Iphigenia as his once-prospective bride: 'Never will your daughter be slaughtered by her father since she was called mine' (935–6). He dwells upon the insult to his honour and the wrongful appropriation of his name (938–69). Then he calls his sword to witness, in words that leave no doubt as to intent:

> I will smear my sword with stains of barbarian blood,
> if someone will deprive me of your daughter. (971–2)

The sword, no longer merely a prop for the actor playing a soldier, becomes the focus of Achilles' conflict with Agamemnon. It visualizes Achilles' intention not to mourn, not to 'lament', but rather to set things right for Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and himself in the way of a warrior more readily disposed to violence than to pity.

Achilles' speech argues vigorously for the reading καταστελῶ in order to restore not only its meaning but also the telling stage direction contained in that word.

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EIPΩNEIA IN ARISTOPHANES AND PLATO

I. INTRODUCTION

Otto Ribbeck's 'Über den Begriff des εἴρων' of 1876 is the point of departure for modern studies of εἰρωνεία in Graeco-Roman antiquity.[1] Ribbeck engaged the topic in the course of research into Theophrastus' characters. His aim was to provide a background in terms of which to understand Theophrastus' εἴρων. Ribbeck's article begins with the earliest surviving occurrences of the word, in Aristophanes, and suggests that it is there used as a vulgar term of insult meaning 'liar'. It is argued that the same sense occurs throughout Plato, where chronologically the next cluster of cognate instances occurs.

Most recently, Melissa Lane's 'The evolution of *eirôneia* in classical Greek texts: why Socratic *eirôneia* is not Socratic irony' largely confirms Ribbeck's conclusion.[2] Lane argues that εἰρωνεία means 'deception' or 'concealing by feigning'.[3] She also emphasizes that, in contrast, irony, precisely verbal irony, is 'saying something with the intent that the message is understood as conveying the opposite or an otherwise different meaning'.[4] For example, a museum patron mocks a hideous painting by calling it gorgeous. Thus, in the case of εἰρωνεία, success implies that the intended audience believes what the εἴρων literally says, whereas in the case of irony, success implies that the intended audience does not believe what the ironist literally says. Consequently, εἰρωνεία should never be translated as 'irony', and Socratic εἰρωνεία, to the extent that it exists, is not Socratic irony, to the extent that that exists.

[1] *RhM* 31 (1876), 381–400. See also Wilhelm Büchner, 'Über den Begriff der Eironeia', *Hermes* 76 (1941), 339–58 and Lief Bergson, 'Eiron und Eironeia', *Hermes* 99 (1971) 407–22, as well as the bibliography in David Wolfsdorf, 'The Irony of Socrates,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (2007), 175–87, and in Melissa Lane's article, cited in the following note.

[2] *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006), 49–83.

[3] Ibid. 53.

[4] Ibid. 49.

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Ribbeck's and Lane's conclusions point in the right direction. Nowhere in Aristophanes or Plato should εἰρωνεία be translated as 'irony'. On the other hand, Ribbeck's and Lane's conclusions do not go far enough. In Aristophanes and Plato εἰρωνεία has a more specific meaning than 'deception'.

In their discussion of cunning intelligence among the Greeks, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant describe the following hunting tactic of the fox. When he sees a herd of deer, the fox crouches low to the ground and pretends to be asleep so that when his unsuspecting prey grazes close by, he can effectively spring upon them.[5] The fox's hunting tactic well illustrates the precise meaning of εἰρωνεία: εἰρωνεία is the use of deception to profit at the expense of another by presenting oneself as innocuous or even benign in an effort to disarm the intended victim.

In a fragment of a lost comedy of Philemon, the fox is characterized as εἴρων.[6] Compare our expression 'sly as a fox'. Accordingly I will refer to the precise meaning of εἰρωνεία as the vulpine sense. The thesis of this paper is that in Aristophanes and Plato εἰρωνεία and its cognates are used in the vulpine sense.

My argument for this thesis will proceed with a discussion of all instances of εἰρωνεία and its cognates in Aristophanes and Plato. According to the vulpine sense, εἰρωνεία is a species of deception. Consequently the interpretation of 'deception' is consistent with the uses of εἰρωνεία. Therefore, my argument rests on showing that the contexts in which εἰρωνεία and its cognates occur share features that suggest that εἰρωνεία and its cognates are used in a more specific way. The more frequently these shared features occur, in the absence of any contradictory evidence, the more plausible the view that they are not merely coincidental to the use of εἰρωνεία – accordingly, the more implausible the view that εἰρωνεία merely means 'deception'.

