

Figures de sages, figures de philosophes dans l'œuvre de Plutarque

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METRODORUS OF LAMPSACUS IN PLUTARCH

GEERT ROSKAM

KU Leuven

(geert.roskam@kuleuven.be; ORCID: 0000-0002-8158-6458)

ABSTRACT: Metrodorus of Lampsacus was one of the most significant figures of the first generation of Epicureans. In this paper, all the passages from Plutarch's works that contain information about Metrodorus are examined in detail. For methodological reasons, we first briefly deal with Metrodorus' philosophical position, since this enables us to evaluate the details of Metrodorus' life against the background of his theoretical convictions (thus taking into account the ancients' own concern for consistency). The second part of the paper then focuses on biographical data (Metrodorus' illness, his 'marriage', his quarrel with his brother Timocrates, and his friendship with Mithres).

KEYWORDS: Plutarch, Metrodorus, Epicureanism

1. METRODORUS, A BAD MODEL?

"Do everything as if Epicurus were watching you". This advice could give Epicureans something to hold on to in the tribulations of everyday life. The master's general and abstract reflections on the nature of virtue and the importance of a careful calculus of pleasure and pain provided the necessary theoretical framework, but in concrete circumstances, we are often confronted with particular questions that require specific answers. Then, it may be very helpful to recall great models and draw inspiration from their conduct. Plutarch agrees on this point. The man who makes progress towards virtue sets before his eyes famous models and reflects:

What would Plato have done in this case? What would Epameinondas have said? How would Lycurgus have conducted himself, or Agesilaus?²

Plutarch and Epicurus thus fundamentally agreed about the interesting opportunities that such models of human wisdom and virtue can offer, but they disagreed in answering the question of who should be regarded as appropriate models. From an Epicurean point of view, the models are the distinguished teachers of the Garden, whereas Plutarch prefers Plato and the great statesmen of the past. The latter's accomplishments are related at length in the *Parallel Lives* and presented to the reader as a source of inspiration. But eminent philosophers like Plato or Socrates no less qualify as models. Plutarch did not write a series

¹ Seneca, *epist.* 25,5 (= fr. 211 Us.).

² *De prof. in virt.* 85AB; cf. ROSKAM, 2005, 331-332. All translations are from the *LCL*.

of biographies of these philosophers³, but many of his works contain anecdotes that reveal their character, manner and disposition⁴. And just as the *Parallel Lives* contain a few negative examples that illustrate virtuous behaviour *e contrario*⁵, so Plutarch also repeatedly mentions negative examples of philosophers. Prominent among them are the Epicureans, who are usually characterised as inveterate hedonists and subversive atheists.

In this contribution, I focus on Plutarch's view of Metrodorus of Lampsacus, one of the principal figures among the Epicureans of the first generation. As Plutarch is by far our most important non-Epicurean source about Metrodorus' life and philosophical convictions⁶, an exhaustive and thorough discussion of the relevant material that can be found in his works can significantly contribute to a better understanding of Metrodorus. Before turning to the different passages, I would like to make two more general preliminary observations.

a) Plutarch quite often connects Metrodorus closely with Epicurus. This is not surprising, of course, and reflects the previous tradition. Cicero aptly calls Metrodorus a *paene alter Epicurus*⁷ and the philological problems which this close relationship between the two Epicureans entails are well-known⁸. Several statements are both ascribed to Epicurus and to Metrodorus, and it cannot even be excluded that they could indeed be found in the writings of both thinkers, who then borrowed insights from one another. Epicurus and Metrodorus were cheek by jowl, and thus they also appear in Plutarch's writings⁹. Quotations from their works are juxtaposed as cumulative support for the Epicurean point of view¹⁰, and they generally appear as the two great coryphaei of the Garden.

This picture corresponds to what we find in the Epicurean sources. Several quotations from Metrodorus were inserted in Epicurean collections such as the *Vatican sayings*¹¹, Metrodorus himself connected his situation and that of

³ As far as we know, he wrote a *Life of Crates* (Lamprias catalogue 37; cf. Julian, *orat.* 6, 200b = fr. 10 Sandbach). Other lost works that may have contained relevant material are *On famous men* (Lamprias catalogue 168) and *On the first philosophers and their successors* (Lamprias catalogue 184). Cf. also *On the Cyrenaic philosophers* (Lamprias catalogue 188 – it is unlikely, however, that Plutarch would have regarded these philosophers as models).

⁴ Cf. *Nic.* 1,5 and *De Her. mal.* 856D.

⁵ *Demetr.* 1,1-6. It is by no means clear, however, whether such 'negative' *Lives* are entirely negative. See on this esp. Duff, 1999, 53-65.

⁶ Cf. Koerte, 1890, 531-532.

⁷ Cicero, *fin.* 2,92 (= fr. 5 K.).

⁸ See esp. Clay, 1983.

⁹ See, e.g., *De def. or.* 420D; *Non posse* 1087A; 1091E; 1096A; 1098B; *Adv. Colot.* 1127E. See also Heracleides' reaction to Plutarch's attack on Colotes in *Non posse* 1086E.

