicurus in order to turn general Epicurean views against Colotes⁴³. This has two important implications: (1) Epicurus and Metrodorus are often attacked only indirectly, sharing the blows levelled at Colotes; and (2) Colotes himself appears as even more silly, in that he proves not only unfamiliar with the doctrines of his opponents but also with those of his own school.

One further example, which illustrates the importance of (a correct insight in) Plutarch's polemical approach very well, is to be found near the beginning of the treatise. Whereas Colotes attacks Democritus, his master long proclaimed himself a Democritean, and Metrodorus even claimed that Epicurus would never have reached wisdom if Democritus had not shown the way⁴⁴. The conclusion, of course, is obvious:

Ἄλλ' εἰ κατὰ τὰ Δημοκρίτου δόγματα ζῆν οὐκ ἔστιν, ὡς οἴεται Κωλώτης, γελοῖος ἦν ἐπὶ τὸ μὴ ζῆν ἄγοντι Δημοκρίτῳ κατακολουθῶν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος (1108F).

Yet if the principles of Democritus make it impossible to live, as Colotes supposes, Epicurus cuts a ridiculous figure as he follows in the footsteps of Democritus down the road to no more living. (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy.)

This famous passage casts important light on the precise relation between Democritus and Epicurus. Whereas other passages often mention the opposition between both thinkers⁴⁵, this one shows that Epicurus' critical attitude towards Democritus should not be overemphasised⁴⁶. At the same time, however, this passage should not be divorced from its polemical

43. This raises the question as to whether Colotes also discussed and defended his own Epicurean tenets in his work. In all likelihood the emphasis was entirely on the destructive attack; cf. R. WESTMAN, *o.c.* (n. 42), p. 87, n. 1 and p. 89-90. *Contra*: M. ISNARDI PARENTE, "Plutarco contro Colote", in I. GALLO (ed.), *Aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco. Atti del II convegno di studi su Plutarco. Ferrara, 2-3 aprile 1987*, Ferrara, 1988, p. 70.

44. On the tradition of Democriteans and Epicurus' relation to it, see the fine study of J. WARREN, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics. An Archaeology of Ataraxia*, Cambridge, 2002.

45. See, e.g., Diogenes Laertius, 10, 8; Cicero, *De fin.*, 1, 21 and 28; *De nat. deor.*, 1, 93; *Tusc.*, 1, 82; Plutarch, *Non posse*, 1100A.

46. Cf. also D. N. SEDLEY, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 134-135, and P. M. HUBY, "Epicurus' Attitude to Democritus", *Phronesis* 23 (1978), p. 80-86.

context. As has been said, it finds its *raison d'être* in Plutarch's eristic strategy of turning Colotes' attacks against himself. In such a context, Plutarch has every reason to underline the fundamental consensus between Epicurus and Democritus, just as elsewhere, it is in his interest to focus on their disagreements. The information which Plutarch provides should thus always be evaluated in the light of his authorial goal.

It may be noted in passing that Colotes is not the only one who is confronted with Plutarch's ἀντεπιστρέφουσαι ἀπαντήσεις. In *Non posse*, several instances of the same strategy can be found, this time directed against Epicurus himself. If criminals can never enjoy tranquillity of mind, since they always have to fear the future in which they can be detected, the Epicureans are likewise unable to enjoy the pleasures of the moment, since they are doomed to suffer uninterrupted fears for a future in which their stable condition of the flesh may be ruined (1090CD). If it is true that only fear of punishment can deter criminals from doing wrong, we would better cultivate superstitious fears for *post mortem* penalties (1104B; cf. also 1101CD). And if the process of dying is for most people attended with pain, fear of death proves certainly justified in an Epicurean perspective (1107A)⁴⁷. In all of these cases, Epicurus is confronted with direct conclusions of his doctrines that are at odds with his own convictions. In this way, the strategy of ἀντεπιστρέφουσα ἀπάντησις proves to be closely connected to the argument from inconsistency.

In Colotes' case, on the other hand, the same strategy is especially used in order to reveal his utter ignorance:

Ὁ δὲ Κωλώτης ἔοικε τὸ αὐτὸ πάσχειν τοῖς νεωστὶ γράμματα μανθάνουσι τῶν παίδων, οἱ τοὺς χαρακτῆρας ἐν τοῖς πυξίοις ἐπιζόμενοι λέγειν, ὅταν ἔξω γεγραμμένους ἐν ἑτέροις ἴδωσιν, ἀμφιγνοοῦσι καὶ ταράττονται. Καὶ γὰρ οὗτος, οὗς ἐν τοῖς Ἐπικούρου γράμμασιν ἀσπάζεται καὶ ἀγαπᾷ λόγους, οὐ συνίησιν οὐδὲ γινώσκει λεγόμενους ὑφ' ἑτέρων (*Adu. Colot.*, 1120F-1121A).

It would appear that Colotes is in the predicament of boys who have just begun to read: they are accustomed to reciting the characters written on their tablets, but are perplexed and at a loss when they see characters outside the tablets and written on other objects. So with him: the reasoning that he accepts with satisfaction when he finds it in the writings of Epicurus he neither understands nor recognizes when it is used by others. (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy.)