II. *ΕΙΡΩΝΕΙΑ* IN ARISTOPHANES

εἰρωνεία or its cognates occur four times in Aristophanes: *Nub.* 439, *Vesp*. 173, *Pax* 623, *Av*. 1211. The earliest surviving instance – assuming that the instance of εἴρων in the revised version of *Clouds* also existed in the original version – occurs in 423. The salvo of insults to which Strepsiades envisions he will be subject if he learns the sophists' teachings is, at least initially, loosely organized into semantic clusters:[7] θρασύς, τολμηρός and ἴτης relate to boldness; εὔγλωττος, ψευδῶν συγκολλητής and εὑρησιεπής relate to linguistic facility, but with negative connotations;[8] περίτριμμα δικῶν and κύρβις relate to familiarity with the legal system; and μάσθλης, εἴρων, γλοιός and ἀλαζών relate to deception and shiftiness.[9]

In this case, little more can be derived from the passage about the εἴρων *per se* than that he is duplicitous, hard to pin down and undesirable. For instance, it is unclear from this context whether εἴρων is intended to mean something different from the other associated terms. Aristophanes could be iterating the same idea with different words.

[5] Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les ruses d'intelligence. La Metis des grecs* (Paris, 1974), translated as *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. J. Lloyd (1978); the chapter is entitled 'The fox and the octopus'.

[6] οὐκ ἔστ' ἀλώπηξ ἡ μὲν εἴρων τῇ φύσει, ἡ δ' αὐθέκαστος.

[7] *Pace* Bergson (n. 1) who claims no order can be distinguished.

[8] So also κρόταλον, but βδελυρός is an exception.

[9] τρύμη, if it refers to the practice of thieves boring into the walls of houses is, also, albeit more tenuously, associated with this cluster. Hereafter, the terms lack any specific semantic unity.

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The instance in *Peace*, performed in 421, is more revealing. Hermes describes how some tributary allies, disgruntled with Athens, succeeded in persuading Spartan leaders to break the peace. These Spartans are described by the Aristophanic coinage διειρωνόξενοι, that is, εἴρων toward foreigners. LSJ provide the following gloss: 'treacherous under the mask of hospitality'. Compare Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

In *Wasps*, performed in 422, Philocleon, who is imprisoned within his house, suggests that he should go and sell the donkey at the market. But he fails thereby to trick Xanthias and Bdelycleon into letting him out. Xanthias comments: 'With such craft he dropped the bait (οἵαν πρόφασιν καθῆκεν), how εἰρωνικῶς'.[10] And Bdelycleon replies: 'But he caught nothing by this means'.[11] Their expressions are clearly drawn from angling.

In *Birds*, performed in 414, Peisthetaerus interrogates Iris regarding how she got into the city. She replies, honestly, that she does not know. But her accuser thinks she is withholding knowledge and responds with indignation: 'Have you heard her, how she εἰρωνεύεται?'[12] He thinks she is dissembling, but he also thinks that her denial conceals a competence, knowledge, that threatens him.

Note that there are many reasons for dissembling. One might dissemble to conceal one's ignorance or incompetence. One might dissemble to spare the feelings of others. One might dissemble to illustrate a point that could not be illustrated otherwise. One might dissemble because frankness would be dangerous. A culture concerned with any particular form of dissembling might generate or adapt a word for that particular form. In the case of the Aristophanic uses, at least the last three, but given the temporal and generic proximity of *Clouds*, most likely in this instance too, εἰρωνεία and its cognates means something more specific than 'dissembling'. Precisely, εἰρωνεία is a sly, crafty dissembling by which the εἴρων presents himself in a positive aspect, be it as beneficent, amiable, modest or simply innocuous, when in fact he is self-seeking and harmful. The strategy of the εἴρων is thereby to disarm another and defeat him. In other words, the εἴρων is vulpine.

III. *EIPΩNEIA* IN PLATO'S EARLY DIALOGUES

Among Plato's early dialogues, εἰρωνεία and its cognates occur six times: *Ap.* 38a1, *Euthd.* 302b3, *Grg.* 489e1, 3 and *R.* 337a4, 6.[13]

At *Apology* 37e–38a Socrates explains why he cannot stop philosophizing. In giving the explanation Socrates also notes that the jury is unlikely to accept it as sincere: 'If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the divine, you will not believe me and think that I am *eironizing* (εἰρωνευομένῳ)'.[14] The truth is that Socrates regards his philosophical activity as obedient to the divine. The jurors, however, are bound to think that this man, who is on trial for impiety, is presenting his philosophizing as pious precisely to exculpate himself and to conceal from them the seditious dimensions of his activity.

