Parnassos Press — Fonte Aretusa

Chapter Title: Epicharmus, Sicily, and Early Greek Philosophy
Chapter Author(s): R.J. Barnes

Book Title: Paideia on Stage
Book Editor(s): Phillip Mitsis, Victoria Pichugina, Heather L. Reid
Published by: Parnassos Press — Fonte Aretusa. (2023)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.11660128.8

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Parnassos Press — Fonte Aretusa is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Paideia on Stage*

R.J. Barnes[1]

Epicharmus, Sicily, and Early Greek Philosophy

In this contribution, I shine a light on the early days of what will become a lively relationship between philosophy and comedy. As David Konstan noted in 2014, "Although the topic would seem to be attractive, there are in fact few studies on the interaction between comedy and philosophy, especially from the perspective of comedy, apart from the obvious case of Aristophanes's *Clouds*."[2] Since then, the story remains about the same. Although it is widely recognized that Greek comedy often mocked the figure of the philosopher and riffed humorously on popular philosophical topics of the day, little sustained work has been done to account for what Konstan calls the "sibling rivalry" between these two genres of discourse.[3] The gap is especially conspicuous in contrast to recurrent, high-profile interest in Greek tragedy as a vehicle for and interlocutor with philosophies of all kinds.[4] The intellectual discussions that were going on at the time do in fact percolate through comedies just as much as they do through tragedies. And although comedy engages philosophy less seriously, it is still, I argue, capable of providing a playful *counter-education* in which philosophically significant questions are raised for its audience to turn over in their minds both creatively and critically.

---

[1] R.J. Barnes received his Ph.D. in Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies from Bryn Mawr College in 2022. He has served as a visiting lecturer at Haverford College and is currently a visiting assistant professor at Wabash College.

[2] David Konstan, "Crossing Conceptual Worlds: Greek Comedy and Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, eds. M. Fontaine & A. Scafuro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 278.

[3] Apart from Konstan's piece, several dissertations have dealt with this topic: W.R. Grey, "Treatment of Philosophy and Philosophers by the Greek Comic Poets" PhD diss. (John Hopkins University, 1896); Anton Weiher, "Philosophen und Philosophenspott in der attischen Komödie" Phd diss. (K. Ludwig Maximilians Universität München, 1914); David Carroll Preston, "Between the Dionysia and the Dialogues: The *Agon* between Philosophy and Comedy" PhD diss. (University of London, 2017). The first two are outdated, and the latter focuses on Plato's appropriation of comedic tropes.

[4] Most works of this type focus on the broad philosophical insight to be gained from reading Greek tragedy, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Simon Critchley,

My focus here will be on the fragments of Epicharmus who operated in and around Syracuse probably between 490 and 466 BCE.[5] At this time and place, the discourses of both comedy and philosophy were still emerging. The very terms "philosophy" (φιλοσοφία) and "comedy" (κωμῳδία) had likely not gained currency.[6] Yet, as we shall see, there are still traces of friction between

---

Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us (New York: Random House, 2019). There has also been recent interest in tragedy's direct engagement with the philosophical thought of its own day, e.g., Joshua Billings, *The Philosophical Stage. Drama and Dialectic in Classical Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). Although Billings touches upon Aristophanic comedy, he notes that his study is geared more towards tragedy (21). For a recent collection of passages in which tragedies and comedies seem to engage with the philosophical ideas of their own day, see André Laks and Glenn W. Most, "Appendix: Philosophy and Philosophers in Greek Comedy and Tragedy," in *Early Greek Philosophy, Vol. IX: The Sophists, Part 2* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 256–365.

[5] For the dates of Epicharmus, see Katheryn G. Bosher, *Greek Theater in Ancient Sicily*, eds. E. Hall and C. Marconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 16–18; Eric Csapo and Peter Wilson, *A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC, Volume II: Theatre beyond Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 317–21.

[6] There is no reason to believe that Epicharmus would have described his works as *kōmōdiai*. More likely is *dramata*: Georg Kaibel, "Epicharmos (2)," in *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*:, 1907; Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 276–7. However, most later readers considered Epicharmus to be a writer of comedies (Plato *Theaet*etus 152e, Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a29–34, Theocritus, *Epigrams* 18 = *Palatine Anthology* 9 600, Pseudo-Lucian, *Octogenarians* 25, Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 24, Anonymous, *On Comedy* (*Prologues on Comedy* III), 9 p. 7

the jokester and the intellectual resembling those found in later interactions between philosopher and comedian.

In what follows, I gather evidence for Epicharmus's engagement with these early strands of pre-Socratic discourse and explore the particular ways in which his comedy not only makes fun of these intellectuals but also makes use of their ideas in the construction of his own comedic devices. I begin by situating Epicharmian comedy within the vibrant intellectual context of 6th-5th century BCE Sicily. I then discuss how his comedic fragments engage with the poets and pre-Socratic philosophers of his day. I show how Epicharmus targets figures like Xenophanes in the same way that he targets seers or other figures who can easily be recast as vain know-it-alls, charlatans, or (in Greek) *alazones*. In addition to illustrating this more direct and antagonistic engagement, I illustrate how Epicharmus borrows elements of philosophical discourse and uses them for his jocular agenda. That is to say, as philosophers churned out new conceptual paradigms and thought experiments all aimed at altering a person's perspective on what is taken for granted about life and the world, Epicharmus drew on these perspective-altering tools and refashioned them as comedic toys. And it is within this mode of play (παιδία) that we find one mode of comic education (παιδεία).

Making a mockery in Magna Graecia

Before turning to Epicharmus himself, it is useful to situate his fragments within their intellectual context. As we shall see, Epicharmus was not a lone luminary in the Greek West but one bright light among many others. I shall touch briefly on the early poets, critics, philosophers, and rhetoricians in turn.[7]

Koster, *Suda* ε 2766, et al.). For the emergence of the label "philosophy" see Christopher Moore, *Calling Philosophers Names: On the Origin of a Discipline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[7] For a window into this intellectual environment, see Andreas Willi, *Sikelismos: Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft im griechischen Sizilien* (Basel: Schwabe, 2008); Kathryn Morgan, "A Prolegomenon to Performance in the West," in *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, ed. Katheryn G. Bosher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 35–55.

The poetic tradition of Sicily goes back at least to the founder of Syracuse, Archias of Corinth, who was closely associated with the epic poet, Eumelus of Corinth (8th c. BCE). The latter is said to have produced a *Titanomachy*, *Corinthiaca*, *Europia*, and *Prosodion* and may have played a role in the founding of the city of Syracuse.[8] It is also in Syracuse, at 504/1 BCE, that the first attested rhapsodic performance is said to have been carried out by the Chian rhapsode Cynaethus.[9] By this time, in northern Sicily, Stesichorus of Himera (ca. 630–555 BCE) had already produced lyric poems that challenged the authority of the epic tradition (frs. 90 and 91 Finglass). His poems show the first sure signs of intertext with the Homeric epics,[10] and these intertexts have moreover been taken as signs that the oral tradition of these epics had already reached a fixed state in the Greek West, perhaps in the form of texts in circulation.[11] Similar evidence of literary innovation and Homeric engagement can be found in the lyric poetry of Ibycus,[12] who operated in Rhegium, a city on the "toe" of the Italian peninsula just off the coast of Sicily in the 6th c. BCE.

---

[8] See C. M. Bowra, "Two Lines of Eumelus," *The Classical Quarterly* 12 (1963): 145–53; M. L West, "Eumelos: A Corinthian Epic Cycle?," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 122 (2002): 109–33.

[9] Scholia on Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 2.1c Drachmann = *BNJ* 568 (Hippostratos) F5. See also M.L West, "Cynaethus' Hymn to Apollo," *The Classical Quarterly* 25 (1975): 161–70.

[10] For example, we find traces of close engagement with the *Iliad* 8.302–8 in Stesichorus fr. 19.44–7 Finglass, *Iliad* 22.83 in Stesichorus fr. 17 Finglass, *Iliad* 12.322–8 in Stesichorus fr. 15.5–12 Finglass, and *Odyssey* 15 in Stesichorus fr. 170.1–11 Finglass.

[11] Walter Burkert, "The Making of Homer in the Sixth Century BC: Rhapsodes versus Stesichoros," in *Oxford Readings in Homer's* Iliad, ed. Douglas Cairns (1987; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 92–116; A.C. Cassio, "Epica orale flutuante e testo omerico fissato: riflessi su Stesicoro (*PMGF* 222b 229 e 275)," *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 1 (2012): 253–60; Adrian Kelly, "Stesichorus' Homer," in *Stesichorus in Context*, eds. P. Finglass and A. Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21–44.

[12] Maria Noussia-Fantuzzi, "The Epic Cycle, Stesichorus, and Ibycus," in *The Greek Epic Cycle and Its Ancient Reception*, eds. M. Fantuzzi and C. Tsagalis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 430–49.