47. A subtle argument can also be found in *De lat. uiu.*, 1130A: if one should accept the doctrine of atomism, one cannot but accept the equation of Apollo with the sun as well. See on this G. ROSKAM, *A Commentary on Plutarch's De latenter vivendo*, Leuven, 2007, p. 144-149.

This passage is particularly interesting in that it makes explicit, by means of a beautiful comparison, both the dynamics of the strategy of ἀντεπιστρέφουσα ἀπάντησις and its intended conclusions concerning the low level of Colotes' erudition. The strategy shows how Colotes fails to show the necessary knowledge of the relevant material – he does not even realise that he himself can be blamed for precisely the same mistakes of which he accuses others – and thus yields an interesting polemical advantage, entailing conclusions that are both shameful and painful for the opponent⁴⁸.

Furthermore, Colotes' complete ignorance is aggravated by his excessive fault-finding concerning merely terminological issues and by his lack of intellectual honesty. That he is rather concerned with words than with content appears from his attacks on Empedocles (1112D-1113A) and Parmenides (1114D). Moreover, such a focus gives evidence of intellectual dishonesty, in that he merely argues about terms rather than about the matter itself. And even when he discusses content, he prefers to focus on isolated doctrines without any context. He omits all of the opponents' arguments and instead gives their doctrines a different turn (1108D; cf. 1114C). A salient example of this approach is his attack on the Cyrenaics. Their conviction that the experiences and impressions should be placed in oneself is presented by Colotes as follows: "they do not maintain that a man and a horse and a wall is, but that they themselves are walled, horsed, and manned" (1120D). Even if this, in Plutarch's view, is the implication of their view, Colotes' unfair use of the terms characterises him as a sycophant. He should have used their own examples (viz. they are "sweetened", "turned bitter", "chilled", etc.), which are far more difficult to refute (1120DE).

This example can finally be connected with another of Plutarch's grievances, that is, Colotes too often acts the clown. Even his style is unbecoming and at odds with the demand of knowledge of the matter under discussion. For instead of questioning the views of his opponents through a careful and theoretical discussion of their arguments, Colotes usually

48. See *De cap. ex inim.*, 88D: οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰσχίον ἐστὶ βλασφημίας παλινδρομούσης οὐδὲ λυπηρότερον, ἀλλ' ἔοικε καὶ τοῦ φωτὸς τὸ ἀνακλώμενον μᾶλλον ἐνοχλεῖν τὰς ἀσθενεῖς ὀράσεις καὶ τῶν ψόγων οἱ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀναφερόμενοι τοὺς ψέγοντας ὑπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας. It is interesting to note that the combination of αἰσχίον and λυπηρότερον in this passage may be understood in the context of Plutarch's *Seelenheilung*, in which the patient is cured through βλάβαι and αἰσχῦνα; see *De gar.*, 510D and H. G. INGENKAMP, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele*, Göttingen, 1971, p. 74-86. In this way, Plutarch's treatise may even be the first step in Colotes' process of improvement, although Plutarch himself probably had no illusions about the success of this process.

prefers to introduce (the implications of) their doctrines in a particularly concrete, simplistic, and unwelcome way. As a result, presentation and refutation often prove to coincide in his polemical approach. Parmenides, for instance, is accused of having abolished cities lying in Europe and Asia (1114B). Plato would have argued that it is idle to regard horses as being horses and men as being men (1115CD). Socrates' views raise questions such as: why does he put his food in his mouth and not in his ear, why does he eat food and not grass, and why does he wrap his cloak about himself and not around a pillar (1108B and 1117F). Somewhat similar objections, finally, are raised against Arcesilaus' scepticism:

Ἄλλὰ πῶς οὐκ εἰς ὄρος ἄπεισι τρέχων ὁ ἐπέχων ἀλλὰ εἰς βαλανεῖον, οὐδὲ πρὸς τὸν τοῖχον ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς θύρας ἀναστὰς βαδίζει βουλόμενος εἰς ἀγορὰν προελθεῖν (1122E).

But how comes it that the man who suspends judgement does not go dashing off to a mountain instead of to the bath, or why does he not get up and walk to the wall instead of the door when he wishes to go out to the market-place? (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy.)

All of these attacks, which are so offensive to Plutarch, illustrate Colotes' polemical approach very well. His style was entertaining and challenging, his objections were inspired by a down-to-earth approach that was especially interested in the concrete and practical consequences of the philosophical doctrines. His strongest weapons were common sense and humour. These weapons, however, at the same time opened up the possibilities for Plutarch's counterattack. For Colotes' polemical success was often bought at the price of considerable generalisation and simplification. This was his weakest flank, on which Plutarch launched his frontal attack. In this polemical counterattack, the rules for a good debate yield interesting opportunities because they expose the gaps in Colotes' own defense and undermine the cogency of his assault.