¹⁰ See *Non posse* 1091AB (ὁμοία δὲ καὶ τὰ Ἐπικούρου λέγοντος κτλ.).

¹¹ Koerte, 1890 included SV 10 (fr. 37), 27 (= fr. 47), 30 (= fr. 53), 31 (= fr. 51), 41 (= fr. 59), 45 (= fr. 48) and 47 (= fr. 49) into his collection. In some cases, the arguments for his ascription are far from compelling, but several are supported by other sources and are plausible indeed.

Epicurus in one of his letters¹², and Epicurus wrote several commemorative writings in honour of Metrodorus¹³. There can be no doubt that Metrodorus was a significant figure and an authoritative source for the doctrine of the Garden, and Plutarch was surely right in regarding him as a “*grosse pointure*”.

b) Yet with a few exceptions, Plutarch only mentions Metrodorus in his anti-Epicurean polemics. This suggests that the great Epicurean was of minor importance for Plutarch’s own philosophical views. Plutarch recognizes Metrodorus’ significance and relevance for the history of (Epicurean) philosophy and deems him important enough to refute him, but largely ignores him when developing his own philosophy. The Epicurean could not be part and parcel of Plutarch’s Platonic outlook on life. In that respect, he was “*quantité négligeable*”.

This raises the question of Plutarch’s knowledge of Metrodorus’ works. *Prima facie*, the many different references suggest at least a certain familiarity with the Epicurean’s writings. Several titles are explicitly mentioned or alluded to¹⁴, and many verbatim quotations are given. It is difficult to check their reliability, though, since Plutarch is usually *testis unus*¹⁵. Pointing to the general reliability of Plutarch’s quotations from Epicurus¹⁶ is of little help, for his accuracy in this case need not imply the same meticulousness with regard to Metrodorus. Yet several scholars are convinced that Plutarch knows Metrodorus’ works from his own reading¹⁷, and although Plutarch nowhere claims this himself, their position – albeit impossible to prove – is not implausible, given Plutarch’s general erudition.

2. METRODORUS’ PHILOSOPHY

Plutarch provides interesting information about some details of Metrodorus’ life, and he also mentions several of his key doctrines. Most handbooks of ancient (Hellenistic) philosophy first deal with the philosophers’ lives and only then turn to their philosophical thinking. Here, I prefer the reverse order,

¹² Seneca, *epist.* 79, 16 (= fr. 43 K.).

¹³ Diogenes Laertius 10, 28. These writings are mentioned by Plutarch in *De lat. viv.* 1129A.

¹⁴ *Reply to the sophists* (*Non posse* 1091A; cf. Diogenes Laertius 10,24); *On poems* (*Non posse* 1094E); *Reply to Timocrates* (*Non posse* 1098B and C; cf. Diogenes Laertius 10,24) and *On philosophy* (*Adv. Colot.* 1108E and 1127B).

¹⁵ An interesting exception is *Adv. Colot.* 1125B (= fr. 6 K.): τὰ καλὰ πάντα καὶ σοφὰ καὶ περιττὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐξευρήματα κτλ. Hershbell 1992, 3368-3369 is sceptical about Plutarch’s accuracy in this case, but the phrase reappears in almost the same way in a mutilated fragment from *PHerc.* 418,12-14 (τὰ καλὰ πάντα καὶ σοφὰ καὶ περιττὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔργα); see Spinelli, 1986, 33 and Tepedino Guerra, 1992, 119-120. The same accuracy can be found in *De tranq. an.* 476C, which almost perfectly corresponds to *SV* 47.

¹⁶ See Hershbell, 1992, 3365-3368; Boulogne, 2003, 17.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Ziegler, 1951, 922; Hershbell, 1992, 3363. Other scholars have suggested that part of Plutarch’s information can also be traced back to Timocrates; thus Sedley, 1976, 132 and Erler, 1994, 221; *contra* Roskam, 2007a, 73.

for methodological reasons that rest on the ancients' concern for consistency between words and deeds. For ancient philosophers, concrete conduct should indeed be closely related to theoretical insights: a philosopher should practice what he preaches¹⁸. Plutarch likewise insists on the importance of consistency at the very beginning of *De Stoicorum repugnantiiis*:

In the first place I require that the consistency of men's doctrines be observed in their way of living, for it is even more necessary that the philosopher's life be in accord with his theory than that the orator's language, as Aeschines says, be identical with that of the law¹⁹.

This and similar passages provide us with an important interpretative key. We can be sure indeed that Plutarch himself approached Metrodorus from this point of view. In other words, Plutarch was always prone to consider and evaluate the details of Metrodorus' life against the background of the latter's theoretical doctrines. If that is true, an appropriate discussion of the biographical data presupposes an insight into Metrodorus' philosophical position. Therefore, philosophy should precede biography.