Also from Rhegium was Theagenes (fl. ca. 530 and 520 BCE), who was considered in antiquity to have been the first literary critic.[13] According to Seleucus of Alexandria, Theagenes made the first known emendation of a Homeric line: reading ἐπεὶ ῥά νύ οἱ φίλος ἦεν ("since he was thus now dear to him") for ἐπεὶ μάλα οἱ φίλος ἦεν ("since he was very dear to him") at *Iliad* 1.381.[14] Theagenes also allegorized the Homeric battle of the gods from *Iliad* 5 as a covert lesson about how the elements of nature interact.[15] Such close engagement with Homer's epics not only attests to the vibrant poetic culture of southern Italy but also suggests the possibility of the circulation of fixed versions of Homer's epics in the Greek West at a very early period.[16]

Theagenes's allegorical engagement with elemental qualities of nature suggests acquaintance with the type of natural philosophy carried out by Ionian contemporaries such as Anaximander and Anaximenes.[17] The first signs of pre-Socratic philosophy in Magna Graecia can be traced at least to Pythagoras's arrival at Croton in southern Italy around the time that Theagenes was writing. After his arrival from the east, various "Pythagoreans" begin to populate the intellectual landscape.[18]

---

[13] On Theagenes, see Rudolph Pfeiffer, *The History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 9–11.

[14] DK 8A3 = D scholia to *Iliad* 1.381. Unless noted, all translations are mine.

[15] DK 8A2 =D scholia to *Iliad* 20.67–74 =Porphyry, *Homeric Questions* 1.240.14.

[16] A.C. Cassio, "Early Editions of the Greek Epics and Homeric Textual Criticism in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BC," in *Omero Tremila Anni Dopo*, ed. Franco Montanari (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2002), 118–9; Cassio, "Epica orale," 254–5.

[17] See Mirjam Kotwick, "Allegorical Interpretation in Homer: Penelope's Dream and Early Greek Allegoresis," *American Journal of Philology* 141 (2020): 5–7; Andrew Ford, "Performing Interpretation: Early Allegorical Exegesis of Homer," in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*, eds. M. Beissinger, J. Tylus, and S. Wofford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 33–53; Mikolaj Domaradzki, "Theagenes of Rhegium and the Rise of Allegorical Interpretation," *Elenchos* 32 (2011): 205–27.

[18] See Leonid Zhmud, "Sixth-, Fifth- and Fourth-Century Pythagoreans," ed. Carl Huffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88–111.

A very different type of philosophy is put forward by Parmenides of Elea (late 6th and early 5th c. BCE). After him, Empedocles of Acragas (ca. 490-430 BCE) produced his own competing theory of nature and, in doing so, became something of a local celebrity in Sicily. According to Aristotle, Empedocles was also instrumental to the rise of rhetoric.[19] Whatever the value of the remark, Sicily was indeed widely held in antiquity to be the site where the art of rhetoric began to take root. According to sources other than Aristotle, the (perhaps legendary) figures of Tisias and Corax are most commonly associated with the birth of rhetoric. In any case, Sicily was home to some early experimentation in rhetorical theory, and it cannot be denied that Sicily produces one of antiquity's more audacious orators in Gorgias of Leontini (ca. 480-380 BCE).[20]

Beyond its home-grown intellectual talents, Sicily also attracted a bevy of high-profile figures from across the Greek world. Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, was instrumental in promoting the arts. He hosted the lyric luminaries Pindar and Bacchylides, as well as the philosopher Xenophanes.[21] Simonides, too, was patronized by several Siceliotes and seems to have passed through Hieron's court.[22] In addition to the lyric poets, the Athenian dramatist Aeschylus (and perhaps also Phrynichus) found their way to the court of Hieron.[23] Aeschylus, we are told, put on a play in honor of Hieron, titled *The Women of Aetna*, as well as a one-off of the *Persians* (if not the whole four-play sequence of *Phineus*, *Persians*, *Glaucus of Potniae*, and the satyr drama *Prometheus*).[24] Apart from his trip to Syracuse, Aeschylus is said to have spent his final days in Gela just as Simonides spent his in Acragas.[25]

---

[19] "Empedocles first discovered rhetoric, Zeno dialectic" (πρῶτον Ἐμπεδοκλέα ῥητορικὴν εὑρεῖν, Ζήνωνα δὲ διαλεκτικήν, Diogenes Laertius 8.57 = Aristotle fr. 65 Rose = DK 31A1).

[20] According to tradition, Gorgias was a close acquaintance of Empedocles. Although sources often describe Gorgias as a pupil of Empedocles, they may have been too close in age for that sort of relationship, as noted by Hermann Diels, "Gorgias und Empedokles," in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte der antiken Philosophie*, ed. Walter Burkert (1884; repr., Darmstadt: Hildescheim, 1969), 159–84. See also: Ewegen, S. Montgomery, and Coleen P. Zoller, editors. *Gorgias*/Gorgias*: The Sicilian Orator and the Platonic Dialogue* (Dakota Dunes, SD: Parnassos Press, 2022). Another important figure, who may have also had ties with Empedocles, is the physician Acron of Acragas, who predates Hippocrates and is later regarded as the founder of the Empiricist school of medicine (Pseudo-Galen 14.638 cf. Diogenes Laertius 8.65; Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 80 383d). Sicily was also home to Mithaicus, the author of one of the earliest cookbooks (Plato, *Gorgias* 518b; Pollux 6.70; Athenaeus 12 516c; 7 282a).

[21] See Kathryn Morgan, *Pindar and the Construction of Syracusan Monarchy in the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

From this survey, it is evident that, by the 5th century BCE, Sicily (and Syracuse in particular) served as a major hub for poets and other intellectuals. During the time that Aeschylus, Pindar, Bacchylides, and Xenophanes were passing through Syracuse and philosophers such as Empedocles and Parmenides were popularizing their theories of nature in verse, another band of local poets by the names of Aristoxenus, Epicharmus, Deinolochus, and Phormis/Phormos (both spellings are found in sources) began to create some of the earliest known comedies.[26] Although Aristoxenus may have been the eldest of these comic poets, Epicharmus is traditionally held to be the one who truly galvanized stage comedy.[27] Epicharmus's writings became so influential that they overshadow those of his comedic contemporaries; nearly all is lost from Aristoxenus, and, for Phormis/Phormos and Deinolochus, only titles remain.

---

[22] J.H. Molyneux, *Simonides: A Historical Study* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1992), 220–33; Morgan, *Syracusan Monarchy*, 93–6.

[23] C.J. Herington, "Aeschylus in Sicily," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 87 (1967): 74–85; Mark Griffith, "Aeschylus, Sicily and Prometheus," in *Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry by Former Pupils*, eds. D. Dawe, J. Diggle, and P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 105–39; Csapo and Wilson, *Theater beyond Athens*, 345–6, 355–64. See also Peter Meineck in this volume.

[24] Maria Broggiato, "Aristophanes and Aeschylus' Persians: Hellenistic Discussions on Ar. Ran. 1028," *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 157 (2014): 1–15 and "Eratosthenes and the Persian War Tetralogy of Aeschylus," *Seminari Romani Di Cultura Greca* 26 (2019): 17–29. See also Philippos Karaferias in this volume.

[25] Aeschylus: *Life of Aeschylus* 10–11 = *TrGF* test. 1.35–47; Parian Marble 59 = *TrGF* test. 3 = *BNJ* 239 (Marmor Parium) A59. Simonides: Callimachus fr. 64.3–4 Pfeiffer; *Suda* σ 441 Adler. Phrynichus is also said to have died in Sicily, *TrGF* 3 test. 6.

[26] For an analysis of the relevant testimonia, see Csapo and Wilson, *Theater Beyond Athens*, 305–45.

Epicharmus's massive influence was probably helped along by the sheer popularity of the genre of comedy in Syracuse. Unlike Athenians, for whom comedy always played second fiddle to tragedy, Syracusans betrayed a surprising partiality for the comedic sphere of poetic performance. According to the 4/3rd century BCE historian Timaeus, Siciliotes, generally speaking, betray a penchant for iambists (ἰαμβιστάς), just as Athenians exhibit a preference for Dionysiac music and cyclical choruses.[28] Just what Timaeus means by "iambists" is debated, though according to some interpreters, this fondness for "iambists" suggests a general fondness for comedic lampoons.[29] Epicharmus himself notes how his comedic predecessor, Aristoxenus, wrote in an iambic fashion, and remarks fondly on the poetry of the Ionian iambic poet, Ananius, whose works Epicharmus seems to have been personally familiar with.[30] Whatever the relation between Ionian *iambos* and Sicilian comedy, scholars generally agree that comedy reigned supreme in Epicharmus's day. There was, by all accounts, no competing performance genre.[31] Lyric was being performed, and tragedy was being imported from Athens, but neither seems to have had the same level of broad support as comedy. This comedic bent appears to carry on in Sicily well after Epicharmus. Sophron (fl. ca. 430 BCE) would excel in the genre of mime.[32] Rhinthon (ca. 323-285 BCE) would produce the hybrid genres of "farce-writing" (ἱλαροτραγῳδία or φλυακογραφία) and tragicomedy (κωμικὰ τραγικά, *Suda* ρ 171 Adler). And according to the historian Alcimus (4th-3rd century BCE), Sicily is also home to the curious and possibly comedic genre of "*paignia*" (παιγνία).[33]

---

[27] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b5, 1448a30; Aristotle, *On Poems* fr. 34 Janko = Themistius, *Orations* 27 337a–b; *Suda* ε 2766 Adler; Theocritus, *Epigrams* 18.1–2 = *Palatine Anthology* 9 600.1–2; Diomedes, *On Poems* I 489.8 Keil; Anonymous, *On Comedy* (*Prologues on Comedy* III), 9 p. 7 Koster.

