

Epicurean Mockery of Opposing Philosophers and Schools

Post by “Bryan” of July 4, 2025 at 3:01 PM

ADMIN EDIT BY CASSIUS 04-23-26: Due to the importance of this material and the need for easy cutting and pasting I am adapting Bryan's work (which will remain the gold standard for accuracy into a reformatted table <https://epicurustoday.com/02-key-sources/mockery/>

I wanted to share this incomplete rough draft of the mocking epithets applied to other schools. I'm looking for any critiques, large and small. Most of the pairings of epithet to the particular philosopher are clear, but not all, given the higgledy-piggledy presentation given in Plutarch, Non Posse, 1086 D.

the Clatterers

οἱ περὶ
Πυθαγόραν

followers of
Pythagoras

(c. 530 BCE onward)

Lēkythismoí

οἱ **Ληκυθισμοί**

action of
a lekythos

A **lekythos** is a clay oil flask – an empty one makes a hollow, clattering noise.

*Pythagorean teachings were steeped in secret symbols
and the esoteric jargon of mystical numerology.*

*The adherents of Pythagoras spoke with words empty of meaning:
both the flask and the students make noise but have no actual content.*

the Agitator

Ἡράκλειτος

Heraclitus

of Ephesus

(fl. 500 BCE)

Kykētēs

ὁ **Κυκητής**

wheel

Heraclitus was fundamentally a skeptic, saying:

"let us not hazard guesses about the most important matters" (Laertius 9.73)

Plato mocked the Heracliteans and their theory of fiery flux by calling them

οἱ ῥέοντες *"the fluxing ones" (Theaetetus 180c)*

Epicurus escalates the irony: not just calling Heraclitus a "Fluxor" – but an "Agitator."

Epicurus' term alludes to Heraclitus' own metaphor of

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4549-epicurean-mockery-of-opposing-philosophers-and-schools/>
*the **kykeōn** (a mixed barley drink) which will separate if not stirred (DK B125)*

the Basketbearer

Πρωταγόρας

Protagoras

(fl. 450 BCE)

Phormophóros

ὁ Φορμοφόρος

wicker basket carrying

According to Athenaeus:

"in the same letter [On Occupations], Epicurus also says that Protagoras, the sophist, from first being a basket-carrier and firewood-carrier, he later became Democritus' scribe (with Protagoras having been admired by Democritus for some particular invention for carrying firewood)" (Deipnosophists, 8.50, 354C)

According to Laertius:

"Protagoras was the first to invent the so-called 'Tylē' (on which people carry burdens)" (9.53)

the Thickskulls

οἱ περὶ

Πρωταγόραν

followers of

Protagoras

Baryengképhaloi

οἱ Βαρυεγκέφαλοι

heavy head

Protagoras was a student of Democritus – even though Democritus was about 30 years younger.

Epicurus highlights Protagoras' humble origins as a manual laborer, his late start in philosophy, and his misapplication of Democritus' science in founding the "profession" of sophistry.

the Pretenders

οἱ περὶ

Σωκράτη

followers of

Socrates

Alazoneîai

αἱ Ἄλαζονεῖαι

vagrant / boaster

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1549-epicurean-mockery-of-opposing-philosophers-a-1000000/>

(430 BCE onward)

the Arbiter of
Absurdities

Δημόκριτος

Democritus

(fl. 420 BCE)

Lērókritos

ὁ Ληρόκριτος

judge of nonsense

Democritus was an eliminative reductionist (believing that only the atoms and the void really exist)

and extreme skeptic, saying: "men know nothing, for truth is in an abyss" (Laertius 9.72)

and he denied that any criterion of knowledge exists, holding that

"none of the apparent things is a criterion" (9.106)

*Democritus thought that the gods deliberately communicate with men via the films,
and he thought the films have their own perception.*

Democritus also took a particular interest in zombies.

According to Proclus (Commentary on the Republic, 2.113.6)

*"Stories of people who appeared to have died and then came back to life
were collected by many of the ancients including the scientist Democritus in his writings..."*

the Golden

Πλάτων

Plato

(fl. 387 BCE)

Chrysoûs

ὁ Χρυσοῦς

shining

Calling Plato "the golden one" was likely a sarcastic jab at his flashy writing and aristocratic status.