2.1. The foundations...

The first thing that strikes the eye is that, apart from two more general fragments about Metrodorus' evaluation of Epicurus' philosophy as a whole, all quotations and references concern ethical doctrines. No mention of Metrodorus' views on the canon or on physical questions. Does this reflect Metrodorus' own interests? Probably not, given that he also wrote works on physics²⁰. Ethics may have been his principal concern, but the exclusive focus on ethical doctrines is mainly the result of Plutarch's selection, which itself rests on his specific polemical goals²¹.

a) In a remarkable passage from his letter to his brother Timocrates, Metrodorus writes as follows:

Let us crown an auspicious beginning with an auspicious end, all but sinking away by a communion of experience and exchanging this earthbound life for

¹⁸ See in general Mansfeld, 1994, 177-191.

¹⁹ *De Stoic. rep.* 1033AB; see on the importance of consistency also *De prof. in virt.* 84B-85B, with Roskam, 2005, 320-335.

²⁰ Such as his *Περὶ αἰσθήσεων* or his *Πρὸς τοὺς ἰατρούς* (Diogenes Laertius 10,24). That he also wrote on atomist doctrines appears from *PHerc.* 439 = O '253' = *PHerc.* 1824; cf. Janko, 2008, 64-65.

²¹ In *Non posse*, Plutarch primarily develops an ethical point. *Adv. Colot.* more focuses on physics, but the references to Metrodorus are mostly found in the last section of the work, which is about ethics.

the holy mysteries of Epicurus, which are in very truth the revelation of a god²².

This is a salient example of the enthusiasm with which the true Epicurean ‘initiate’ eagerly expresses his loyalty and devotion to what his ‘divine’ master has revealed him²³. To Plutarch, however, such a tone is offensive and he has only contempt for all these excessive ‘cries of thanksgiving’, ‘bursts of applause’ and ‘reverential demonstrations’²⁴. In an Epicurean context, however, such expressions had at least two functions: for members of the community, they contained an element of self-confirmation, whereas other people could read them as a protreptic invitation to join the Epicurean community.

This enthusiasm about Epicurus’ divine revelation can perfectly be reconciled with a sober-minded philosophical assessment of his philosophy:

Metrodorus states outright in his work *On philosophy* that if Democritus had not shown the way Epicurus would not have attained to wisdom²⁵.

This throws interesting light on the many Epicurean attacks against Democritus²⁶. Metrodorus here introduces a note of justified fairness: acknowledging Democritus’ importance for Epicurus does not detract from the latter’s outstanding contribution. Plutarch is less subtle in this respect: in his eyes, Epicurus has simply stolen everything from Democritus and then quarrels with him about syllables and serifs²⁷.

b) Several passages deal with the fundamentals of Metrodorus’ Epicurean ethics. First, he shares Epicurus’ interpretation of the good:

Metrodorus asserts in his *Reply to the Sophists*: “Hence this very thing is the Good, escape from the evil; for there is nowhere for the Good to be put when nothing painful to the body or distressing to the mind is any longer making way for it”²⁸.

²² *Adv. Colot.* 1117B (= fr. 38 K.).

²³ On the imagery of the ‘Epicurean mysteries’, see also Cicero, *De orat.* 3,64 (*tacitum tamen tamquam mysterium teneant*) and Timocrates’ slander in Diogenes Laertius, 10,6. On the divinity of Epicurus, see, e.g., Lucretius, 5,8 (*deus ille fuit, deus*); Cicero, *Tusc.* 1,48 and *ND* 1,43.

²⁴ *Adv. Colot.* 1117A.

²⁵ *Adv. Colot.* 1108EF (= fr. 33 K.).

²⁶ Metrodorus was himself the author of a work *Against Democritus* (Diogenes Laertius 10,24), and Epicurus (cf. Cicero, *fin.* 1,21 and 28) and Colotes (cf. Plutarch, *Adv. Colot.* 1108E-1111E) also criticized Democritus. See further Huby, 1978; cf. Sedley, 1976, 134-135.

²⁷ *Non posse* 1100A; cf. also Cicero, *ND* 1, 72 and 93; *fin.* 1, 21.

²⁸ *Non posse* 1091AB (= fr. 28 K.); cf. also 1091E.

This is a core element of Epicurus' philosophical understanding of pleasure, which is reflected in the definition of his ideal as a condition of freedom from corporeal pain (ἀπονία) and from mental disorders (ἀταραξία). Such a view of pleasure was unconvincing for a Platonist like Plutarch²⁹. The Epicureans, so he argues, mistakenly take the middle region (understood as an escape from evil) for the summit and thus forget the positive pleasures. Their pleasure is that of slaves or prisoners who are already overjoyed because they are released from confinement, while they are still unfamiliar with the pure pleasures of the free man³⁰.

Metrodorus combines this basic interpretation of pleasure with a marked concern for bodily pleasure:

It made me both happy and confident to have learned from Epicurus how to gratify the belly properly (ὀρθῶς γαστρι χαρίζεσθαι)

and

The belly, Timocrates my man of science, is the region that contains the highest end³¹.