[28] *Brill's New Jacoby* 566 (Timaios) F140 = Athenaeus 5.181c.

[29] Mancuso, *La lirica classica greca in Sicilia e nella Magna Grecia* (Pisa: A. Polla, 1912), 76. For other interpretations, see Andrea Rotstein, *The Idea of Iambos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 268.

[30] These fragments are discussed below. On Ananius, see Chris Carey, "Mapping Iambos: Mining the Minor Talents," in *Iambus and Elegy: New Approaches*, ed. Laura Swift and Chris Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 122–39; Rotstein, *Iambos*, 40–1, 219–20.

[31] Willi, *Sikelismos*, 160–1; Martin Revermann, "Paraepic Comedy: Point(s) and Practices," in *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres*, eds. Emmanuela Bakola, Lucia Prauscello, and Mario Telò (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 109.

As Andreas Willi has argued, the receptivity to comedy in Sicily is best interpreted as a manifestation of a specific colonial mindset.[34] By embracing the inherently antinomian counter-discourse of comedy, Siciliotes were able to stake out their own cultural identity. If we look at Epicharmus's fragments, we do find a great deal of mythical burlesque as well as some clear spoofing on Homer, Hesiod, and the epic tradition more broadly. For instance, Epicharmus riffs on longer epic phrases, such as "it rests in the lap of the five judges" (ἐν πέντε κριτῶν γούνασι κεῖται, fr. 237 K-A) which parodies a recurrent phrase in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: "it rests in the lap of the gods" (θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται).[35] The dative plural ending of γούνασι alone is a clear sign of epic parody,[36] as are other epicisms, such as πετεηνῶν in fr. 150 K-A: "eggs of a goose and of winged hens" (ὤεα χανὸς κἀλεκτορίδων πετεηνῶν).[37] Slightly more elaborate is the dactylic fragment "bow shirted folk, hear the

---

[32] For the dating, see J.H. Hordern, *Sophron' s Mimes: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2–4.

[33] *Brill's New Jacoby* 560 (Alkimos) F1 = Athenaeus 7 321f–322a, referring to "Botrys of Messene."

[34] Willi, *Sikelismos*; Andreas Willi, "Challenging Authority: Epicharmus between Epic and Rhetoric," in *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, ed. K. Bosher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 56–75; cf. Revermann, "Paraepic Comedy," 106–110.

[35] *Iliad* 17.514, 20.35; *Odyssey* 1.267, 1.400, 16.129.

[36] E.g., τοῖσι at fr. 56.1 K-A and Ἀχαιοῖσι at fr. 99.4 K-A. See Willi, *Sikelismos*, 132, 155.

[37] A. C. Cassio, "The Language of Doric Comedy," in *The Language of Greek Comedy*, ed. Andreas Willi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 70.

Sirens" (λαοὶ τοξοχίτωνες, ἀκούετε Σειϱηνάων, fr. 121 K-A) which may be an absurd spin on *Odyssey* 12.52: "that delighting you may hear the voice of the Sirens" (ὄφϱα κε τεϱπόμενος ὄπ᾽ ἀκούσῃς Σειϱήνοιιν).[38] At fr. 113.415 K-A, Epicharmus even quotes *Iliad* 9.63 directly yet translates the line into his local, Doric dialect: "tribeless, lawless, homeless" (ἀφϱ]άτωϱ ἀθέμ[ιστος ἀ]νίστιος = ἀϕϱήτωϱ ἀθέμιστος ἀνέστιός, Homer *Iliad* 9.63).[39] Hesiod's *Theogony* may be parodied in fr. 135.1–2 K-A, where a character tells of the birth of Athena (cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 924) and fr. 275 K-A, where a character calls into question Hesiod's claim that Chaos came into being first.[40] The most extended parody to be found in the extant fragments comes from a comedy titled *Odysseus the Deserter,* in which Epicharmus seems to retell, in a comic vein, the episode in which Odysseus sneaked into Troy disguised as a beggar.[41]

All of this may suggest that Epicharmian comedy included a counter-discourse to the poetic-cum-pedagogic hegemony of mainland Greece. It was also a counter-education. Homer and

---

[38] The fragment fits the definition of *parōdia* as a metrical imitation of epic, cf. Polemon of Ilium's remark that "Epicharmus the Syracusan also used [parody] to a small extent in some of his comedies" (κέχϱηται δὲ καὶ Ἐπίχαϱμος ὁ Συϱακόσιος ἔν τισι τῶν δϱαμάτων ἐπ′ ὀλίγον). *LGGA* (Polemon 1) 45 = Athenaeus 15 698c = Epicharmus, test. 20 K-A.

[39] A.C. Cassio, "The Language of Doric Comedy," in *The Language of Greek Comedy*, ed. A. Willi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72–3.

[40] The latter fragment is discussed further below. On the parodic elements in Epicharmus's *Wedding of Hebe* (frs 39 and 40 K-A), see Marta Cardin and Olga Tribulato, "Enumerating the Muses: Tzetzes in Hes. *Op*. 1 and the Parody of Catalogic Poetry in Epicharmus," in *Approaches to Greek Poetry: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, and Aeschylus in Ancient Exegesis*, ed. Marco Ercoles et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 161–92.

[41] Frs. 97–103 K-A. For reconstructions of the plot, see Willi, *Sikelismos*, 177–191; Andreas Willi, "Challenging Authority: Epicharmus between Epic and Rhetoric," in *Theater Outside Athens*, ed. K. Bosher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63–72; Revermann, "Paraepic Comedy," 106–110; and recently, Michele Napolitano, "Epicharmus, Odysseus Automolos: Some Marginal Remarks on Frr. 97 and 98 K–A," in *Fragmentation in Ancient Greek Drama*, eds. A. Lamari, F. Montanari, A. Novokhatko (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 321-35.

Hesiod were regarded as the main teachers of Hellas. Their poetry was treated as a source of multifaceted wisdom. Epicharmus destabilizes this pan-Hellenic pedagogical model through parody. The subtle refashioning of familiar tales and subversive wordplay teach audiences, at the very least, not to take the "classics" so seriously and to value irony as a means of forestalling the credulousness often bred by canonicity.

The traditional teachers of Hellas are not the only ones called into question through Epicharmian comedies; the mounting authority of contemporary literati and philosophers who were establishing their names in Magna Graecia and beyond, are also playfully undercut by Epicharmian wit, as we shall see.[42]

Calling out contemporaries

Epicharmus's willingness to engage with his contemporaries is especially evident in what he has to say about his fellow humorists. As noted above, he remarks fondly on the Ionian iambic poet Ananius in fr. 51 K-A:

> Also a swordfish and catfish, the latter of which is the finest
> of all fish in the springtime according to Ananius, whereas
> the comber is the best in the winter.
>
> καὶ σκιφίας χρόμις θ', ὃς ἐν τῶι ἦρι κὰτ τὸν Ἀνάνιον |
> ἰχθύων πάντων ἄριστος, ἀνθίας δὲ χείματι

In this fragment, Epicharmus quotes (in his own Doric dialect) a choliambic tetrameter preserved from Ananius's writings: "catfish is the best in the spring, comber in the winter" (ἔαρι μὲν χρόμιος ἄριστος, ἀνθίας δὲ χειμῶνι, fr. 5.1 West). The line belongs to Ananius's so-called "gastronomic calendar"—a work that would have certainly pleased Epicharmus, whose fragments contain lists and lists of comestibles.[43] Epicharmus also comments on his fellow comedians Aristoxenus and Phormis/Phormos. The former comes in for some praise (or blame) in fr. 77 K-A: "those who use iambs and the finest style, which Aristoxenus first introduced" (οἱ τοὺς ἰάμβους καὶ τὸν [ἄριστον] τρόπον, | ὃν πρᾶτος εἰσαγήσαθ' ὡριστόξενος).[44] The reading of "finest" (ἄριστον) is suspect on metrical grounds, and scholars have reworked the line in ways that either retain the complimentary tone—as with "sweet" (ἅδιστον)—or turn the compliment into an insult—as with "old" (ἀρχαῖον) or "ugly" (ἀχάριστον).[45] Another contemporary comedian, Phormis/ Phormos, often mentioned alongside Epicharmus as the founder of comedy, may have been satirized more directly in a reported dialogue between an unnamed character and a basket. This "basket" (φορμός) may be a nominal stand-in for Φόρμος/ Φόρμις himself.[46]

---

[42] Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén, "On Epicharmus' Literary and Philosophical Background," in *Theater Outside Athens*, ed. K. Bosher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 85–96.

[43] Epicharmus may quote Ananius a second time with the mock oath, "yes by the cabbage" (ναὶ μὰ τὰν κράμβαν, fr. 22 K-A), which is a doricized

In addition to intra-comedic interactions, Epicharmus's fragments also engage with contemporary lyric and tragic poets. Aeschylus, a known figure in Syracuse, was apparently mocked by Epicharmus for overusing the word τιμαλφούμενον.[47] Scholars have suggested that similar mockery of Aeschylean diction may have extended to other words (e.g., δυσπάλαιστος, Epicharmus fr. 280.5, which appears in Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 468 and *Libation Bearers* 692),

---

version of Ananius's ναὶ μὰ τὴν κράμβην, fr. 4 West. The same mock oath is found again in Teleclides fr. 29 K-A and Eupolis fr. 84 K-A.