[10] 173–4.
[11] ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔσπασεν ταύτῃ γ' (175–6).
[12] 1211.
[13] Note that I am treating *Republic* 1 as an early dialogue, composed independently and significantly prior to the rest of *Republic*. Little rests on this chronological commitment, nor on my conventional treatment in the following section of *Cratylus* and *Symposium* as middle period dialogues and *Sophist* and *Laws* as late dialogues.
[14] *Ap.* 37e5–38a1. Here and elsewhere I use the coinage *eironize* in order to allow the meaning of the Greek to emerge from context.

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At *Euthydemus* 302a–b, Dionysodorus attempts to defeat Socrates with one of his sophisms. Having elicited Socrates' commitment to a set of premises, Dionysodorus prepares to draw the fatal conclusion. He is described as follows: 'Then he, pausing in a wholly *ironic* manner (εἰρωνικῶς), as though he were considering some weighty matter, said …'.[15] Dionysodorus here gives the impression of being in deep thought; that is, he pretends to be treating the discussion in an earnest and thus well-intentioned manner. Of course, the opposite is the case, and Socrates' subsequent remark makes this clear: 'I tried to escape by some futile turn and twisted around as though I were caught in a net'.[16] As in the *Wasps* passage, the hunting or angling metaphor occurs here. Comparable is the passage in *Sophist* where the Eleatic visitor's attempt to define the sophist begins with an account of the angler ostensibly to demonstrate the diairetic method. The model chosen is also loaded, for the sophist is subsequently defined, among other ways, as a kind of hunter who preys on wealthy youth.[17]

In *Republic* 1, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates: 'By Heracles … there it is, Socrates' accustomed εἰρωνεία. I knew it all along, and I told these people in advance that you'd be unwilling to answer, that you'd *eironize* (εἰρωνεύσοιο) and do anything except give an answer if someone were to ask you a question'.[18] Thrasymachus believes that Socrates is concealing his views under the pretence of ignorance. By falsely disavowing competence, Socrates can criticize the views of others and avoid criticism himself.

At *Gorgias* 489e Callicles accuses Socrates of εἰρωνεία, and Socrates accuses Callicles of εἰρωνεία in turn: '[Ca.] You are *eironizing* (εἰρωνεύῃ), Socrates. [So.] No, by Zethos, Callicles, whom you used just now in *eironizing* (εἰρωνεύου) with me'.[19] Immediately before this exchange, Socrates says that he had guessed some time ago that Callicles, in saying that the stronger are better, did not mean that the many are better because physically stronger. Therefore, Callicles is annoyed with Socrates because he believes that Socrates deliberately misinterpreted him in order to make him appear foolish. In other words, Callicles accuses Socrates of pretending to be simple-minded by offering an extremely literal interpretation of Callicles' account precisely in order to criticize that simple-minded account and thereby Callicles. Socrates' accusation of εἰρωνεία, in turn, refers to Callicles' earlier remarks, when, in criticizing Socrates' involvement in philosophy, Callicles claimed that he was sympathetic to Socrates and looking out for his best interests. Socrates now thinks that Callicles' sincere belief is that Socrates' involvement in philosophy is despicable; thus, Callicles previously expressed himself in a disingenuous way to give the impression that he was concerned with Socrates' wellbeing. In short, Callicles' principal aim was to attack philosophy, not to support Socrates.

[15] *Euthd.* 302b3–4.

[16] ἄπορόν τινα στροφὴν ἔφευγον τε καὶ ἐστρεφόμην ἤδη ὥσπερ ἐν δικτύῳ εἰλημμένος (302b6–7)

[17] Compare Socrates' description in *Protagoras* of the sophist as dangerous precisely because, like a merchant, he extols his wares without genuine concern for its benefit to the naive young customer.

[18] 337a4–7.

[19] *Grg.* 489e1–3.

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IV. *EIPΩNEIA* IN PLATO'S MIDDLE AND LATE DIALOGUES

Five other instances of cognates of εἰρωνεία occur in Plato: *Cra.* 384a1, *Symp.* 216e5, 218d6, *Soph*. 268a7, and *Leg*. 908e2.