At first sight, this sounds like the statement of a vulgar sensualist, and this, of course, is precisely what Plutarch also suggests. Moreover, we may presume that Metrodorus also realised that his words could easily be understood in this way, and that he is – for whatever reason – challenging his brother through a provocative saying. Yet we do no longer know the context in which Metrodorus made this claim, and this obviously interferes with our understanding of its precise meaning and purpose. Radicalising frankness for clarity's sake? Scornful teasing of his renegade brother? Anyhow, we should not overlook the presence of the qualifying adverb ὀρθῶς. This is not a plea for unbridled hedonism, for in fact, the belly is not insatiable and needs only a limited amount of food to be filled³². For a Platonist like Plutarch, however, who prefers the soul to the body and serving the public interest to serving the belly, such quotations are particularly offensive, and an important qualification like ὀρθῶς does not suffice to bring about a more positive appreciation.

That Metrodorus was not merely interested in the immediate and inconsiderate gratification of corporeal pleasures, appears from the following short quotation:

²⁹ Cf. Warren, 2011, who points to the influence of Plato's *Republic* on Plutarch's polemic in *Non posse*.

³⁰ *Non posse* 1091E; cf. Zacher, 1982, 211-212 for parallels from Plato's works.

³¹ *Non posse* 1098D (= fr. 42 and 40 K.); cf. Athenaeus 7, 280a and 12, 546f (= fr. 39 K.).

³² See esp. SV 59. On the importance of the notion of limit (ὄρος or πέρας) in Epicurus' philosophy, see, e.g., De Lacy, 1969 and Salem, 1989, 83-99.

I have often spat (πολλάκις προσεπτύσαμεν) on the pleasures of the body³³.

The verb προσπτύω was popular in Epicurean literature and was often used in order to provocatively reject commonly accepted ideals³⁴. In this fragment, the same verb underscores Metrodorus' contempt for corporeal pleasures. No less relevant here is the adverb πολλάκις: 'frequently', not 'always' (ἀεί). As an Epicurean, Metrodorus no doubt appreciated bodily pleasures – after all, his belly was quite important for him – but he was no slave of them. Everything depends on a careful *calculus* of pleasure and pain. Often, immediate corporeal pleasure should be given up in order to safeguard greater pleasure in the long run. Metrodorus, then, will not snatch away every cake that is laid on the table, nor will he always trample on it. Sometimes he enjoys eating it, sometimes he prefers spitting on it. For Plutarch, this fragment from Metrodorus is interesting because it illustrates in his view the base character of corporeal pleasures and can as such even be used against Metrodorus himself. As a matter of fact, Plutarch is sceptical about Metrodorus' credibility in this case, and he suggests that this is only empty and pretentious talk. Spitting on bodily pleasure rather characterizes the Platonist, or so it seems.

A similar intellectual freedom appears from Metrodorus' famous saying that

I have anticipated you, Fortune, and taken from you every entry whereby you might get at me³⁵.

These celebrated words illustrate the fundamental independence and 'invulnerability' of the Epicurean sage, who is striving for pleasure but who also needs very few things. His limited natural desires enable him to be master of his own life until the very end and overcome the capriciousness of Fortune. This time, Plutarch fully and without reservation agrees with Metrodorus, whom he strikingly enough does not mention *nominatim*. He introduces the quotation with a vague ὁ εἰπών, thus masking his source, as if the idea itself would be disqualified if the reader realises that it comes from an Epicurean author.

In his *Coniugalia praecepta*, finally, Plutarch expresses his opinion that

³³ *Non posse* 1088B (= fr. 62 K.).

³⁴ See, e.g., Stobaeus, 3, 17, 33 (= fr. 181 Us.); Athenaeus, 12, 547a (= fr. 512 Us.). Cf. also SV 47, which can probably be traced back to Metrodorus (fr. 49 K.).

³⁵ *De tranq. an.* 476C (= fr. 49 K.); the fragment is quoted more fully in SV 47 and its first part is also translated in Cicero, *Tusc.* 5,27.

the virtuous woman has especial need of graces in her relations with her husband, in order that, as Metrodorus used to put it, she may live pleasantly with him and not be cross all the time because she is virtuous³⁶.

Metrodorus' interest in this topic is not surprising, given that he may have been one of the Epicureans who was married (cf. *infra*) and that he also advised his married sister Batis on conjugal problems. Nor is his position surprising, for in marriage, as in everything else, pleasure is the final end. From Metrodorus' Epicurean point of view, virtue is not an end in itself, but is only appreciated as a useful means to pleasure³⁷, and the above fragment is his application of this principal doctrine to the domain of marriage. And Plutarch agrees! He can indeed without problem integrate Metrodorus' view into his own Platonic perspective: after all, Plato himself advised Xenocrates to sacrifice to the Graces³⁸. By cleverly recalling Plato's advice before Metrodorus' view, Plutarch takes care that the whole idea is situated within an overall Platonic framework. Even Metrodorus can occasionally be useful, then, but only when isolated from his own philosophical point of view and strategically adapted to that of Plutarch's Platonism. In other words, Metrodorus is right when he agrees with Plato.

2.2. ... and their implications

The fragments discussed above show that Metrodorus fully endorses the Epicurean ideal of a pleasant life. But accepting pleasure as the criterion for human decisions and actions entails many implications that are examined in detail in different sources on Epicureanism. In Plutarch's works, three of these implications are also connected with Metrodorus' position.

a) First, the pursuit of pleasure as a rule implies a preference for an 'unnoticed life' far away from the troubles of a political career. This also appears from one of Metrodorus' most notorious statements:

So we are not called upon to be saviours of the Greeks or to receive from them any crown for wisdom, but to eat and drink, my dear Timocrates, in a way that will do the flesh no hurt and gratify it³⁹.