[44] His name also appears in fr. 98.23 K-A cf. fr. 97 scholium 1.4 K-A.

[45] For broader discussion as well as the suggested emendation, Ἀνανίου ("of Ananius"), see Rotstein, *Iambos*, 213–21.

[46] Kassel and Austin reconstruct the dialogue as follows: "(A) Who is your mother? (Phormos/Phormis) Slave Girl. (A) Your father? (Phormos/ Phormis) Slave Girl. (A) And your brother? (Phormos/Phormis) Slave Girl." (τίς ἐστι μάτηρ; Σακίς. ἀλλὰ τίς πατήρ; | Σακίς. τίς ἀδελφεὸς δέ; Σακίς, Epicharmus fr. 123 K-A = Phormos fr. 1 K-A). On Phormos/ Phomis, see Csapo and Wilson, *Theater beyond Athens*, 338–342.

[47] "It's a common word in Aeschylus, so Epicharmus mocks him for it" (συνεχὲς τὸ ὄνομα παρ' Αἰσχύλωι διὸ σκώπτει αὐτὸν Ἐπίχαρμος) (Epicharmus fr. 221 K-A = Aeschylus, *TrGF* test. 115). The word appears in *Eumenides* 15, 626, 807, and *Agamemnon* 922. The scholia to fr. 97 K-A mentions another instance in which Epicharmus makes fun of tragedy: "…is said once more in reference to the tragedians" (πάλιν πρὸ[ς] τοὺς τραγικοὺς λέγετ[αι], fr. 97 K-A scholium 1.2).

as well as phrases (e.g., "go to ruin!" [ἄπαγ' εἰς φθόρον,] Epicharmus fr. 154 K-A ≈ "go to ruin" [ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον,] *Agamemnon* 1267).[48] Some have even suggested that Epicharmus's *Persians* (frs. 110–111 K-A) may be a spoof of Aeschylus's *Persians* which had been performed in Syracuse. The fragments, however, are not very revealing. Svarlien suggests that Pindar, another periodic visitor of Syracuse, receives similar comic abuse in fragment 76 K-A:

> (A) Zeus invited me, serving a banquet for Pelops. (B) Serving an egret?! That's one wretched dish, my friend! (A) Not "an egret," I'm saying "a banquet."
>
> ὁ Ζεύς μ' ἐκάλεσε, Πέλοπί γ' ἔρανον ἱστιῶν. ἦ παμπόνηρον ὄψον, ὦ 'τᾶν, ὁ γέρανος. | ἀλλ' οὔτι γέρανον, ἀλλ' ἔρανόν <γά> τοι λέγω.

The joke hinges on the confusion between γ' ἔρανον ("banquet") and γέρανον ("egret or crane"). As Svarlien argues, ἔρανος was rarely used when Epicharmus was writing, with the exception of Pindar, who was fond of the term (*Olympian* 1.38, *Pythian* 5.77 and 12.14).[49]

Federico Favi has recently cast doubt on these instances of recurrent diction and proposes to focus less on echoes of terminology and more on echoes of dialect.[50] He claims that fragment 80 K-A, "celebrated in songs and knowledgeable about music, a lover of the lyre." (εὔυμνος καὶ μοισικὰν ἔχοισα πᾶσαν, φιλόλυρος) is a better indication of engagement between Epicharmus and his lyric contemporaries since it adopts dialectical features of choral lyric and not just diction. It is worth noting that the fragment also contains what is perhaps the earliest known use of the abstract term "*mousikē*" (μουσική), and one of the earlier examples of technical -ική terms which will eventually become all-the-rage with sophists.[51] The fragment may then not only allude to choral lyric but also to a more technical meta-discourse about lyric or "the art of the muses" (μουσική) more broadly.[52]

---

[48] Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén, "On Epicharmus" 85, 86n41.

[49] Diane Arnson Svarlien, "Epicharmus and Pindar at Hieron's Court," *Kokalos* 36–37 (1990): 106-8, followed by Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén, "On Epicharmus" 83; Morgan, *Syracusan Monarchy*, 107–8.

[50] Federico Favi, "Epicharmus and Choral Lyric Poetry: A Reappraisal of Old and New Evidence," in *The Paths of Greek: Literature, Linguistics and Epigraphy*, eds. Enzo Passa and Olga Tribulato (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 149–74.

The fact that Epicharmus may have not only teased lyric poets but even waded into more abstract discussions about poetry and "poetic education" (as the term μουσική implies) is not surprising once we consider the intellectualized bent of Epicharmus's *oeuvre*. Along with our collection of authentic fragments from comedies, we have another sizable collection of pseudepigrapha—the so-called pseudo-Epicharmeia. The latter batch of fragments, which comprise about a fifth of his entire corpus, go well beyond the generic confines of comedy and contain much material that might be called philosophical, gnomic, or medical. These falsely attributed fragments, which begin appearing as early as the 5th century BCE, are a consequence not only of Epicharmus's fondness for writing in a sententious style, but also his apparent tendency to weigh in on the intellectual discussions of his day. That is to say, Epicharmus's inclusion of statements and even whole scenes that riff on intellectual discussions eventually led posterity to (mis)construe him as a sage of sorts and to attribute to him a vast range of materials that were likely absent from his genuine comedic writings.[53] As we shall see, Epicharmus's comedy not only teases the traditional mythopoetic educators of Greece (Homer, Hesiod, and the lyric tradition) but also the new brand of teachers and intellectuals who sought to replace traditional poets as the keepers of real wisdom.

---

[51] Unless Pindar used it earlier (Pindar, *Olympian* 1.15, fr. 32 cf. Ibycus fr. S255.4 Davies).

[52] Epicharmus also wove into his comedies remarks about matters as technical as accentuation (Pseudo-Sergius, *Explanation concerning Donatus*, 1.531.17; cf. Richard Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems, Book I* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 183n1).

[53] For a hypothesis on how the pseudo-Epicharmeia developed over time, see Andreas Willi, "Epicharmus, the Pseudepicharmeia, and the Origins of Attic Drama," in *Fragmentary History of Greek Comedy*, eds. S. Chronopoulos and C. Orth (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2015), 109-45. And now the recent edition of the fragments by Federico Favi, *Epicarmo e pseudo-Epicarmo (frr. 240–297) Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

Epicharmus and early Greek philosophy

Epicharmus engages with his contemporary intellectual scene in two ways—as a critic of conceited know-it-alls, and as a collector of comedic gold. That is to say, Epicharmus not only mocks and caricatures early cosmologists and rhetoricians, but also borrows their theories, flips them on their head, causes them to implode or malfunction, and in doing so offers the audience an engaging education on how to think freely, creatively, and also critically about real philosophical subjects. This give-and-take is what characterizes the "sibling rivalry" between comedy and philosophy. I will treat both modes of engagement in turn.

Epicharmus's more critical mode of engagement with early Greek intellectuals comes in the form of direct mockery and indirect caricature. Some evidence of the latter may be sensed in fr. 213 K-A:

> It is joined, and it is separated, and again it goes from whence it came, earth to earth, and spirit aloft; what's so difficult about that? Not a thing!
>
> συνεκρίθη καὶ διεκρίθη κἀπῆλθεν ὅθεν ἦλθεν πάλιν,
> γᾶ μὲν εἰς γᾶν, πνεῦμα δ᾽ ἄνω· τί τῶνδε χαλεπόν; οὐδὲ ἕν.

Here, an unnamed character strings together what resembles the abstruse jargon of pre-Socratic cosmologists. From the context in which the fragment is quoted, we can tell that the character is speaking about a separation that occurs at the event of death—the spirit rises, and the body sinks. This concept would have been far from the *communis opinio* at the time Epicharmus writes. Rather, it was still emerging within cosmological thinking and remained, even in the later 5th century BCE, as a more "philosophical" view of the afterlife.[54] The strangeness of the concept and the language in which it is described are comedically foregrounded by the colloquial half line that caps it—"what's so difficult about that? Not a thing!" Thus, the humor hinges on the knee-jerk feeling that cosmological jargon is a type of nonsensical geek-speak.

---

[54] On this pre-Socratic intellectual history and possible influence from eastern religions, see Walter Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 111–3.

Direct caricature of a particular pre-Socratic can be argued for (if not securely determined) in a number of fragments, such as fr. 266 K-A: "manner is a daimon for people, for some it's good, others it's bad" (ὁ τρόπος ἀνθρώποισι δαίμων ἀγαθὸς, οἷς δὲ καὶ κακός) which may mimic Heraclitus's remark that "character is a daimon for a person" (ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων, DK 22B119).[55] Another instance is fr. 185 K-A: "neither compact nor rarified" (οὔτε πυκινὰς οὔτε μανάς). The short fragment stands out for the long alpha of μανάς, which is not a Doric form.[56] In most cases, code-switching of this kind can be explained as epic parody (see above). In this fragment, however, with its reference to the abstract concepts of compaction and rarefaction, Epicharmus may mean to call to mind Ionian natural philosophy. The similarities with one local pre-Socratic, Empedocles, are worth underlining:

> All that are compact internally and are loose on the exterior,
> having received such moisture from the hands of Cypris.[57]
>
> τῶν δ' ὅσ' ἔσω μὲν πυκνά, τὰ δ' ἔκτοθι μανὰ πέπηγε,
> Κύπριδος ἐν παλάμῃσι πλάδης τοιῆσδε τυχόντα
>
> For all that are more compact at the root yet blossom above
> with looser shoots.
>
> τῶν γὰρ ὅσα ῥίζαις μὲν ἐπασσύτερ̣', [α]ὐ̣|τὰ̣[ρ ὕ]περ̣θε
> μανοτέροις ὅ̣ρπηξι καταστῆ(ι) τηλ̣εθάο̣[ντα][58]

---

[55] The authenticity of fr. 266 K-A has been doubted; however, see Favi, *Epicarmo e pseudo-Epicarmo*, 164.