This implies that Plutarch's interest in the rules for a good debate is to an important extent rooted in the peculiar nature of Colotes' own work. This also explains why the issue is so much emphasised in the anti-Epicurean writings, and much less so in the anti-Stoic treatises: the theme is directly connected with Colotes' Achilles heel. At the same time, however, these rules to a certain extent prove to be biased and influenced by Plutarch's own philosophical perspective. Many of them, it is true, can be generalised and were also accepted in Epicurean circles⁴⁹, but several rules

49. Cf. Epicurus' own conviction that ἐν φιλολόγῳ συζητήσει πλεῖον ἤνυσεν ὁ ἡττηθεὶς, καθ' ὃ προσέμαθεν (SV, 74). Philodemus attaches great importance to a thorough familiarity with Epicurus' doctrines (Πρὸς τοὺς ---, col. IV, 10-13), which

also prove to be conditioned by Platonic ideals. This holds true, for instance, for Plutarch's emphasis on the component of erudition, which is much more in line with his own ideal of παιδεία⁵⁰ than with Epicurus' rejection of it. The component of laughter, on the other hand, had its own (protreptic and polemical) function in Epicurean philosophy⁵¹, and as such had a relevance that Plutarch failed to appreciate. This is illustrated by Plutarch's reply to Metrodorus' remark that it is fitting to burst into laughter of one truly free (τὸν ἐλεύθερον ὡς ἀληθῶς γέλωτα γελάσαι) at all the followers of Lycurgus and Solon (*Adu. Colot.* 1127C). In Metrodorus' Epicurean perspective, such laughter is indeed entirely justified and characteristic of personal independence. For Plutarch, it rather betrays ill-bred servility (1127C). It is clear, then, that Plutarch's rules for a good discussion, and his interpretation of their concrete application, can never entirely be isolated from a more general philosophical background.

3.2. *Colotes the villain: failure to observe the moral rules*

If Colotes and his master Epicurus frequently break the intellectual rules for a good debate, they likewise disregard several important moral rules. Epicurus' writing and doctrines prove to be motivated by an intense desire for renown (*Non posse*, 1099F-1100A)⁵², and Plutarch adds that the great fame of Arcesilaus, who had the greatest success in his days, was a source of much trouble for Epicurus (*Adu. Colot.*, 1121EF). The Epicureans in general give evidence of immoderate self-conceit and arrogance (1119BC), and Colotes himself adds cowardice to these vices

should be understood in a methodically correct way (col. VII, 13-16) and examined with precision (col. XI, 1-2 and XVI, 10-13).

50. For Plutarch's appreciation of παιδεία, which is manifest in many of his *Lives*, see, e.g., C. B. R. PELLING, "Plutarch: Roman Heroes and Greek Culture", in M. GRIFFIN, J. BARNES (eds.), *Philosophia Togata. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, Oxford, 1989, p. 199-232; ID., "Rhetoric, Paideia, and Psychology in Plutarch's *Lives*", in L. VAN DER STOCKT (ed.), *Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch. Acta of the IVth International Congress of the International Plutarch Society. Leuven, July 3-6, 1996*, Louvain - Namur, 2000, p. 331-339; S. C. R. SWAIN, "Hellenic Culture and the Roman Heroes of Plutarch", *JHS* 110 (1990), p. 126-145; ID., *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50-250*, Oxford, 1996, p. 139-145. The theme is also important in *Non posse*, 1092E-1096E; a short discussion of this section can be found in H. ADAM, *Plutarchs Schrift non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum. Eine Interpretation*, Amsterdam, 1974, p. 42-45.

51. See esp. J. SALEM, *Tel un dieu parmi les hommes. L'éthique d'Épicure*, Paris, 1989, p. 167-174.

52. At the outset of *De lat. uiu.*, Plutarch interprets the famous *dictum* λάθε βιώσας as Epicurus' means to secure fame for himself by advising everyone else to live unnoticed; see 1128A-C, with the analysis of G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 47), p. 90-99.

(1126C). He never reaches Plutarch's ideal of mildness – being foolish (ἡλίθιος) rather than mild (πρᾶος); cf. 1113C – nor shows sincere respect for his opponents (1120C; cf. also 1124C). It is clear that Plutarch's evaluation is once again conditioned by his philosophical background. One might argue indeed that from an Epicurean perspective, Colotes' approach could be regarded as a striking example of frankness: he merely expresses the (Epicurean) truth, without being afraid of overthrowing commonly accepted or respected views. But Epicurus' παρρησία is not that of Plutarch⁵³. In Plutarch's view, Colotes' attack is a sample of effrontery which has but little to do with decent behaviour.

Moreover, the moral wickedness of the Epicureans is also revealed by their language and style. At the outset of *Non posse*, Plutarch mentions a whole catalogue of terms of abuse which were used by the Epicureans in order to insult their distinguished philosophical opponents (1086EF)⁵⁴. In Plutarch's view, this abusive language reveals the presence of base jealousy (1086F). On the other hand, Epicurus' great ambition and love of honour becomes evident in his annoying self-praise. Always aiming at fame, he gives himself what he does not receive from others (1100BC). Accordingly, he calls himself "imperishable" and "equal to the gods" (1091C; cf. also *Adu. Colot.*, 1117DE) and is overflowing with excessive gratitude for trivial services (*Non posse*, 1097CD). Furthermore, his ill conduct also has a negative influence on his followers. The excessive praise which he bestows on Pythocles implants in his young disciples rashness and wantonness (*Adu. Colot.*, 1124C), and his lectures elicited from Colotes the theatrical but ineffective προσκύνησις⁵⁵.