Cratylus begins with Hermogenes perplexed by Cratylus' claims regarding the natural correctness of names, and specifically that 'Hermogenes' is not Hermogenes' correct name. Hermogenes protests to Socrates that when he asks Cratylus to explain himself, Cratylus obfuscates:

> Now, although I ask him and make an effort to learn what in the world he means, he does not make himself clear at all; he *eironizes* (εἰρωνεύεται) with me by presenting the appearance of having some understanding in himself, as though he has the knowledge, and if he desired to explain it clearly to me, he would make me agree with him and commit to the very things he says. So if you are able to interpret the oracle of Cratylus, I would gladly hear from you.[20]

Compare also Hermogenes' comment later in the dialogue:

> As I said at the beginning, Cratylus often makes a lot of trouble for me. He claims that there is a correctness of words, but he does not clearly say what it is. The result is that I am unable to determine whether, on the occasions when he speaks about these things, he is intentionally or unintentionally being obscure.[21]

Clearly Hermogenes thinks that Cratylus presents his theory of names in an intentionally obscure way. In doing so, Cratylus can achieve several objectives. First, he can give the impression of sophistication and of possessing expertise. Second, he can avoid subjecting his views to scrutiny and so conceal any defects. Third, Hermogenes' failure to understand Cratylus will appear to be due to Hermogenes' simple-mindedness, concealing Cratylus' responsibility for effecting that impression. Thus, Hermogenes accuses Cratylus of εἰρωνεία in so far as Cratylus presents himself as an earnest intellectual, when in fact, according to Hermogenes, Cratylus is behaving like a sophist, concerned to maintain an appearance of expertise, regardless of the truth of the matter, and at the expense of others such as Hermogenes.

In *Symposium*, Alcibiades gives a speech in which he accuses Socrates of 'spend-[ing] his whole life *eironizing* (εἰρωνευόμενος) and playing with all men'.[22] This claim immediately precedes Alcibiades' story of his futile erotic venture with Socrates. The gist of Alcibiades' story is that Alcibiades had fallen in love with Socrates and had boldly pursued him. Alcibiades had arranged to meet with Socrates in private and there professed his love, claiming that no one more than Socrates could help him to achieve his aim of becoming the best possible person.

Alcibiades describes Socrates' response to his profession of love as characteristically and utterly εἰρωνικῶς.[23] Socrates responds that if Socrates is capable of making Alcibiades a better man, then Socrates' power is greater than Alcibiades' beauty; but then the exchange of Socrates' aid for Alcibiades' beauty is unfair. If Alcibiades has accurately detected Socrates' power, then Alcibiades is more accomplished than he realizes. However, Alcibiades should be careful since he may not perceive correctly, and Socrates might in fact be of no use to him.[24] Socrates

[20] *Cra*. 383b8–384a5.
[21] *Cra*. 427d3–7.
[22] *Symp.* 216e3–5.
[23] *Symp*. 218d6–7.
[24] *Symp*. 218e–219a.

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concludes: 'In the future, let's consider things together; we'll always do what seems the best to both of us'.[25]

Alcibiades interprets Socrates' response as an indication that his own words have 'hit their mark' and that Socrates is 'smitten by his arrows'.[26] The reason for this is that the practical consequence of Socrates' response is that he and Alcibiades should subsequently spend time together, doing what is mutually satisfactory. Assuming, then, that sex is going to be a part of their future relationship, Alcibiades slips underneath Socrates' cloak and embraces him. To Alcibiades' amazement, however, Socrates simply goes to sleep. Alcibiades thus winds up deeply humiliated by Socrates' disinterest in his physical beauty. And at the end of his speech Alcibiades says that Socrates has deceived (ἐξαπατῶν) him, as well as other youths, for Socrates initially appeared to be the lover, but it turned out that Socrates was the beloved.[27]

In this stretch of *Symposium*, Alcibiades attributes εἰρωνεία to Socrates twice, first as a general characteristic, then specifically with regard to Socrates' response to Alcibiades' profession of love. I will explain both attributions, but since I view the latter as explicable in terms of the former, I will begin with the first, general attribution.

Alcibiades was under the impression that, on account of his extraordinary physical beauty, Socrates had a sexual interest in him. Alcibiades thought that he could benefit from Socrates' wisdom by exchanging sexual gratification for tutelage. Moreover, Alcibiades thought that this would be a mutually satisfactory exchange in so far as Alcibiades believed that Socrates valued sex with Alcibiades as much as Alcibiades valued Socrates' wisdom.