³⁶ *Con. praec.* 141F-142A (= fr. 36 K.).

³⁷ See, e.g., Athenaeus, 12, 546f (= fr. 70 Us.) and 547a (= fr. 512 Us.); Diogenes Laertius 10, 138 (= fr. 504 Us.).

³⁸ *Con. praec.* 141F.

³⁹ *Adv. Colot.* 1125D (= fr. 41 K.); cf. also *Non posse* 1098CD and 1100D. Westman, 1955, 211-212 argues that the original version of Metrodorus' words is in the quoted passage from *Adv. Colot.*

Metrodorus' rejection of political ideals basically rests on his Epicurean ideal of pleasure, but it is phrased in a very provocative way. He could have pointed to the perverse dynamics of unnatural and unlimited desires, to the risks and dangers which a political career usually brings, or, alternatively, to the purer pleasures of a quiet life among likeminded friends⁴⁰. Instead, he only focuses on the pleasures of eating and drinking – the belly again! Perhaps this fragment throws light on Metrodorus' pedagogical approach, which aims at perfect clarity by a frank juxtaposition of two extreme alternatives⁴¹. However that may be, these words go against everything that is dear to Plutarch. Saving Greece... that was what Themistocles did! That recalls the deeds of Philopoemen, the “last of the Greeks”⁴², or of Flamininus, who gave Greece its freedom back⁴³, or indeed of so many other heroes who benefited their country and whose achievements are related in the *Parallel Lives*. Eating and drinking... that was what Lucullus did in his old days, adopting a way of life that was not worthy of the Academy but rather of a man who leans to Epicurus⁴⁴. In Plutarch's eyes, Epicurus and Metrodorus simply abolished human life by their apolitical doctrines⁴⁵.

Metrodorus' criticism of politics and politicians also appears from another fragment that is quoted near the end of *Adversus Colotem*:

Certain sages in their prodigality of conceit have been so well able to detect the function of the state that in their discourse about ways of life and about virtue they go flying off after the same desires as Lycurgus and Solon. [...] It is therefore fitting to burst into the laughter of one truly free at all men and more particularly at these Lycurguses and Solons⁴⁶.

Plutarch indignantly objects by emphasising (through a rhetorical question) the great merits of Lycurgus and Solon, but this counterattack misses the point, since Metrodorus is not criticising the great legislators of the past⁴⁷ but rather contemporary philosophers who cherish the same ambitions and fruitlessly try to imitate them⁴⁸. Plutarch is no less offended by Metrodorus' laughter – a

⁴⁰ For a general survey of the Epicurean arguments against participation in politics, see Roskam, 2007a and 2007b, 19-32. On Metrodorus' position, see Roskam, 2007a, 69-76 and 2011 (on fr. 60 K.).

⁴¹ Cf. Roskam, 2007a, 73.

⁴² *Phil.* 1,7.

⁴³ *Flam.* 10-11.

⁴⁴ *Comp. Cim. et Luc.* 1, 3.

⁴⁵ *Adv. Colot.* 1127DE.

⁴⁶ *Adv. Colot.* 1127BC (= fr. 31 and 32 K.).

⁴⁷ For Epicurus' great appreciation of legislation and ancient legislators, see, e.g., *RS* 31-38; Philippson, 1910; Mueller, 1974 and 1983; Goldschmidt, 1977; Alberti, 1995.

⁴⁸ Thus correctly Westman, 1955, 214.

typical sample indeed of Epicurean polemical laughter⁴⁹, which, however, is here connected with a positive perspective. This laughter rests on true freedom and reflects the superiority of the Epicurean sage who looks down from his *templa serena* to the stupidity of the multitude. For Plutarch, who may well have taken such Epicurean jeering at public-spirited philosophers personally, this laughter is servile rather than characteristic of freedom⁵⁰.

b) Epicurus did not only dissuade his followers from engaging in politics, but also advised them to shun excessive παιδεία and particularly the learned discussions of poetry⁵¹. Metrodorus endorses the same view:

So when you say that you do not even know on which side Hector fought, or the opening lines of Homer's poem, or again what comes between, do not be dismayed⁵².

It is not difficult to see that this position is consistent with the basic orientation of Epicurean philosophy: great erudition is no necessary condition for enjoying the simple pleasures of life. Therefore, Epicureanism is open to everyone⁵³. Yet what once again strikes the eye is the remarkable radicalness of Metrodorus' statement. For what he here rejects is not great erudition: we can presume that even the most blatant ignoramus would still know that Hector was not the best friend of Achilles. Even stupidity, then, is no impediment to reach Epicurean happiness. In this fragment as well, Metrodorus brings his point to a head.

c) Finally, the doctrine of pleasure has implications for our assessment of cultural evolutions and discoveries. The 'wise' Metrodorus (ὁ σοφὸς Μητροδώροϛ) argues that

⁴⁹ Epicurean laughter is almost always of a polemical nature (one of the very few exceptions may be Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 19.II.6-11; cf. also SV 41); see Salem, 1989, 167-174 and Roskam, forthcoming.