All this shows that the Epicureans fail to observe moral rules in their polemical discussions. Virtuous behaviour is for them as unattainable as the truth. And yet, it is remarkable that Colotes comes off fairly well on this

53. See, e.g., M. GIGANTE, "Philodème: Sur la liberté de parole", in *Actes du VIII^e Congrès de l'Association Guillaume Budé (Paris 5-10 avril 1968)*, Paris, 1969, p. 199-202 and I. Gallo, "La parrhesia epicurea e il trattato *De adulator et amico* di Plutarco: qualche riflessione", in Id. (ed.), *Aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco. Atti del II convegno di studi su Plutarco. Ferrara, 2-3 aprile 1987*, Ferrara, 1988, p. 123-128 on the differences between Plutarch's *De adulator et amico* and Philodemus' *Περὶ παρρησίας*. That there are nevertheless several interesting parallels between both works is shown by J. OPSOMER, *o.c.* (n. 19), p. 117-118 and p. 151.

54. K.-D. ZACHER, *o.c.* (n. 28), p. 45-51. Another catalogue of abuse can be found in Diogenes Laertius, 10, 8, on which see D. SEDLEY, *o.c.* (n. 2).

55. *Adu. Colot.*, 1117BC; cf. also *Non posse*, 1100A and C; on the precise meaning of Colotes' act of adoration and of Epicurus' reaction to it, see, e.g., R. WESTMAN, *o.c.* (n. 42), p. 27-31 (with further bibliography); F. ALBINI, *o.c.* (n. 28), p. 213-214.

point. In general, Plutarch's anti-Epicurean treatises contain far less relevant material concerning this issue than with regard to intellectual rules, and moreover, when Plutarch indeed thematises moral demands, his attacks are for the greatest part directed against Epicurus rather than against Colotes. This, of course, raises the question why Plutarch focuses his attention mainly on Epicurus' moral wickedness if he actually wants to attack Colotes. Has he forgotten about his real opponent? I see two reasons which explain this problem.

First of all, Plutarch in all likelihood found only few starting points for such polemic in Colotes' own work. We may presume that he used his opportunities whenever he could, but they were meagre and required inferences on Plutarch's part⁵⁶. Moreover, at the outset of *Non posse*, Plutarch admits that Colotes' speech was very mild (εὐφημώτατος) in comparison with that of Epicurus and Metrodorus (1086E). The first reason, then, is a heuristic one.

The second reason explains why Plutarch prefers to take advantage of his limited opportunities, rather than omitting the whole issue all together: it yields an important polemical advantage. Character assassination is especially interesting when its victim is a philosopher, who claims to be virtuous. If it was probably difficult to attack Colotes directly, it remained possible to do it indirectly by placing him in a whole tradition of wickedness. Whereas Epicurus in *Aduersus Colotem* usually shares the blows levelled at Colotes, in this case Colotes shares the blows meted out to Epicurus. This technique even yields two additional advantages. On the one hand, it considerably mitigates the onus of proof, in that Plutarch can depict Colotes as merely one example of well-known Epicurean wickedness. On the other hand, by avoiding a direct attack *ad hominem*, Plutarch better succeeds in suggesting that his own argument is completely free from passions such as anger or indignation. He merely recalls more general and well-known facts about the Epicurean tradition, refraining from personal attacks. If Colotes and Epicurus are morally blameworthy, Plutarch subtly suggests that he himself is doing much better. This brings us to our last question.

56. For instance: the fact that Colotes does not mention the Academics and Cyrenaics, which in Plutarch's view gives evidence of cowardice (*Adu. Colot.*, 1120C), and the fact that he attacks all his predecessors together, which shows his boldness (1124C).

4. Plutarch as *exemplum ad imitandum*?

Plutarch elaborates a whole series of rules for a good discussion and uses them as a means to attack Colotes. At the same time, however, he *de facto* imposes these rules on himself too. The demand of consistency obviously requires that he himself practises what he preaches. For “to accuse others of doing what you are guilty of yourselves, how is that to be described without a generous expenditure of the strong language that it deserves” (1125F, transl. B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy)? This raises the interesting question of whether Plutarch observes his own rules. *A priori* we might expect he does, since many rules are explicitly thematised and argued. Plutarch can hardly allow himself to go wrong on this point⁵⁷, even more so because he emphatically presents his treatise *Non posse* as an example of a correct philosophical polemic (1086D).

4.1. It is not surprising, then, that Plutarch indeed faithfully observes many of his own rules. He frequently displays his own knowledge, showing himself thoroughly familiar both with the Epicurean literature⁵⁸ and with all the philosophers attacked by Colotes. More than once, he explains to Colotes the precise meaning of the doctrines which the Epicurean has misunderstood. To give but a few examples: *Aduersus Colotem* contains what might be called a short course “Plato for beginners” (1115D-1116B), a basic introduction to Parmenides’ views (1114B-F), or a technical discussion of the traditional ἀπρᾶξιᾶ argument (1122B-D). Plutarch even goes a step further, explaining Colotes his own Epicurean doctrine, thus trying to beat his opponent on his own ground. He also shows his erudition by raising a whole series of theoretical questions (*Non posse*, 1096AB), thus suggesting that the level of his intellectual interests far exceeds that of the Epicureans. The best parallel I know is to be found in Apuleius’ *Apologia* (15, 12-16, 6), where the *philosophus Platonicus* from Madaura illustrates his intellectual superiority over his rustic opponent Sicinius Aemilianus by a similar set of questions. This parallel may suggest that Plutarch was in his anti-Epicurean treatises not entirely unconcerned about outward display if it suited his self-presentation and *auctoritas* as an author.