Plato is fundamentally skeptical, leaving truth "to the gods"

and only hoping for "probable explanations." (Laertius 9.72, Timaeus 29c)

the Manslayers

οἱ περὶ
Ἡρακλείδην
followers of
Heracleides
of Aenus

Androphoníai

αἱ **Ἀνδροφονίαι**
man slaying

*A pupil of Plato, Heracleides took part in the assassination
of the King Cotys I of Thrace around 360 BCE*

the Dionysus-
Flatterers

οἱ περὶ
Πλάτωνα
followers of
Plato

Dionysokólakes

οἱ **Διονυσοκόλακες**
Dionysus flatterer

*A reference to King Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse.
Epicurus is ridiculing the Academy's sycophantic pursuit of political influence:
especially Plato's own ill-fated attempt to tutor King Dionysius II –
who ultimately detained Plato against his will.*

the Enemies of
Greece

οἱ Κυζικηνοί
the Cyzicenes
(350 BCE onward)

Echthroì
tês Helládos

οἱ **Ἐχθροὶ**
τῆς Ἑλλάδος
hating

*the Cyzicenes here refers to the students of Eudoxus of Cnidos (**Κνίδος**), the mathematical astronomer and associate of Plato. Eudoxus taught at Cyzicus (**Κύζικος**) and set up a school there.*

(Cyzicus is on the Sea of Marmara about 35 miles east of Lampsacus.)

Eudoxus' teachings on pleasure were similar to Epicurus.

Eudoxus died right around when Epicurus was born, but he left many influential pupils in Cyzicus,

who also spread their influence from there to Athens.

the Degenerate

Ἀριστοτέλης

Aristotle

(fl. 344 BCE)

Ἄσωτος

ὁ Ἄσωτος

not *saving*

Aristotle wasted his inheritance and then turned to military service and selling drugs – presumably in connection with his peddling of remedies, we also hear of Aristotle:

"bathing in a bath of warm oil and then selling the oil." (Laertius 5.16)

the Grand Wreckers

οἱ Διαλεκτικοί

Dialecticians

Πολύφθοροι

οἱ Πολύφθοροι

having damaged

much

Epicurus grouped together the Aristotelians, Academic Skeptics, Megarian logicians, and Stoics as purveyors of fruitless debate that could be destructive to living well.

By dubbing all dialecticians "the Grand Wreckers," Epicurus highlighted the deep rift between his philosophy and the logic-oriented approach of the builders of false systems such as the Aristotelians and of the outright destructive skepticism of the Megarians such as Diodorus Cronus.

the Groaners

οἱ περὶ

Θεόφραστον

followers of

Theophrastus †

(fl. 330 BCE)

Βαρύστονοι

οἱ Βαρύστονοι

heavy tone

† This application to Theophrastus only is by process of elimination.

barýstonoi was colloquial slang for actors who utter deep tragic groans.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4549-epicurean-mockery-of-opposing-philosophers-and-schools/>
possibly parodying Theophrastean style as long-winded,

emotionally burdensome, or affectedly serious.

<p>the Wood-Giver</p>	<p>Ἀντίδωρος <i>Antidorus</i> (fl.c 330 BCE)</p>	<p>ὁ Σαννίδωρος <i>Sannídōros</i> gift of penis / plank</p>
<p><i>We know that Epicurus wrote a two book series on Antidorus. (Possibly Antidorus of Cyme the grammarian)</i></p>		
<p>the Altar-Beggars</p>	<p>οἱ περὶ Ἴππαρχίαν <i>Hipparchia</i> followers of of Maroneia</p>	<p>αἱ Βωμολοχίαι <i>Bōmolochiái</i> [i.e., begging at] the altar</p>
<p>the Courtesanry</p>	<p>οἱ περὶ Ἴππαρχίαν <i>Hipparchia</i> of Maroneia (fl.c. 325 BCE)</p>	<p>αἱ Ἐταιρήσεις <i>Hetairéseis</i> process of being a courtesan</p>
<p><i>Hipparchia of Maroneia was the wife of Crates of Thebes and a student of Diogenes of Sinope. Calling the students of Diogenes "altar-beggars" was likely literally true, and calling his female adherents "the courtesanry" was humorous because it ironically elevated their status.</i></p>		

stupid

Πύρρων

Amathés

ὁ Ἀμαθής

not learning

Pyrrho

(fl. 320 BCE)

Ἀπαιδεύτος

ὁ Ἀπαιδεύτος

not educated

uneducated

Pyrrho was an extreme relativist, saying "for each assertion, there is an opposing assertion" (9.74) and "each thing is no more this, then that."