⁵⁰ *Adv. Colot.* 1127C.

⁵¹ Cf., e.g., his advice to Pythocles to "hoist all sail and flee from all education"; Diogenes Laertius 10, 6 (= fr. 163 Us.); cf. Plutarch, *Non posse* 1094D. For Epicurus' criticism of the poets, see, e.g., *De aud. poet.* 15D; *Non posse* 1087A (= fr. 228 Us.); Cicero, *fin.* 1,72 and other passages collected in Zacher, 1982, 54-55.

⁵² *Non posse* 1094E (= fr. 24 K.).

⁵³ Cf., e.g., Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 3.I.11-13; 32.II.9-III.1; 29.III + NF 207.I.13 - NF 207.III.13. According to Plutarch, Epicurus circulated his books to every man and woman (πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις; *De lat. viv.* 1129A); cf. *Adv. Colot.* 1126F (πρὸς πάντας ἐγράφετο καὶ πάσας); Seneca, *epist.* 14,18 (*omnibus dixit*).

all the wonderful, ingenious and brilliant inventions of the mind have been contrived for the sake of the pleasure of the flesh or for the sake of looking forward to it, and that any accomplishment that does not lead to this end is worthless⁵⁴.

By ironically calling Metrodorus wise⁵⁵, Plutarch as it were adopts the latter's view, suggesting that the label of σοφός is indeed valid for Metrodorus provided that we accept pleasure as the only standard. For all Metrodorus' discoveries are indeed made for pleasure's sake. However, Plutarch's subtle irony passes over the real interest of Metrodorus' view. What we find here is fundamentally not so different from what Epicurus argues in *RS* 7. There, Epicurus agrees that some politicians in the past succeeded in safeguarding their personal security by striving for a great reputation⁵⁶. In such exceptional cases, a political career thus proved justified. This view provides the Epicureans with a convenient interpretative key for the evaluation of the past. More precisely it enables them to reinterpret the great achievements of famous statesmen from their own Epicurean point of view⁵⁷. Successful politicians in the end turn out to be clever Epicureans. The above passage from Metrodorus shows an analogous approach, now with regard to successful discoverers. We thus come across a more general Epicurean strategy of reorienting and explaining the great achievements of the past from an Epicurean perspective.

3. METRODORUS' LIFE

All the fragments and excerpts discussed above show that Metrodorus regarded pleasure as the final goal of life and that he also accepted the different consequences of this view. Against the backdrop of this Epicurean outlook, we can now turn to the passages that contain information about Metrodorus' life. These passages are interesting for several reasons : they do not only inform us about Metrodorus' person and about his concrete way of life, but also throw some light on the activities of the Epicureans of the first generation, Epicurus' συμφιλοσοφούντες, and, through Plutarch's evaluative comments, on the latter's ideals as well.

⁵⁴ *Adv. Colot.* 1125B (= fr. 6 K.); cf. also *Non posse* 1087D (= fr. 7 K.); *PHerc.* 255 = O '247', fr. 2; Janko, 2008, 56-57.

⁵⁵ He actually does so in both passages (*Adv. Colot.* 1125B and *Non posse* 1087D), and it is unlikely that this is a mere coincidence. Apparently, the content of the fragment somehow triggered this ironic characterization.

⁵⁶ Cf. Roskam, 2007a, 37-39.

⁵⁷ As is done by Torquatus in Cicero, *fin.* 1, 34-36.

a) Twice Plutarch points to Metrodorus' illness. He recalls how Metrodorus was proud (μέγα φρονεῖν) because

when suffering from the dropsy he invited friends to a number of common meals and in spite of the disease did not refuse to take liquid⁵⁸.

This first testimony about Metrodorus' conduct already supports our above claim that an insight into his philosophical convictions is necessary for a correct understanding of the details of his life. Plutarch shows profound contempt for Metrodorus' pride of such an 'achievement', which means nothing at all when compared to the brilliant accomplishments of heroes such like Thrasybulus, Pelopidas, Aristides or Miltiades⁵⁹. But we have already seen that Plutarch and Metrodorus cherish different ideals: whereas Plutarch admires the saviours of Greece, Metrodorus wishes to gratify his belly without harming it (ἄβλαβῶς). Yet this does not solve all problems. Precisely the qualification introduced by the adverb ἄβλαβῶς raises a further, and more urgent question: why did Metrodorus decide to drink although he knew that this would harm his body? Presumably because a careful calculus of pleasure and pain had shown him that the bodily pain caused by the water would be overcome by the greater pleasure of drinking together with his friends⁶⁰. Of course such a decision requires a certain bravery (understood from an Epicurean point of view), and this explains Metrodorus' pride. From Plutarch's Platonic perspective, all this is no reason to be proud, of course, but from an Epicurean perspective it is⁶¹.