[56] Compensatory lengthening of this sort is foreign to Epicharmus's Syracusan dialect. See Susana Mimbrera, "Sicilian Greek before the Fourth Century BC," in *Language and Linguistic Contact in Ancient Sicily*, ed. Olga Tribulato (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 203.

[57] DK 31B75.

[58] Empedocles fr. 152 Wright. I follow here the reconstruction by Oliver Primavesi and Klaus Alpers, "Empedokles im Wiener Herodian-Palimpsest," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 156 (2006): 36.

Empedocles not only also speaks of compaction and rarefaction but does so in an affected Ionicizing dialect. Epicharmus's fragment provides only a small snatch of words, yet the similarity in dialect and diction with several passages of Empedocles is, at the very least, suggestive of comic allusion.[59] Unfortunately, apart from a possible caricature, the humor of the passage is lost to us.

The surest evidence of Epicharmus's direct engagement with a figure whom we might call a "philosopher" concerns Xenophanes—one of many visitors at Hieron's court in Epicharmus's day. As with the previous examples, we can trace some possible allusions to Xenophanes's philosophy in several of Epicharmus's fragments. For instance, one of Epicharmus's most famous lines—"the mind sees, and the mind hears; the rest is deaf and blind" (νοῦς ὁρῆι καὶ νοῦς ἀκούει· τἄλλα κωφὰ καὶ τυφλά, fr. 214 K-A)—may allude to Xenophanes's core concept of *nous* (νοῦς).[60] However, the tendency to sense close engagement between Epicharmus and Xenophanes is largely motivated by testimonial evidence that the comedian, at some point, lobbed a direct insult at the philosopher. According to Asclepius of Tralles, "the comic poet advanced hubristically against Xenophanes" (<ὁ> κωμικὸς ὑβριστικῶς προῆλθεν εἰς τὸν Ξενοφάνη).[61] This act of "hubris" is alluded to by Aristotle (*Metaphysics* Γ 5 1010a5–7 = Epicharmus fr. 143 K-A):

---

[59] See M.L West, "Notes on Newly-Discovered Fragments of Greek Authors," *Maia Rivista Di Letterature Classiche* 20 (1968): 200.

[60] Quoted by Maximus of Tyre, Orations 11.10; Plutarch, On Fortune 98d, On the Virtue of Alexander 336b, On the Intelligence of Animals 961a (= Porphyry, On Abstinence 3.21); Galen, On Hippocrates' Book on the Duties of Medicine 3 18b.658 Kühn; Iamblichus, On the Life of Pythagoras 32.228. Epicharmus's remark possibly riffs on Xenophanes's description of νοῦς: "entirely does it see, entirely does it know, entirely does it hear" (οὖλος ὁρᾶι, οὖλος δὲ νοεῖ, οὖλος δέ τ' ἀκούει, DK 31B75).

[61] Asclepius of Tralles, *Commentary on Aristotle's* Metaphysics A–Z, 278.23–24 Hayduck = Epicharmus fr. 143 K-A.

> So they speak plausibly, but they do not speak the truth; for it is more fitting to say it in *this* way than in the way Epicharmus put it against Xenophanes.
>
> διὸ εἰκότως μὲν λέγουσιν, οὐκ ἀληθῆ δὲ λέγουσιν· οὕτω γὰρ ἁρμόττει μᾶλλον εἰπεῖν ἣ ὥσπερ Ἐπίχαρμος εἰς Ξενοφάνην

The passage suggests that Epicharmus called into question the truth and/or plausibility of a claim made by Xenophanes. According to Alexander of Aphrodisias, the original remark to which Aristotle alludes was rather slanderous (βλασφημότερά) and insolent (ἐπηρεαστικὰ), and it apparently mocked Xenophanes for exhibiting a certain degree of foolishness and ignorance of reality (εἰς ἀμαθίαν τινὰ καὶ ἀγνωσίαν τῶν ὄντων).[62] Modern scholars have attempted to reverse engineer the lost insult from this secondhand evidence. The most convincing reconstruction is that Epicharmus had in some way called a claim of Xenophanes's "neither plausible nor true" (οὔτ’ εἰκότως οὔτ’ ἀληθῆ).[63]

Laying aside, for a moment, the specific wording of the lost insult, it is worth noting how the very opposition between the concepts of likelihood (εἰκότως) and truth (ἀληθής), which Aristotle believes to be operative in the Epicharmian remark, would seem to be a spoof on the epistemological concerns that do, in fact, characterize Xenophanes's philosophy. His worldview is marked by a concern with the limits of human knowledge in contrast to divine omniscience.[64] Although he makes his own pronouncements about the limitlessness of the earth, the identity of the primal elements, and their cyclicality, Xenophanes advises his audience against taking his remarks as hard facts: "let these be taken as opinions resembling real things" (ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι).[65] In another remarkable fragment, Xenophanes treats his remarks about his own life and travels as merely provisional:

---

[62] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, 308.10–14 Hayduck = Epicharmus fr. 143 K-A.

[63] R. Kassel and C. Austin, eds., *Poetae Comici Graeci*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), ad loc.; Albert Schwegler, *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles*, v. 3 (Tübingen: Druck und Verlag von L. Fr. Fues, 1847), 179. Another, less probable interpretation is that Epicharmus called Xenophanes's claims "not likely but true." See Heinrich Gomperz, *Sophistik und Rhetorik: das Bildungsideal des* εὖ λέγειν *in seinem Verhältnis zur Philosophie des V. Jahrhunderts.* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912), 244; James Lesher, *Xenophon of Colophon—Fragments: A Text and Translation with Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 201n16.

> Sixty-seven are the years already shaking my thought across the Greek lands, and from birth, there were twenty-five years added to those—if, in fact, I know how to speak truly of these things.
>
> ἤδη δ᾽ ἑπτά τ᾽ ἔασι καὶ ἑξήκοντ᾽ ἐνιαυτοί | βληστρίζοντες ἐμὴν φροντίδ᾽ ἀν᾽ Ἑλλάδα γῆν· | ἐκ γενετῆς δὲ τότ᾽ ἦσαν ἐείκοσι πέντε τε πρὸς τοῖς, | εἴπερ ἐγὼ περὶ τῶνδ᾽ οἶδα λέγειν ἐτύμως[66]

Here and elsewhere, Xenophanes exhibits a broad concern with the gap between opinion or likelihood and what he calls truth (ἔτυμος). If this reconstruction of Epicharmus's insult is close to the original, it may be the case that he is hoisting the philosopher by his own petard: "You think that your claims are likely (ἐοικότα) if not true (ἔτυμος)? Well, I think they are neither true (οὔτ' ἔτυμος) nor even likely (οὔτ' εἰκότως)."[67]

If Epicharmus swapped out Xenophanes's preferred term, ἔτυμος, with the word ἀληθής (as reconstructions suggest), the insult might contain a further twist of the dagger. The word ἔτυμος is a more objective term than ἀληθής. It is related to the verb "to be" and refers to what exists in reality. Thus, one could utter what is ἔτυμος without knowing that it is the truth. The term ἀληθής, by contrast, is more subjective. Etymologically it means "without deception" or "without forgetting" and refers not only to something true but to something that the subject *knows* to be true. Thus, when someone describes their utterance as ἀληθής, it is a truth that they are in some sense committed to. When someone describes their utterance as ἔτυμος, it is a truth they are not necessarily committed to. This is, presumably, why ἔτυμος is Xenophanes's preferred term.[68] By stating that Xenophanes's claims are not true (οὔτ' ἀληθῆ), Epicharmus would suggest that Xenophanes is not only wrong about the claims that are implausible (οὔτ' εἰκότως) but also claims that he has foolishly committed himself to.[69] Understood in this way, Epicharmus's insult would indeed fit the description given by Alexander of Aphrodisias: it mocks Xenophanes "for exhibiting a certain degree of foolishness and ignorance of reality" (εἰς ἀμαθίαν τινὰ καὶ ἀγνωσίαν τῶν ὄντων). This is also quite "slanderous" (βλασφημότερά) since, by all accounts, Xenophanes does not, in fact, commit himself very strongly to his own claims. They are, for him, provisional interpretations that may be improved upon imperfectly through investigation.[70]

---

[64] James Lesher, "Xenophanes' Skepticism," Phronesis 23 (1978): 1–21.

[65] DK 21B35 = Plutarch, *Table–Talk* 746b.

[66] DK 21B8 = Diogenes Laertius 9.19.