57. Cf. J. P. HERSHBELL, “Plutarch and Epicureanism”, in *ANRW* II, 36, 5, Berlin - New York, 1992, p. 3366: “Given the explicitness of these charges of Plutarch against two Epicureans, it seems unlikely that he would readily expose himself to the same accusations.”

58. Cf. Aristodemus’ *obiter dictum* ἔναγχος γὰρ κατὰ τύχην τὰς ἐπιστολάς διήλθον αὐτοῦ in *Non posse*, 1101B. For Plutarch’s knowledge of Epicureanism, see J. P. HERSHBELL, *o.c.* (n. 57), p. 3357-3363; J. BOULOGNE, *o.c.* (n. 37), p. 13-17.

A special application of the demand to have a good knowledge of the matter under discussion is Plutarch's decision to change the order in which the philosophers are discussed. On this point, he prefers not to follow Colotes, but argues that it makes more sense to deal with Empedocles immediately after Democritus, because in both cases similar questions are raised (*Adu. Colot.*, 1113EF). For the same reason, he prefers to discuss Plato immediately after Parmenides (1114F), and only then turns to Socrates (1116E). These changes in the order of philosophers serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they are a correction of the order proposed by Colotes, who generally preferred a chronological approach (which was interrupted, however, by his decision to begin with Democritus). Through his changes, Plutarch thus tries to show the interrelations between the different thinkers and *eo ipso* to give evidence of his thorough familiarity with the whole matter. On the other hand, he indirectly suggests that he is concerned with the matter itself. His structuring principle is not an external one such as chronology, but the content itself of the doctrines.

Accordingly, he also avoids merely terminological questions. He only discusses them when they are thematised in Colotes' attack (e.g., in *Adu. Colot.*, 1112Asq.; 1116E; 1120AB), and further underlines that his criticism of Epicurus does not focus on linguistic quibbles but on important problems in real life (1119F). Nor is his attack irrelevant: near the beginning of *Aduersus Colotem*, he explicitly emphasises that the doctrines which he quotes are all basic and well-known tenets of Epicurus (1108D), and he more than once repeats that his quotations can indeed be traced back to Epicurus' own writings⁵⁹ and that his attacks are completely free from abuse (*Non posse*, 1096F). One may add that recent research has shown that Plutarch's verbatim quotations from Epicurus are usually accurate and reliable⁶⁰.

Plutarch no less faithfully observes his moral rules. Important in this respect is the opening of *Aduersus Colotem*, where Plutarch places his treatise in the context of his teaching activities. When Plutarch has finished reading Colotes' work with his students, Aristodemus of Aegium with his characteristic rash enthusiasm proposes to defend the philosophers against

59. See, e.g., *Non posse*, 1091A (ὡς Ἐπίκουρος ἔν τε ἄλλοις πολλοῖς γέγραφε καὶ τοῦτοις ἅ ἔστι περὶ τέλους); *Adu. Colot.*, 1108D (καίτοι ταῦτα μὲν ἐγκέκραται τοῖς Ἐπικούρου λόγοις καὶ διαπεφοίτηκεν αὐτοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας); cf. *Non posse*, 1095CD; 1101B; and 1087A (on Metrodorus).

60. See J. P. HERSHBELL, *o.c.* (n. 57), p. 3365-3368; cf. also J. BOULOGNE, *o.c.* (n. 37), p. 17.

Colotes (1107F). Plutarch, as befits a good teacher⁶¹, stimulates Aristodemus to accept the challenge himself (1107F-1108A). Aristodemus' reply is very clever: pointing to an anecdote about Plato, who asked Speusippus to beat his slave because he himself was angry, he tells Plutarch to undertake the matter himself, because he is angry (1108A). If this is the attempt of a slacking student to get himself out of a tricky situation which is caused by his own impetuosity, the attempt is brilliant nonetheless. For on the one hand, Aristodemus has a perfect excuse, in that his anger prevents him from carrying on the debate in a virtuous way. On the other hand, even in his vice (anger!), he is not blameworthy, since he merely imitates Plutarch's own philosophical hero, the great Plato himself. This is the kind of student from whom most of us, I guess, derive many pleasures.

Plutarch, in any case, is checkmated, and as his other students support Aristodemus' plea, he cannot but give in to their desire (1108AB). He first of all gives attention to precisely the point that was raised by Aristodemus: contrary to his student, Plutarch's disposition is perfectly virtuous, so that he qualifies for the job. He fears, to be sure, that he would also appear to be angry and to take the book more seriously than is proper (1108B), but in his case, this would only be an – unjustified – impression (μη δόξω), since he actually enjoys perfect tranquillity of mind and knows to judge the book's real importance fairly well.