He was also an extreme skeptic, Pyrrho and his followers "themselves determined nothing, not even [that they determined nothing]. and consequently they even rejected not determining" (9.74) while holding that "the senses deceive, and reason is inconsistent." (9.95)

Pyrrho and his followers employed logical puzzles in "rejecting all demonstration, criterion, sign, cause, motion, learning, coming into being – and the idea that anything is good or bad by nature." (9.90)

His school maintained a famous list of 10 ways (τρόποι) in which sensation and certainty are undermined.

Despite all this, Pyrrho also served as a high priest at the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.

Jellyfish <i>literally, "(sea) lungs"</i>	Ναυσιφάνης <i>Nausiphanes</i> <i>(fl.c. 310 BCE)</i>	Pleúmones	οἱ Πλευμονες <i>sides / lungs</i>
illiterate		Agrámmatos	Ἄγραμματος <i>not the result of writing</i>
swindler		Apateón	ὁ Ἀπατεών <i>deceiving agent</i>
prostitute		Pórnē	ἡ Πόρνη <i>selling</i>
<p><i>Epicurus used the term "Jellyfish" to specifically indicate insensitivity and senselessness.</i> <i>(Sextus Empiricus, Against the Professors, 1.2)</i></p> <p><i>Nausiphanes was a student of Pyrrho. In support of eliminative skepticism, Nausiphanes said:</i> <i>"Of those things which appear to exist, nothing exists more than it does not exist."</i></p> <p><i>Nausiphanes took some of his science from Democritus. In support of his 'science-based political rhetoric,' Philódēmos quotes Nausiphanes as saying, "honor depends on winning a reputation for cleverness in politics... the wise man is he who can persuade his hearers – and this power of persuasion belongs to the man of science."</i></p>			

Post by "Don" of July 4, 2025 at 6:43 PM

I did something similar to the m Epicurus' nicknames for others in Diogenes Laertius a couple years ago:

Post

RE: Epicurus' Favorite Insults

Okay, done! That was fun! I didn't do Plato since @Joshua did a good job above.

Enjoy!

Nausiphanes:

'The mollusk,' πλεύμονά (pleumona "lung-fish, jellyfish"> related etymologically to English "pleurisy")

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ry%3Dpleu%2Fmwn>

Hicks note: Cf. Sext. Emp. Adv. math. i. 3 νῦν πλεύμον α καλῶν τὸν Ναυσιφ άνην ὡς ἀναίσθητον; Plato, Phil. 21 c ζῆν δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπο υ βίον ἀλλά τινος...



Don

May 28, 2022 at 7:55 AM

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 6, 2025 at 11:18 AM

I **really** enjoyed chewing on these ancient slurs.

I appreciate that there seems to be a universal preconception for "*Hater*" or "*Haters*". 😊

In particular, I like thinking that Plato is not just "*golden*", but "**gilded**", as in, "*cheap*" and "*superficial*", like modern currency, or that his dialogues are just *gold leaf painted over bad philosophy*.

Good find on *Sannídōros*! I missed that etymology completely.

Post by “Bryan” of July 6, 2025 at 9:47 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Sannídōros!

I still think your translation of "Phallosodorus" captures the whole spirit better.

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

"gilded"

Yes, Joshua pointed this out as well and I agree that it is the correct direction. I'll update.

Thank you for your comments!

Post by "Cassius" of April 22, 2026 at 9:49 PM

I am bumping this old thread because in tonight's Zoom meeting we started going through this list as part of reviewing Bryan's Usener material. I personally had not focused on the fact that there is a list in both Diogenes Laertius and in Plutarch, and that to get full picture there are several sources that have to be brought together. Bryan's work here is valuable because beyond the colorful nature of the descriptions we get insight into the particular aspects of other philosophies that he found to be worth criticizing.

Post by "Cassius" of April 23, 2026 at 4:39 AM

Due to the importance of this material I am adapting Bryan's work (which will remain the gold standard for accuracy into a reformatted table here:

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Epicurean Mockery Of Opposing Schools.

epicurustoday.com

Post by "Matteng" of April 24, 2026 at 9:34 AM

I also think Plato was the „Golden“ because he values people in categories of gold, silver and bronze/iron

Gold: Elites, King/ Philosopher

Silver: Warriors

Bronze/Iron: Worker, farmers

And oh, of course Plato was in the golden category ☐☐

I think „the Golden“ is a play on this arrogant and inhumane assessment / valuation of people which is done in every totalitarian state. Popper saw Platos Politeia as core of every totalitarian state.