Alcibiades charges Socrates with deception on the grounds that Socrates allowed Alcibiades to remain benighted in the false belief that Socrates' interest in him was sexual. Moreover, Alcibiades' belief that Socrates would exchange wisdom for sex encouraged Alcibiades' belief that his physical beauty was of real value. Thus, the exposure of Socrates' disinterest in sex with Alcibiades was deeply humiliating to Alcibiades, for it then emerged that Alcibiades' beauty was of little value, and Alcibiades' sense of self-worth was consequently shattered. Moreover, in the process the value of Socrates' wisdom emerged unscathed, even elevated. Accordingly, as Alcibiades concludes, Socrates emerged as the more desirable of the two, and so as the beloved rather than the lover. In short, Alcibiades views Socrates as having triumphed in an erotic contest; Socrates emerged the real object of desire, although initially he made it seem that Alcibiades was.

The following words immediately precede Alcibiades' claim that Socrates spends his whole life *eironizing*: '… all the beauty a man may have means nothing to Socrates. He despises it more than any of you can believe; nor does wealth attract him, nor any sort of honour that many envy. All these possessions he counts as worthless, I assure you'.[28] For Alcibiades, then, Socrates' general εἰρωνεία manifests itself in a pretence of interest in conventionally valued goods such as beauty, wealth and honour. Those individuals who possess these conventionally valued goods falsely believe themselves to be objects of Socratic interest because they possess those goods. Such individuals, therefore, engage with Socrates on this false assumption, while Socrates uses their misunderstanding to achieve his own objectives.

[25] *Symp.* 219a8–b2.
[26] *Symp.* 219b3–4.
[27] *Symp.* 222a8–b4.
[28] *Symp.* 216d6–e5.

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Alcibiades views Socrates' specific response to Alcibiades' profession of love as exemplifying εἰρωνεία for the following reason. Alcibiades interprets Socrates' response as an expression of Socrates' desire to commune with him and therefore, falsely, of Socrates' sexual interest in him. Moreover, Alcibiades views his misinterpretation of Socrates' response as a consequence of the fact that Socrates did not previously disabuse him of his misconception of Socrates' interests. In other words, Socrates facilitated Alcibiades' misinterpretation of Socrates' response. Indeed, Socrates strategically facilitated Alcibiades' misconception of Socrates' interests in order to achieve his (Socrates') own objectives.

At the end of *Sophist* Theaetetus and the Eleatic visitor are summarizing the results of their inquiry into the identity of the sophist. The sophist has been defined as an imitator of belief. The visitor distinguishes two sorts of belief-imitators. One sort is naive and falsely believes he has knowledge; thus he unintentionally presents himself as knowing things he does not. The other sort does not think he knows 'the things he pretends in front of others to know'.[29] The former is described as a simple-minded (ἁπλοῦν) imitator, the latter as an εἰρωνικόν imitator;[30] and the latter is identified with the sophist. In other words, the sophist attempts to deceive by presenting an appearance of knowledge.

In *Laws* 10, the Athenian is describing to Clinias the sorts of punishment due to atheists. He distinguishes two sorts of atheist. One sort is, aside from his atheism, a just person. The other sort is unjust. Thus, 'both … suffer from a common failing, atheism, but in terms of the harm they do to others, the former is much less dangerous than the latter'.[31] The latter sort is, further, described as full of 'cunning and guile' and 'one who invents the so-called tricks of the sophists'; he is, then, described as εἰρωνικόν.

The shared features among the descriptions of the εἴρων sophist and atheist in *Sophist* and *Laws* are clear. The εἰρωνεία of both characters is consistent with the vulpine sense, for both characters use deception to appear innocuous or even benign in order to advance their personal interests at the expense of others.

V. CONCLUSION

In all the cases we have considered, except the first one, from Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the contexts suggest that εἰρωνεία and its cognates are not merely used to convey the sense of 'deception'. Rather, the individuals to whom εἰρωνεία is attributed are viewed as deceptively presenting themselves in an innocuous or even benign manner in an effort to gain at the expense of others. I emphasize that these attributions may well be false. Indeed, presumably all those attributed to Socrates are false, in so far as Socrates' intentions are pedagogical and benevolent, however uncomfortable or painful Socratic pedagogy may be for his pupils. However, in this brief study I have taken no interest in the question whether εἰρωνεία in fact is characteristic of Socrates. I have been concerned only to clarify what speakers such as Thrasymachus and Alcibiades mean when they charge Socrates with being εἴρων.

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[29] *Soph.* 268a3–4.
[30] *Soph.* 268e7–8.
[31] *Leg.* 908c.

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