But if Plutarch's reply to Colotes is not motivated by passions, what then is his driving force? His main motivation is a certain sense of duty towards all the important philosophers that were attacked by Colotes. In this case, silence would be shameful, and the utmost frankness (παρρησία) is necessary (1108BC). After Plutarch's exposition, Zeuxippus adds that Plutarch should have been even more frank (*Non posse*, 1086E). The suggestion is clear enough: in his counterattack, Plutarch continuously observes the most reasonable and moral standards.

The same story, but with partly different actors, can be told about the discussion in *Non posse*. This time, the subject is proposed by Theon. Plutarch begins by adopting the same attitude as before, promising to follow attentively and inviting his student to deal with the matter himself (1087C). Just like Aristodemus, Theon first hesitates, but he is less adroit than his fellow student and finally takes up the gauntlet (1087CD). Quite remarkably, the whole discussion is particularly well-ordered. The speakers are not interrupted, agree with each other and take over from one another in order to elaborate together one coherent argument. A possible nuisance

61. Cf. G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 20), p. 103, 105 and 108-113 (on Plutarch's teacher Ammonius).

such as Heracleides is immediately removed from the scene (1086E and 1087A), and in general, the whole debate recalls the pleasant conversations of the *Table Talks*. It is clear, then, that Plutarch in every way tries to show that he observes his own rules and that his works can be regarded as classic examples of a good philosophical polemic.

4.2. This, however, is not the whole story, and it is time for a palinody. In spite of Plutarch's attempt to set a good example, his polemical attacks raise several questions with regard to his observance of his own rules.

If his familiarity with the relevant material cannot seriously be called into question, his intellectual honesty is not always obvious. It is true that most of the Epicurean tenets which Plutarch quotes reflect basic insights of Epicurus and his followers and can be found in several of their works, but this does not imply that the criticisms which he levels against them are always fair. Usually, he omits all Epicurean arguments, and merely provides paraphrases of general tenets in all their radicalness (e.g., in *Non posse*, 1100D and *Adu. Colot.*, 1111B; 1123A; 1124EF). Moreover, Plutarch's presentation is not always unbiased. To give but one example, Epicurus' philosophy, in Plutarch's view, makes friendship less glorious and fondness for pleasure bolder, it does not value what is honourable for its own sake, and it throws our convictions about the gods into confusion (*Adu. Colot.*, 1113F). Even if the doctrines concerned can easily be recognised, the way in which they are introduced is far from neutral. Plutarch's presentation already contains an evaluative component influenced by Platonic parameters. Such catalogues, in which the different constitutive elements lend credibility to each other without taking the precise meaning of the Epicurean tenets into account, do not contribute to a penetrating and fair discussion.

It is clear that each element should be understood in its own context and evaluated in the light of Epicurus' own arguments. Such an approach would make Plutarch's criticism far less justified. This may be illustrated by two additional examples. Firstly, Plutarch follows Carneades in mocking Epicurus for having kept, as it were, a kind of diary about how often he had intercourse with Hedeia or Leontion, where he drank Thasian wine, or on what twentieth of the month he had an extravagant dinner (*Non posse*, 1089C). At first sight, such a practice indeed seems absurd, and excessive attention for such things seems improper if not worse. On closer investigation, however, the comparison (οἶον ἐξ ἐφημερίδων) may ascribe a much too systematical approach to Epicurus, who probably was far less

scrupulous and methodical in listing such details. Moreover, the custom of recalling even such pleasures is less absurd in the context of a philosophy which both takes the pursuit of pleasure seriously and attaches great importance to recollection.

The second example concerns Epicurus' great enthusiasm when Metrodorus succeeded in freeing Mithres from prison. In Plutarch's eyes, such enthusiasm is ridiculous: even though Metrodorus accomplished nothing at all, Epicurus praises his pupil and friend to the skies. He would have done better by admiring and imitating the pleasures of other philosophers who benefited their fellow citizens by their great political achievements (*Non posse*, 1097AB and *Adu. Colot.*, 1126EF). Once again, this evaluation seems plausible, at least in Plutarch's own Platonic perspective. From an Epicurean point of view, however, Metrodorus' accomplishments should be evaluated on the basis of other criteria, which make Epicurus' praise more meaningful and justified⁶².

Plutarch's quotations from Epicurus may be basically correct and reliable, to be sure, but often receive a completely different meaning in the anti-Epicurean context of Plutarch's polemic. One of the most striking examples is the last quotation in *Aduersus Colotem*, from a letter to Idomeneus:

Πάλιν δὲ οἶμαι γράφων πρὸς Ἰδομενέα διακελεύεται μὴ νόμοις καὶ δόξαις δουλεύοντα ζῆν, ἐφ' ὅσον ἂν μὴ τὴν διὰ τοῦ πέλαος ἐκ πληγῆς ὀχλησιν παρασκευάζωσιν. (1127D)

Again – in a letter to Idomeneus, I believe – he calls upon him not to live in servitude to laws and men's opinions, as long as they refrain from making trouble in the form of a blow administered by your neighbour. (Translation B. Einarson - P. H. De Lacy.)