[67] The position Epicharmus takes against Xenophanes jibes well with the sentiment found in fr. 144 K-A: "'it is difficult to speak finely from premises that are not fine,' as Epicharmus says, 'for once it is said, it straight away appears not to be fine" (χαλεπὸν δ᾽ ἐκ μὴ καλῶς ἐχόντων λέγειν καλῶς, κατ᾽ Ἐπίχαρμον· ἀρτίως τε γὰρ λέλεκται, καὶ εὐθέως φαίνεται οὐ καλῶς ἔχον, cf. fr. 218 K-A).

So far, Epicharmus's engagement with the intellectual discourse of his day has operated on the level of insult and caricature. Presumably, these early philosophers became easy targets for the comedian since they could be neatly recast as vain know-it-alls, charlatans, or (as it would be in the Greek) *alazōnes*. Already Aristoxenus, the earliest known comedian, uses his poetry to call out the worst type of *alazōn* in his day: “which types of people are the greatest charlatans? Seers!” (τίς ἀλαζονίαν πλείσταν παϱέχει τῶν ἀνθϱώπων; τοὶ μάντεις, fr. 1 K-A). Epicharmus *also* takes a shot at local seers: “Just like those trashy lady-seers who cheat some stupid women out of a fiver of silver, others out of a pound, and still others out of a half-pound, and they know everything [so-to-speak (?)]” (ὥσπεϱαὶ πονηϱαὶ μάντιες, | αἵ θ’ὑπονέμονται γυναῖκας μωϱὰς ἂμ πεντόγκιον | ἀϱγύϱιον, ἄλλαι δὲ λίτϱαν, ταὶ δ’ ἀν’ ἡμιλίτϱιον | δεχόμεναι, καὶ πάντα γινώσκοντι [τω λόγω], fr. 9 K-A). From Aristoxenus onward, comedians uniformly depict seers as cheats and frauds. This tellingly contrasts with non-comic genres like tragedy and epic, where seers are always right (though not always heeded).[71] Like seers, philosophers have a pretense of knowing something ordinary folks apparently do not. When abstract ethical questions begin to figure more prominently in intellectual discourse, philosophers also share with seers the additional pretension of moral superiority. Comedy schools audiences on how to “school” their schoolmaster, how to jeer the local seer, and, in general, how to bring those with pretensions under a critical gaze. This is one of comedy’s most frequent lessons.

---

[68] "And so there never has nor will be any man with a clear knowledge of the gods and however much I say about all things. *For, even if one happened, for the most part, to speak what is perfect, he himself nevertheless does not know it*. For opinion has been set upon all things" (καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὔτις ἀνὴρ γένετ' οὐδέ τις ἔσται | εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων· | εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών, | αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ᾽ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται, DK 21B34).

[69] See also, Willi, *Sikelismos*, 165n11 and 114–5.

[70] "The gods have not indicated all things to mortals from the start. But in time they [i.e., mortals] will light upon more by searching" (οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ' ὑπέδειξαν, | ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον, DK 21B18). See Lesher, *Xenophon,* 149–155.

Cognitive tools as comedic toys

Another way in which Epicharmus engages with philosophy, apart from direct attack, is by repurposing the cognitive tools of philosophers and other intellectuals as comedic toys. That is, Epicharmus, like many later comedians, not only derives humor from dressing down philosophers but also from using their abstract intellectual arguments for his silly purposes. A basic example of this would be turning a rhetorical figure on its head for the sake of wordplay, as with fr. 145 K-A: “at that time I was at their place, at the other time I was in their company” (τόκα μὲν ἐν τήνων ἐγὼν ἦν, τόκα δὲ παϱὰ τήνοις ἐγώ). Demetrius the Syrian suggests that Epicharmus was teasing rhetoricians by deliberately misusing the figure of antithesis.[72] Instead of reinforcing a conceptual opposition through formal parallelism, Epicharmus uses antithesis to distinguish what could be synonymous remarks.[73]

---

[71] Michael Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 19.

A more expansive example of such comic repurposing is found in fr. 146 K-A:

> (A) After the sacrifice, a feast, and after the feast comes drinking. (B) How lovely! (A) Then after drinking, revelry, and after revelry comes pigheadedness, and after pigheadedness, a lawsuit … and after the verdict comes shackles, stocks, and a fine.
>
> ἐκ μὲν θυσίας θοῖνα,
> ἐκ δὲ θοίνας πόσις ἐγένετο. χαϱίεν, ὥς γ᾽ ἐμοὶ [∪ –]
> ἐκ δὲ πόσιος κῶμος, ἐκ κώμου δ᾽ ἐγένεθ᾽ ὑανία,
> ἐκ δ᾽ ὑανίας δίκα [καταδίκα]
> ἐκ δὲ καταδίκας πέδαι τε καὶ σφαλὸς καὶ ζαμία.

Here an unnamed character leads his interlocutor down a long slippery slope that links the pious act of sacrifice with crimes and misdemeanors. The chain of causation takes a turn for the worse once drinking is introduced and (for comedic effect) just after the interlocutor expresses approval (χαϱίεν, ὥς γ᾽ ἐμοὶ). Aristotle, who alludes to this passage, cites it as an example of one sort of causation, namely, "motive" or "efficient" cause, that is, one action is shown to put into motion the following action. The joke's effectiveness comes from the way it uses claims of plausibility to make what is ultimately an implausible argument. By misusing arguments from likelihood, Epicharmus may well be riffing on the "intellectually interesting arguments, often concerned with likelihood," which early Syracusan rhetoricians were developing around the same time.[74] If this is the case, Epicharmus is turning trendy rhetorical forms into clever comic devices, and, in doing so, he illuminates the ways in which the device can (humorously) misfire.

---

[72] Demetrius, *De Elocutione* 24. This attribution of *De Elocutione* to Demetrius the Syrian ca. 100 BCE is argued for by Pierre Chiron, *Un Rhéteur méconnu: Démétrios* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001).

[73] Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 3.9 1410b4) quotes the passage as an example of false antithesis. Compare also fr. 230 K-A: ἀποθανεῖν ἢ τεθνάναι οὔ μοι διαφέϱει, which can be read either as a philosophical statement of not fearing death "to die or to be dead is of no difference to me" or as a pun about the synonymity between present tense verbs and stative perfects "for me, 'to die' is no different than 'to be dead.'"

Elsewhere, Epicharmus's intellectual borrowings derive more squarely from early Greek philosophical discourse. For example, fr. 166 reads, "this is humankind's nature, to be flatulent windbags" (αὔτα φύσις ἀνθρώπων, ἀσκοὶ πεφυσημένοι). The joke puns on the verbal resonances between φυσάω and φύσις. The latter being a foundational concept for the natural philosophers (φυσικοί).[75] Rather than use the concept of "nature" seriously, Epicharmus mines its comic potential, redeploying it as a conceptual framework for reimagining humans as a bunch of gasbags. In fr. 278 K-A, he makes further use of this concept of *phusis*; however, in this instance, he shifts his comic gaze from humans to hens:

> Eumaeus, skill is not one thing alone, rather all who at least live also have intelligence. For the female race of chickens, if you care to study them intently, do not give birth to living offspring, rather they cluck and give the chick life. This skill, how it works, only nature knows; for she taught it to herself.

> Εὔμαιε, τὸ σοφόν ἐστιν οὐ καθ' ἓν μόνον,
> ἀλλ' ὅσσα περ ζῇ, πάντα καὶ γνώμαν ἔχει.
> καὶ γὰρ τὸ θῆλυ τῶν ἀλεκτορίδων γένος,
> αἰ λῇς καταμαθεῖν ἀτενὲς, οὐ τίκτει τέκνα
> ζῶντ', ἀλλ' ἐπῴζει καὶ ποιεῖ ψυχὰν ἔχειν.
> τὸ δὲ σοφὸν ἅ φύσις τόδ' οἶδεν ὥς ἔχει
> μόνα· πεπαίδευται γὰρ αὐταύτας ὕπο.

---

[74] Michael Gagarin, "Background and Origins: Oratory and Rhetoric before the Sophists," in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 33.

[75] On the pre-Socratic 'invention of nature,' see G.E.R. Lloyd, *Methods and Problems in Greek Science: Selected Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 417-434.

The historian Alcimus, who preserves the passage, does not provide anything by way of context;[76] though the humor is apparent enough. An unnamed character waxes philosophical to his interlocutor, Eumaeus, about the hidden nature of hens. Here again, Epicharmus is harnessing a common pre-Socratic idea for the purposes of comedy. In this case, he amusingly suggests that a cluck-cluck here and cluck-cluck there are signs of hidden workings of nature. Although just a joke, the passage reveals just how elastic (and gelastic) this new concept of φύσις can become.

