

Philodemus - On Frank Speech

Post by “Don” of September 17, 2023 at 11:26 AM

παρρησία "Frank speech" isn't a pleasant way of speaking. In many cases, it's uncomfortable and can be biting. It's compared in the text to a doctor administering a remedy that may be painful but necessary. It's often even translated as "frank criticism."

It appears that Philodemus's "On Frank Speech" is based in large part on his notes of lectures given by his teacher Zeno of Sidon

[Zeno of Sidon - Wikipedia](#)

If that's the case, this practice or method of instruction would have been widespread.

For my part, I think we have to consider any Epicurean texts from ancient Greece or Rome as early extant texts, with the caveat to understand how much is reconstructed from fragments and how much still appears as full paragraphs and pages. One thing that looking at the manuscripts has shown me is that even Diogenes Laertius and Lucretius have issues and questions when it comes to their texts. We have so few texts widely available that when we find translations of *On Nature* or Philodemus, we need to mine them for all they're worth. We have lost so much.

I see the practice of frank speech in the Garden as a natural outgrowth of wanting one's friends and students to stay on the path. The Garden provided opportunities for much more social interaction and one on one time than we will most likely ever have. I don't think we should think of frank speech between teacher and student as "confession," which perverts the notion of correction and instruction to a means of punishment and shame. It strikes me that the Garden provided an environment where the student genuinely wanted to follow the path of Epicurus, and the teacher genuinely wanted to help the student. Some students may have been more amenable to this correction than others, but that didn't stop the teacher from administering the medicine.