Plutarch derives also a second argument from Metrodorus' illness:

Or were Metrodorus and Polyaeus and Aristobulus a source of 'confidence' and 'joy' to Epicurus – most of whom he was constantly tending in illness or mourning in death?⁶²

Whereas a man who shares Plutarch's Platonist perspective and believes in divine providence can always be sure that the gods are taking care of him⁶³, Epicurus can only rely on his human friends, and these are vulnerable

⁵⁸ *Non posse* 1097E (= fr. 46 K.).

⁵⁹ *Non posse* 1098A.

⁶⁰ And this is in line with Epicurus' own focus, for he recommends to reflect carefully beforehand with whom you are to eat and drink, rather than what you are to eat and drink; Seneca, *epist.* 19, 10 (= fr. 542 Us.).

⁶¹ Epicurus praised Metrodorus' undaunted courage in meeting troubles and death; Diogenes Laertius 10, 22 (= test. 1 K.).

⁶² *Non posse* 1103A (= fr. 26 K.).

⁶³ *Non posse* 1103AB.

indeed⁶⁴. And, even worse: *if* the Epicurean philosopher is sincerely concerned about his friend (which is far from evident)⁶⁵, the latter's illness cannot but be an obvious source of trouble. Epicurus could object, of course, that his famous *tetrapharmakos* contained strong remedies against pain and death, yet, in my view, Plutarch here seems to put his finger on a sour spot. Whether, however, Plutarch's Platonism, and the cruel providential god of his treatise *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance*, yields a better solution for the problem of human suffering remains to be seen.

b) Plutarch once, and in passing, alludes to Metrodorus' marriage:

As for Metrodorus' mother and sister, how overjoyed they were at his marriage and at his *Replies* to his brother is plain enough from his writings⁶⁶.

The implication of this sarcastic comment is obvious enough: Metrodorus' vulgar 'marriage' actually brought shame upon his mother and sister. That this does not reflect Metrodorus' value scale is obvious of course, for as we have already seen above, the Epicurean judged conjugal affairs as he judged everything else, that is, by means of the criterion of pleasure. Again, Metrodorus' conduct should be evaluated on the basis of his philosophical convictions. Plutarch's comment, however, also raises another problem: our sources disagree about the question whether Metrodorus and Leontion were married or not, and it may well be that Leontion was only Metrodorus' concubine⁶⁷. In this context, I prefer to leave the question open and conclude that for Plutarch, anyhow, their relation was nothing more than fornication.

c) More attention is given to the notorious case of Metrodorus' renegade brother Timarchus. Plutarch refers to their dissension, to the books they published against one another⁶⁸, and to Epicurus' decision to send some people to Asia in order to drive Timocrates from court⁶⁹. For an outsider like Plutarch,

⁶⁴ Cf. also *Non posse* 1089E-1091A, where Plutarch argues at length how uncertain and vulnerable the Epicurean ideal of the 'stable condition of the flesh' actually is.

⁶⁵ Much has been written about the nature of true Epicurean friendship (viz. on the fundamental importance of usefulness and the complicated question whether the Epicurean can also cherish his friends for their own sake); see, e.g., Mitsis, 1988, 98-128; O'Connor, 1989; O'Keefe, 2001; Brown, 2002; Evans, 2004. For Plutarch's criticism of Epicurus' view of friendship, see Boulogne, 2003, 199-213.

⁶⁶ *Non posse* 1098B (p. 554-555 K.).

⁶⁷ Hieronymus (*Adv. Iovin.* 1,48 = fr. 19 Us.), relying on Seneca (fr. 45 Haase), agrees with Plutarch that Metrodorus was married. Diogenes Laertius (10, 23), on the other hand, speaks about their relation in terms of concubinage.

⁶⁸ *Fr.* 40 Sandbach (p. 554 K.); cf. *Non posse* 1098B.

⁶⁹ *Adv. Colot.* 1126C (p. 555 K.).

all this seemed little more than a childish quarrel, but in Epicurean circles, the matter was taken very seriously, and understandably so. For Timocrates originally belonged to the Epicurean community and then decided to leave the Garden and break off his friendship with his fellow Epicureans. His ‘apostasy’ and subsequent attacks must have been a severe blow that struck the Epicurean community in the heart, even more so since friendship was regarded as one of the most important guarantees for the future⁷⁰. This explains the intense reactions and the commotion in the Garden. Plutarch, for his part, dismisses the whole event as an ordinary fratricidal strife. Whereas Epicurus and his brothers can be praised for their fraternal concord⁷¹, Metrodorus and Timocrates are negative examples in this respect. That their quarrels, however, risked undermining the very foundations of Epicurus’ ethical thinking, Plutarch does not seem to have realized.

d) Finally, Plutarch twice refers to the case of Mithres. This Mithres was one of the ministers of King Lysimachus⁷². He was on friendly terms with the Epicurean community and probably also gave financial support to the Garden⁷³. When he, at a certain moment in his career, got into trouble and was imprisoned, Metrodorus went to the Piraeus in order to help him:

When Metrodorus went down to the Piraeus, a distance of some forty stades, to help one Mithres, a Syrian, a royal officer who had been arrested, letters went out to everyone, men and women alike, with Epicurus’ solemn glorification of that journey⁷⁴.