By far the most famous example in which Epicharmus draws upon contemporary intellectual discourse is with his so-called "Growing Argument" (*αὐξανόμενος λόγος* or *αὐξόμενος λόγος*)[77] —also simply known as the "Epicharmian argument" (Ἐπιχάρμειος *λόγος*).[78] It is, in effect, a version of the Ship of Theseus conundrum. Epicharmus seems to have worked his "Growing Argument" into various comic scenarios, such as the one described in fr. 136 K-A. According to the Anonymous Commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus*, Epicharmus wrote of an encounter between a debtor and his creditor. The debtor had dined on the creditor's dime and promised that he would pay his debt. When the creditor asked the debtor for repayment, the debtor argued that he is not the same man who took the loan. Since his body mass had changed slightly, so had he. The creditor beats the debtor, and, for the beating, the debtor takes the creditor to court. In a final twist, the creditor uses the same "Growing Argument" in his defense—claiming that he is not the same man

---

[76] Alcimus wrote a four-book treatise with the aim of showing that Plato plagiarized ideas from Epicharmus. Diogenes Laertius quotes him quoting Epicharmus. I treat the fragments as genuine. For a broader discussion of their authenticity, see the most recent edition of the fragments: Favi, *Epicarmo e pseudo-Epicarmo*.

[77] *αὐξάνω* (Chrysippus fr. 397 *SVF* II = Philo, *On the Eternity of the World* 48), *αὔξω* (Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, col. 71 and Plutarch, *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance* 559a).

[78] Epicharmus test. 1 = *Suda* ε 2766 Adler. The argument reappears again in the *Dissoi Logoi* (DK 90 5.13–15). It is again debated among Hellenistic philosophers, see David Sedley, "The Stoic Criterion of Identity," *Phronesis* 27 (1982): 255-75.

(physically) as the one who did the beating earlier. Therefore, he deserves no blame.

As chance would have it, the specific language of this “Growing Argument” may have been preserved by the historian Alcimus who quotes an Epicharmian dialogue that proceeds along the same lines as described in fr. 136:

> (A) If someone wants to add an integer to an odd number, or, if you prefer, to an even number, or subtract from what was there, does it seem to you that it will still be the same? (B) Not to me, no. (A) Nor, indeed, if someone wants to add length to the measure of a cubit or cut away from what was already there, would that still be the measure? (B) No it wouldn’t. (A) In this light, now consider humans as well. One grows, another shrinks, and all are in flux all of the time. An object that will change its nature and never remain the same would then be something different from what has changed. Both you and I were different yesterday and are different now and [will be] different again, and, due to the very same argument, we’re never the same.

αἰ πὸτ ἀριθμόν τις περισσόν, αἰ δὲ λῇς πὸτ ἄρτιον
ποτθέμειν λῇ ψᾶφον ἢ καὶ τᾶν ὑπαρχουσᾶν λαβεῖν,
ἦ δοκεῖ κα τοί γ’ <ἔθ’> ωὕτὸς εἶμεν; οὐκ ἐμίν γα κα.
οὐδὲ μὰν οὐδ’ αἰ ποτὶ μέτρον παχυαῖον ποτθέμειν
λῇ τις ἅτερον μᾶκος ἢ τοῦ πρόσθ’ ἐόντος ἀποταμεῖν,
ἔτι χ’ ὑπάρχοι κῆνο τὸ μέτρον; οὐ γάρ. ὧδε νῦν ὅρη
καὶ τὸς ἀνθρώπους· ὃ μὲν γὰρ αὔξεθ’, ὃ δέ γα μὰν φθίνει,
ἐν μεταλλαγᾷ δὲ πάντες ἐντὶ πάντα τὸν χρόνον.
ὃ δὲ μεταλλάσσει κατὰ φύσιν κοὔποκ’ ἐν τωὕτῷ μένει,
ἅτερον εἴη κα τόδ’ ἤδη τοῦ παρεξεστακότος.
καὶ τὺ δὴ κἠγὼ χθὲς ἄλλοι καὶ νὺν ἄλλοι τελέθομες,
καὖθις ἄλλοι κοὔποχ’ ωὕτοὶ κὰτ τὸν <αὐτὸν αὖ> λόγον[79]

Character A, who is perhaps the debtor, explains to Character B, who is perhaps the creditor, how human identities must necessarily change just as their bodies change over time. The passage essentially outlines the "Growing Argument" and, in doing so, touches on many hallmarks of pre-Socratic thought: being and becoming, the one and the many, as well as *phusis* (once again).

---

[79] Fr. 276 K-A = *BNJ* 560 (Alkimos) F6.

Those who encounter the passage tend to seek out a direct influence or philosophical agenda behind the curious thought experiment. According to the Anonymous Commentator, Epicharmus's interest in the "Growing Argument" is a result of his acquaintance with the local Pythagoreans ([ὁμιλή]σας τοῖς Πυθα[γορείοις]).[80] This assumption draws on a long tradition in antiquity of viewing Epicharmus as something of a crypto-Pythagorean.[81] Some modern scholars, while not labeling Epicharmus as a Pythagorean *per se*, have supported the link between the "Growing Argument" and Pythagorean philosophy—especially in light of the initial remarks concerning even and odd numbers.[82] Others have supposed a greater debt to the Heraclitean notion of flux.[83] Whether Epicharmus took his argument directly from any particular source or (more likely to my mind) draws on philosophical discourse more broadly, we can be sure that his purpose for deploying the argument is not to use comedy as a platform for philosophy, but philosophy as a platform for comedy.

---

[80] Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, col. 71.

[81] Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin Minar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 289n58.

[82] Augusto Rostagni, *Il verbo di Pitagora* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1924), 26-39; Luigi Battezzato, "Pythagorean Comedies from Epicharmus to Alexis," *Aevum Antiquum* 8 (2008): 139-64; et al.

[83] Jacob Bernays, "Epicharmos und der αὐξόμενος λόγος," in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, ed. H. Usener, vol. 1 (1853; repr., Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1885), 111; Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1 (1903; repr., Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1960), ad loc.; Omar Álvarez Salas, "La 'teoría del flujo' de Heráclito a Epicarmo," in *Nuevos ensayos sobre Heráclito: actas del segundo Symposium Heracliteum*, ed. E. Piccone (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009), 225-60; et al. This supposition partially follows upon Plato's remark that Epicharmus was not only the leader of comedy (ἄκρος κωμωιδίας) but also a fundamental flux-theorist (Plato, *Theaetetus* 152e = Epicharmus test. 3 K-A).

As the Anonymous Commentator recognizes, Epicharmus used the "Growing Argument" for comic purposes ([ἐκ]ω̣μ̣ῴιδησεν αὐτὸ).[84] Even then, however, his comedic agenda should not (and certainly did not) invalidate the philosophical insights raised by the playful dialogue.

In different fragments, Epicharmus approaches the "Growing Argument" from different angles in order to produce different comedic conundrums. For instance, in fr. 147, Epicharmus's curious dialogue about an old tripod puts a slightly different twist on the "Growing Argument" than was found in the situation of the debtor and creditor:

> (A) What's this? (B) A tripod, clearly. (A) Then why does it have four legs? It's not a tripod, rather a tetrapod, as I see it. (B) Its name is "tripod," despite it having four legs. (A) Well, if it were ever a dipod, you're thinking of the riddle of Oedipus.

> τί δὲ τόδ' ἐστί; δηλαδὴ τϱίπους. τί μὰν ἔχει πόδας
> τέτοϱας; ούκ ἔστιν τϱίπους, ἀλλ' <ἐστὶν> οἶμαι τετϱάπους.
> ἔστι δ' ὄνυμ' αὐτῶι τϱίπους, τέτοϱάς γα μὰν ἔχει πόδας.
> εἰ δίπους τοίνυν ποκ' ἦς αἰνίγματ' Οἰ<δίπου> νοεῖς.

In this dialogue, two characters are in the presence of a tripod that happens to have four legs. One additional leg has likely been added for extra support.[85] When it comes to naming the object, the characters are at odds. Character A demands that the object be called a tetrapod, while Character B insists that the object still be called a tripod, as is customary. Like the scenario between the creditor and debtor, this conflict over the name of a tripod hinges on a version of the "Growing Argument"; that is, it comes down to whether an object's identity can persist over time and despite change.

When faced with the question of whether a tripod remains a tripod even after it "grows" another leg, Character A seems, at first blush, to endorse a position similar to the debtor in the previous comedic scenario—that is, he seems to suggest that the identity of an object changes with alterations to its physical makeup. However, the joke that caps fr. 147 actually suggests a slightly different response to the conundrum. Character A suggests that if the *tetrapod* had once been a *dipod*, Character B might be thinking about the riddle of Oedipus (i.e., the riddle of the Sphinx). On the surface, Character A is making a clever pun on εἰ δίπους and Οἰδίπους. More subtle and philosophically interesting is the consequence of the comparison between the riddle of the tripod and the riddle of the Sphinx. According to the latter, the identity of a human, like Oedipus, persists throughout life despite change—whether on four legs (as an infant), two legs (as a grown-up), or three legs (as an old man). The implicit question that Character A raises by introducing this riddle is whether or not the dispute over the tripod follows the same principle—should one think of a τρίπους in the same way as one thinks of an Οἰδίπους? Character B seems to think so, whereas Character A seems to suggest that a distinction exists in the way we identify things; some things, like humans, maintain their identity over time despite change (as in the riddle of the Sphinx), whereas other things, like tripods, are material assemblages named in accordance with what they look like and what they do (as in the riddle of the tripod). In other words, people (like Oedipus) hold on to their identities, but things (like tripods) do not. This back and forth would seem right at home in philosophical discussions about words and their correspondence to reality.[86] However, here the context is far less serious. Lofty notions of ontology and onomatology are creatively woven into a multi-layered joke about Oedipal tripods. The audience of the scene would no doubt have delighted in both παιδία and παιδεία, amused by the humor and bemused by the intellectual game.