Plutarch quotes this passage in order to demonstrate that Epicurus advised his followers to break the laws. It is much more likely, however, that the term νόμοις in this passage does not refer to "laws" but to "customs"⁶³. If that is true, Epicurus did not recommend unlawful behaviour⁶⁴ but independence towards current opinions, and Plutarch is guilty of precisely the

62. Cf. G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 41), p. 55-56.

63. As R. WESTMAN, *o.c.* (n. 42), p. 190 correctly pointed out.

64. For Epicurus' general appreciation of the laws, see, e.g., R. PHILIPPSON, "Die Rechtsphilosophie der Epikureer", *AGPh* 23 (1910), p. 289-337 and 433-446; R. MÜLLER, *Die epikureische Gesellschaftstheorie*, Berlin, 1974; V. GOLDSCHMIDT, *La doctrine d'Épicure et le droit*, Paris, 1977; A. ALBERTI, "The Epicurean Theory of Law and Justice", in A. LAKS, M. SCHOFIELD (eds.), *Justice and Generosity. Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy. Proceedings of the Sixth Symposium Hellenisticum*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 161-190.

same approach for which he censured Colotes. The same holds true for his discussion of the famous *dictum* λάθε βιώσας in *De latenter uiuendo*. By interpreting the saying in its most literal sense, he can make a lot of unjustified inferences from it, which entail more than one irrelevant and even unfair attack⁶⁵.

Elsewhere, Plutarch's discussion is more nuanced, but even then his arguments remain problematic. Often he does not confine himself to general paraphrases but instead points to the details of Epicurus' position and mentions several qualifications and restrictions⁶⁶. Even the reference to those qualifications, however, does not always guarantee the fairness of Plutarch's argumentation, as may appear from two illustrative examples. Firstly, Plutarch mentions Epicurus' discussion about the heating effect of wine. A series of lengthy quotations shows that Epicurus refused to draw general conclusions on this issue, and merely contended that a given amount is heating for a given constitution in a particular condition, and chilling for another one (*Adu. Colot.*, 1109E-1110B). The whole passage may be regarded as a typical example of Epicurus' qualifying philosophy. In Plutarch's view, on the other hand, the passage merely shows that Epicurus basically defends Democritus' view, attacked by Colotes, that no object is any more of one description than of another (1110B). This is an application of his polemical strategy of ἀντεπιστρέφουσα ἀπάντησις, which results in ascribing to Epicurus a philosophy which levels out differences rather than using them for further qualification.

The second illustrative example is to be found near the end of *Aduersus Colotem*. Epicurus asked himself whether the sage would do illegal things if he knows that he will not be found. His answer is once again particularly cautious: "the unqualified predication is not free from difficulty" (οὐκ εὐοδον τὸ ἀπλοῦν ἐπικατηγόρημα; 1127D). Whereas this notorious passage gave rise to much discussion in recent research⁶⁷, Plutarch's

65. See G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 47), p. 97 and *passim*.

66. See, e.g., *De tranq. an.*, 465F-466A (discussed in G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* [n. 41], p. 52-54; cf. also *Id.*, "The Displeasing Secrets of the Epicurean Life. Plutarch's Polemic against Epicurus' Political Philosophy", in A. CASANOVA (ed.), *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Firenze, 23-24 settembre 2004*, Firenze, 2005, p. 362-364); *Non posse*, 1087C; 1089D; 1097A; *Adu. Colot.*, 1118DE and 1125C.

67. See, e.g., R. WESTMAN, *o.c.* (n. 42), p. 185-189; R. MÜLLER, "Konstituierung und Verbindlichkeit der Rechtsnormen bei Epikur", in Συζήτησις. *Studi sull'epicureismo greco e romano offerti a Marcello Gigante*, Napoli, 1983, p. 153sqq.; P. A. VANDER WAERDT, "The Justice of the Epicurean Wise Man", *CQ* NS 37 (1987), p. 406-411; G. SEEL, "Farà il saggio qualcosa che le leggi vietano, sapendo che non sarà scoperto?", in G. GIANNANTONI, M. GIGANTE (eds.), *Epicureismo*

interpretation is simple: “I shall do it, but I do not wish to admit it” (*ibid.*). Epicurus’ qualification is merely understood as fear to admit his secret wicked convictions. Whatever Epicurus’ final opinion may have been, it is clear that Plutarch greatly oversimplifies the matter and unfairly ascribes malicious intentions to his opponent.

More than once, Plutarch further refines his arguments by introducing objections to his own attacks. This no doubt significantly adds to the quality of the discussion, but here too, Plutarch’s replies often remain unfair. A striking example can be found in *Non posse*, 1099F-1100A, where Plutarch refers to Epicurus’ conviction that fame can yield pleasures too. I would regard this as one more example of Epicurus’ qualifying philosophy, and as evidence of his intellectual honesty. For Plutarch, on the other hand, Epicurus’ statement merely shows that he fell victim to passionate ambition.

Finally, Plutarch’s polemical style is occasionally at odds with his demand of knowledge of the matter under discussion. More than once, he proves guilty of the same clownish presentation as Colotes. The most obvious example is Plutarch’s caricature of Epicurus’ philosophy of pleasure as a continuous pursuit of cake and sex (*Non posse*, 1093C; 1093F; 1094A; 1097D; 1099B; *De lat. uiu.*, 1129B). Plutarch no doubt knew very well that this is not what Epicurus wanted to say, but he probably also realised that this way of making Epicurus’ philosophy more concrete appealed to widespread presuppositions. Somewhat similarly, Plutarch does not discuss the precise meaning of Colotes’ famous act of adoration at length, but prefers to visualise the scene itself, in order to ridicule the two Epicureans (*Adu. Colot.*, 1117BC). And by pointedly rephrasing Epicurus’ question whether an old and impotent sage can still derive pleasures from touching the fair (*Non posse*, 1094E) – a relevant issue in the context of Epicurean doctrine – as a problem of “blind and toothless fingering” (1095A), Plutarch adopts precisely the same humorous and challenging way of presenting the opponent’s views that characterised Colotes’ polemical approach.

