

Philodemus On Piety

Post by "Don" of December 22, 2020 at 11:27 AM

That's a good question. One point is that he seems to be equating the political charges and comedic portrayals of philosophers, especially Socrates (as the extreme case) but also others that were exiled or punished. My take is that Philodemus seems to feel that comedy playwrights shouldn't be "slandering" philosophers as if philosophers should be respected and immune from lampoon. It seems that he's also implying that Socrates may have brought this on himself by being so public in his questioning and gadflying of the people. He made enemies. Socrates basically made a nuisance of himself, and Philodemus is saying, "See what it got him?!" It also seems like he's saying that "we know what those comedic playwrights are like! Don't play into their hands." So Philodemus is saying that Epicurus was such an upstanding and civic-minded philosopher that he was not subject to comedic ridicule, and we should emulate his example. On the other hand, Epicurus's insults and name-calling were against rival philosophers and not political figures. So maybe Philodemus felt those kinds of activities were acceptable in defending Epicurus's philosophy against rivals. More of an in-house debate instead of a public "airing of grievances."

As for the comedy, I greatly enjoy Aristophanes. I understand his plays are FULL of contemporary satire directed against "celebrities" of the day, especially Cleon whom Aristophanes despised. I also find it interesting that Socrates himself is supposed to have stood up and taken a bow during performance of *The Clouds*. Evidently, he enjoyed the notoriety.