---

[84] Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus,* col. 71.

[85] …as is common enough from archeological evidence (Anna Novokhatko, "Δηλαδὴ Τϱίπους: On Epicharmus Fr. 147 K-A," in *Fragmentation in Ancient Greek Drama*, eds. Anna Lamari, Franco Montanari, and Anna Novokhatko (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 345–50).

---

[86] For early Greek linguistic thought, see Peter Schmitter, "Die Anfänge der griechischen Sprachforschung," in *History of the Language Sciences / Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften / Histoire des sciences du langage*, ed. Sylvian Auroux et al., vol. 1 (New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 345–66.

One last fragment in which Epicharmus toys with the "Growing Argument" is also quoted by the historian Alcimus in fr. 275 K-A = *BNJ* 560 (Alkimos) F6:

> (A) But the gods always were and never left; these things are always the same and in the same ways. (B) But it is said that Chaos was the first of the gods. (A) How could that be without there being anything from which or to which the first thing might pass? (B) So nothing came first? (A) Nor, by Zeus, did anything come second, at least of the things we now speak, rather these things always were.
>
> ἀλλ′ ἀεὶ τοὶ θεοὶ παρῆσαν χὐπέλιπον οὐ πώποκα·
> τάδε δ′ ἀεὶ πάρεσθ′ ὁμοῖα διά τε τῶν αὐτῶν ἀεί.
> ἀλλὰ λέγεται μὰν Χάος πρᾶτον γενέσθαι τῶν θεῶν.
> πῶς δέ κα, μὴ ἔχον γ′ ἀπὸ τίνος μηδ′ ἐς ὅτι πρᾶτον μόλοι;
> οὐκ ἄρ′ ἔμολεν πρᾶτον οὐδέν; οὐδὲ μὰ Δία δεύτερον
> τῶνδε γ′ ὧν ἁμές νυν ὧδε λέγομες, ἀλλ′ ἀεὶ τάδ′ ἦς

If the argument sounds familiar, it is perhaps because Epicurus lodged the same critique of traditional Greek cosmogony before founding his own philosophy.[87] Like Epicurus, Character A is critiquing Hesiod specifically, but also anyone else who maintains that gods were born.[88] As with fragment 276 above, scholars have debated which early Greek philosopher Epicharmus might be indebted to here. One candidate is Parmenides, whose notion of unchanging being shows similarities to the unchanging nature of the gods described in this passage.[89] However, many other philosophers also had theories of unborn, eternal elements (and deities) that would better complement the remarks of Epicharmus's theological theoretician than Parmenides's theory. As Rosemary Wright remarks, "Being born, but not dying, was the first characteristic of divinity to be attacked in Presocratic cosmology."[90] Epicharmus was not the only person in his day, then, to criticize Hesiod's (ofttimes convoluted) cosmogony. What makes his critique particularly "Epicharmian" is that it seems to be yet another spin on the "Growing Argument." Instead of toying with the identity of *humans* (fr. 136 and 276 K-A) or *objects* (like tripods, fr. 147 K-A), Epicharmus here takes up the question of the identity of *gods*.[91] Unlike the previous examples, Epicharmus's Character A carefully insulates the gods from the problem of identity and physical change by repackaging them in a newfangled conceptual framework—a framework that amusingly comes under immediate pressure once Character A slips in a colloquial oath: "Nor, by Zeus, did anything come second" (οὐδὲ μὰ Δία δεύτερον), which tacitly calls to mind the traditional views of the gods, their hierarchies, and histories that early Greek cosmologies tried to upend.[92]

---

[87] Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 10.17–19.

[88] Hesiod, *Theogony* 115–116 cf. Homer, *Iliad* 13.355, 14.302–303.

[89] Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ad loc.; Andreas Capra and Martinelli Tempesta, "Riding from Elea to Athens (via Syracuse). The *Parmenides* and the Early Reception of Eleatism: Epicharmus, Cratinus, and Plato," *Méthexis* 24 (2011): 135–75; et al.

In these various examples, Epicharmus seizes upon the singular issue of identity and change, familiar enough from early Greek cosmologies, and toys with it by enacting it through different dramatic dialogues. Like the concept of *phusis,* the thought experiment of the "Growing Argument" provided Epicharmus with a tool for creating jokes that defeat expectations and find the surreal in the real. Rather than endorse one solution, he approaches it from different angles and, in the words of the Anonymous Commentator, dealt with the conundrum thoroughly and believably (λ̣[όγον] ἐφοδ[ικῶς καὶ πισ]τ̣[ῶς ἐ]π̣έ̣ρα[(ι)νε], col. 71).[93] Taken together they seem to furnish their audience with a variety of lessons for how to think freely, creatively, and critically about the philosophical disputes of the day.

---

[90] Rosemary Wright, "Is Presocratic Cosmology Atheistic?" in *Penser Les Dieux Avec Les Présocratiques*, ed. R. Saetta Cottone (Paris: Rue d'Ulm, 2021), 15–27. See, e.g., Pherecydes DK 7B1; Heraclitus DK 22B30, et al.

[91] Character A makes clear that he is speaking specifically about the category of gods alone: "*these things here* [i.e., gods] are always the same and in the same way" (τάδε δ' ἀεὶ πάρεσθ' ὁμοῖα διά τε τῶν αὐτῶν ἀεί); "Nor, by Zeus, did anything come second, *at least of the things we now speak*, rather *these things* always were" (οὐδὲ μὰ Δία δεύτερον | τῶνδε γ' ὧν ἁμές νυν ὧδε λέγομες, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ τάδ' ἦς).

[92] The name of Zeus along with the notion of coming second (δεύτερον), may subtly allude to lines 47–8 of Hesiod's *Theogony* where the Muses are said to sing second (δεύτερον) of Zeus, the father of gods and men (θεῶν πατέρ' ἠδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν) while at the same time both begin and end their song with Zeus (ἀρχόμεναί θ' ὑμνεῦσι θεαὶ λήγουσί τ' ἀοιδῆς). The passage epitomizes well the complicated issue of Zeus's priority: he did not come first genealogically but he is still considered first. The awkwardness of the passage has caused some editors to leave it out, though, if authentic, Epicharmus may be alluding to it. For a discussion as well as the noted parallel with Epicharmus, see Gabor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173n67.

Several centuries after Epicharmus wrote, Theocritus penned an epigram in which he describes the comic poet as a great teacher:

> The dialect is Doric and the man, Epicharmus, inventor of comedies. To you, Bacchus, a bronze statue of his true likeness has been dedicated by the Syracusans, inhabitants of a great city, since he is a fellow citizen. It is fitting for those who remember his wise sayings to pay him back in this way: he spoke of many things useful for young lives. He has our deep gratitude
>
> Ἆ τε φωνὰ Δώριος χὠνὴρ ὁ τὰν κωμῳδίαν
> εὑρὼν Ἐπίχαρμος.
> ὦ Βάκχε, χάλκεόν νιν ἀντ᾽ ἀλαθινοῦ
> τὶν ὧδ᾽ ἀνέθηκαν
> τοὶ Συρακούσσαις ἐνίδρυνται, πελωρίστᾳ πόλει,
> οἷ᾽ ἄνδρα πολίταν.
> σοφῶν ἔοικε ῥημάτων μεμναμένους
> τελεῖν ἐπίχειρα·
> πολλὰ γὰρ ποττὰν ζόαν τοῖς παισὶν εἶπε χρήσιμα.
> μεγάλα χάρις αὐτῷ.[94]

The epigram is remarkable for its size, being one of the longest devoted to a poet, as well as for its intertwining praise of Epicharmus and his city. Quite likely, Theocritus has in mind an image of pseudo-Epicharmus—a sage to whom many sententiae had been falsely attributed. However, the picture of Epicharmus as a praiseworthy pedagogue is perhaps not inappropriate for his genuine comedies too. If they taught anything to their audiences it was how to approach peddlers of wisdom, both old and new, with some healthy skepticism and a fertile mind. His comic manipulations of early Greek philosophical ideas show, moreover, that a comedy is fully capable of grappling with serious philosophical ideas—as long as those ideas can be rigged with a punchline.

---

[93] Here I follow the reconstruction offered by Battezzato, "Pythagorean Comedies," 57–8.

[94] *Palatine Anthology* 9.600 = Theocr. 18 Gow.

The tendency to rifle through the philosopher's toolkit in search of various vehicles through which to deliver fresh jokes is not a feature specific to Epicharmian comedy. One can think of the allegorical "reading" of the flying dung beetle in Aristophanes's *Peace* (43–48), the mock-cosmology of sight and hearing in the opening lines of the *Thesmophoriazusae* (1–21), or any number of episodes in the *Clouds*. Nor is it only Aristophanes who follows in Epicharmus's footsteps, but also Ameipsias's *Connus*, Cratinus's *Archilochus* and *Company and All-Seeing Ones*, Eupolis's *Flatterers*, and Metagenes's *Sophists* (also called *Homer* or *Men in Training*). Comedians are as fond of ribbing philosophers for their mannerisms and pretenses as they are of robbing them of their newfangled theories. The foregoing remarks show that this rivalrous relationship between the comedian and the philosopher, the jokester and the intellectual is traceable even in our earliest fragments of comedy.