On the moral level, Plutarch’s attacks are likewise occasionally at odds with his own rules. Twice he uses the rhetorical means of *praeteritio* in order to attack his Epicurean opponents in passing. He alludes to the base and vulgar passions of the Epicureans (*Non posse*, 1097D) and to the books written against them and the contumelious decrees of cities directed against them (1100D). These two instances of *praeteritio* are morally ambivalent.

If Plutarch is right that a discussion of these issues would be an indication of quarrelsomeness (1100D: φιλαπεχθῆμον γάρ), the morally correct attitude is omitting them altogether, rather than mentioning them in passing. One may doubt whether Plutarch's references are indeed *sine ira et studio*.

If such *praeteritio* is still ambivalent, Plutarch's sarcasm is far less so. More than once, vitriolic sarcasm drips from his pen. The convictions of both Epicurus (*Non posse*, 1103E) and Colotes (*Adu. Colot.*, 1117D) are praised as wise, and in this context, Plutarch's repeated reference to, and use of the diminutives Κωλωταρᾶν and Κωλωτάριον (1107E and 1112D) are relevant as well. One begins to wonder how mild (πρᾶος) Plutarch actually is, and one may even begin to feel some sympathy with the offended Heracleides (*Non posse*, 1086E).

Even more problematic finally is the torrent of abuse which can be found in Plutarch's polemics. The Epicureans are compared to grooms and shepherds (*Non posse*, 1096C), pretenders (1102BC), sophists and charlatans (*Adu. Colot.*, 1124C), parasites and gourmands (*Adu. Colot.*, 1126F-1127A; *De lat. uiu.*, 1128B), and boys who have just learned to read (*Adu. Colot.*, 1120F-1121A). If Epicurus' abusive language gives evidence of jealousy (*Non posse*, 1086F), the question may be raised as to whether Plutarch himself is completely free from this vice. In any case, his insults illustrate the limited degree of respect which he has for his opponents. If he occasionally showed a certain respect for them⁶⁸, he respected them as philosophers, never as *Epicurean* philosophers⁶⁹.

5. Conclusion

In the period of Middle Platonism, several authors proposed rules for a good discussion. Even if this attention was not completely new, it reflects a growing consideration of one's own polemical activity and a desire to subject even this domain to the comprehensive demands of philosophical rationality. Nonetheless, it should always be understood against the background of the specific philosophical and/or polemical intentions of each particular author.

By far the most important source in this respect is the work of Plutarch of Chaeronea. From his writings (esp. the anti-Epicurean polemics) can be gathered a whole set of rules for a good philosophical polemic. His ideal is that of a friendly, well-ordered and reasonable discussion characterised by competent argumentation and aiming at the truth. A philosophical debate, in short, should be a pleasant conversation rather than a boxing match.

68. J. P. HERSHBELL, *o.c.* (n. 57), p. 3364.

69. Cf. G. ROSKAM, *o.c.* (n. 30), p. 272.

Nevertheless, Plutarch's anti-Epicurean treatises often more closely resemble the latter than the former. Even such a boxing match, however, may sometimes present a beautiful scene, with all of the participants punching above the waist. Such spectacle can be found in Plutarch, and it would be unfair to neglect all of his criticisms without consideration. Even if none of his arguments, I think, would in the end succeed in convincing Epicurus, he sometimes raises interesting and pertinent questions which may provide other equally valuable alternatives⁷⁰. His polemical attacks may have less value as a direct refutation of Epicurus, but they remain important as a sensible defense of his own Platonism⁷¹.

Often, however, Plutarch's boxing match against Colotes degenerates, and the rules of the game are broken. Poor Colotes finds himself not in a boxing match but in a *pancratium*, in which (except biting and gouging; see Philostratus, *Im.*, 2, 6, 3) everything is permitted. Colotes was long dead and unable to reply to Plutarch's attacks, but if he would have been able to defend himself, his answer would in all probability have been characterised by Epicurean laughter and scoffing, in short, by precisely that biting and gouging that was strictly forbidden in Plutarch's *pancratium*.

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70. See esp. the study of J. BOULOGNE, *o.c.* (n. 37).

71. Cf. J. P. HERSHBELL, *o.c.* (n. 57), p. 3373. A somewhat similar conclusion may be reached about Plutarch's anti-Stoic attack in *De uirtute morali*; see therefore H. G. INGENKAMP, "De uirtute morali. Plutarchs Scheingefecht gegen die stoische Lehre von der Seele", in A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ, R. M. AGUILAR (eds.), *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles. Actas del V Congreso Internacional de la I.P.S. (Madrid - Cuenca, 4-7 de Mayo de 1999)*, Madrid, 1999, p. 79-93.