Thus a short while ago⁷⁵ [...], we heard our friend here describe the expressions Epicurus gave vent to and the letters he sent to his friends as he extolled and magnified Metrodorus, telling how nobly and manfully he went from town to the coast to help Mithres the Syrian, and this although Metrodorus accomplished nothing on that occasion⁷⁶.

These passages contain important information about Metrodorus’ view of politics. We have seen already that he straightforwardly endorsed the Epicurean ideal of an ‘unnoticed life’ far away from the troubles of a political career

⁷⁰ See, e.g., *RS* 28; *SV* 34 and 39 ; cf. Roskam, 2007b, 46.

⁷¹ *De frat. am.* 487D.

⁷² See, e.g., Diogenes Laertius 2, 102 and 10 ,4; Plutarch, *Adv. Colot.* 1126F.

⁷³ Cf. Philodemus, Πραγματεῖαι (*PHerc.* 1418) col. 30,13-6 Militello (= fr. 151 Us.); 31.11-6 (= fr. 177 Us.), 35 inf. (= fr. 74 Arr.²).

⁷⁴ *Adv. Colot.* 1126EF (= test. 14 K.).

⁷⁵ The reference is to the passage from *Against Colotes* quoted above.

⁷⁶ *Non posse* 1097AB (= test. 15 K.).

and that he radically rejected political ideals. Yet in this case, he apparently decided to occupy himself, at least for a few days, with political matters. Is this an indication of inconsistency? Has he left, for whatever reason, the orthodox Epicurean stance? Not really: Epicurus made it very clear that the sage can and should engage in politics under exceptional circumstances⁷⁷. We may presume, then, that Metrodorus precisely faced such an exceptional situation: one of the friends of the Garden got himself into trouble and needed the support of his friends. Playing deaf to the problems of a friend would have been very un-Epicurean. And thus, Metrodorus took action and apparently succeeded in obtaining a satisfactory, pleasant result. In that sense, his exceptional engagement into the troubles of political life was based on genuine Epicurean concerns and contributed to his pleasure. Even on such moments, Metrodorus practiced what he preached.

Plutarch, however, is not impressed. In his view, Metrodorus “accomplished nothing on that occasion”. Such an evaluation may be correct from Plutarch’s own Platonic perspective: for indeed, Metrodorus failed to save Greece. But of course, that was not his ambition: what he wanted to do, is helping a friend. And perhaps, the question of whether or not Metrodorus succeeded in freeing Mithres from prison is even of secondary importance. If he could at least bring back some pleasure in Mithres’ cell, it was mission accomplished.

4. CONCLUSION

How, then, does Metrodorus generally appear in the *Corpus Plutarcheum*? Together with Epicurus, he is correctly presented as one of the most important coryphaei of the Garden. His philosophical views can be used to define orthodox Epicurean doctrine. He agrees with Epicurus about the most basic tenets and about their implications. Moreover, he is impeccably consistent, living according to his convictions and showing a certain virtuosity in applying theory to praxis.

However, if Metrodorus showed in his conduct a certain sense of nuance and a willingness to take into account the specific circumstances (cf. the case of Mithres), the same nuance does not appear from his statements, which are often straightforward and quite radical. This is probably at least partly the consequence of Plutarch’s selection, for Plutarch obviously only quotes what is useful for his own authorial purpose, and for his polemical goals, blunt, oversimplified or radical remarks are especially interesting of course. Nevertheless, in my view, it is unlikely that Metrodorus’ radicalness is merely the product of Plutarch’s polemical heuristics. It can also be understood in the context of pedagogical

⁷⁷ See Seneca, *Dial.* 8,3,2 = fr. 9 Us.; cf. Cicero, *Rep.* 1,10 and 1,11; Plutarch, *Adv. Colot.* 1125C (= fr. 554 Us.).

frankness (παρρησία)⁷⁸. Moreover, we can here catch a glimpse of the enthusiasm and the warm friendship that existed between the members of the first generation of Epicureans. The Garden was a nice place to stay, and the inscription that could be read at its entrance, “Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure”⁷⁹, was more than a promise: it was also the self-confident and enthusiastic expression of a fact.

Nevertheless, Plutarch would never cross the threshold of that pleasant Garden. For him, the inscription was no doubt a strong warning to stay away. As a Platonist, he preferred the *polis* to the Garden. His focus was not on his own belly. Even in times when it was no longer possible (or necessary) to save Greece⁸⁰, he could make himself useful for his fatherland, and crowns for wisdom could be won in his day too. But his wisdom was entirely different from that of Metrodorus and he did not feel any sympathy at all for the Epicurean. He never regarded him as a model that is worth imitating, nor would he think of acting “as if Metrodorus were watching him”. Whenever Plutarch looked into a mirror, he wanted to see Plato, or Epameinondas, or Lycurgus. And it is not unreasonable to suppose that while watching, he focused on their face and gaze, rather than on their belly.

⁷⁸ Cf. Roskam, 2007a, 73.

⁷⁹ Seneca, *epist.* 21,10.

⁸⁰ *Praec. ger. reip.* 814C and 824C.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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