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CHARACTER DRAWING IN
MENANDER'S *DYSKOLOS*:
MISANTHROPY AND PHILANTHROPY¹⁾)

BY

K. HAEGEMANS

ABSTRACT

Menander's *Dyskolos* is based on the moral concepts of *δυσκολία* (or *μισανθρωπία*) and *φιλανθρωπία*, notions that Aristotle discussed in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Diogenes Laertius' definition of philanthropy stresses the importance of social intercourse, hospitality, and generosity. In the play the characters display different stages of philanthropy. The first level, an excess of friendliness (obsequiousness), is represented in some minor characters. The second and best level, friendliness or philanthropy, is exhibited by Knemon's antagonists, Gorgias and Sostratos. While Sostratos has a pleasant character and is the perfect host, Gorgias illustrates the moral basis of the virtue. Gorgias runs the risk of turning into a misanthropist like Knemon, the main character, if his economic situation would remain as hard as it is. The basic elements (distrust, hardship) are present. Moreover Knemon seems to have started life as a philanthropist. He now represents the last level of the three: a lack of friendliness, or misanthropy. His disillusion turned him into a misanthrope. While Gorgias is an image of what Knemon might have been if his life had been easier, Knemon is what Gorgias might become if his life is hard. Thus Menander offers us the picture of a man's transformation in his play.

"It hangs over his desk, and at the top it is plainly labelled *Degrés des Âges*. I gather that it was a picture familiar enough in simple homes in France, but not often seen in the New World. It is a picture, a print, of the journey of life. Over a curved bridge marches Mankind, male and female. At the bottom of the bridge marches Childhood, Youth, Maturity and then—as the curve begins its descent—the marching couples portray Decay, Old Age, and at last,

1) I am very grateful to Prof. Kathryn J. Gutzwiller and to Prof. Ann N. Michelini, for their kind help and useful suggestions. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. G. Schepens for his advice. Thirdly, I am largely indebted to all the faculty of the Classics department of Cincinnati University for the opportunities they gave me and for a wonderful year.

again like infants, but now hideously wrinkled and toothless, labelled *Âge d'imbécilité*.”²⁾ With these words the Canadian novelist Robertson Davies makes a dead man's ghost describe a drawing of a genre that was popular in past times: the consecutive life phases of a person represented all together in one scene, as if they coexist.³⁾

With this paper I hope to demonstrate that Menander's *Dyskolos* contains a parallel idea: in this play the poet represents successive stages of one evolution simultaneously as well. Only, this time the suggested evolution is not life on the whole, but one facet of it: the subtle balance between philanthropy and misanthropy in a man's character.

Menander's bond with the Peripatetic school has been subject to scholarly interest from the first find of Menandrian text onwards.⁴⁾ Many of his plays were inspired by themes that can be traced back to Aristotle's ethical theories. The *Dyskolos* or *Misanthrope*⁵⁾ is obviously based on such moral concepts, more specifically on *δυσκολία* (or *μισανθρωπία*) and *φιλανθρωπία*, notions that Aristotle elaborated on in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Neither Aristotle, nor Menander was the first author to be interested in misanthropes, however. In earlier times, several—mostly comic—playwrights had explored the possibilities this character type could offer them. The first references we find already in Old Comedy.⁶⁾ Moreover, the fourth century provides us with many examples of plays and characters related to

2) R. Davies, *Murder and Walking Spirits* (Harmondsworth 1991), 26.

3) Cf. P. Joerissen, C. Will, *Die Lebensstreppe: Bilder der menschlichen Lebensalter* (Cologne 1983); E. Sears, *The Ages of Man. Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton 1986).

4) E.g. W. Schmid, *Menander's Dyskolos und die Timonlegende*, RhM 102 (1959), 157-182; W. Schmid, *Menander's Dyskolos, Timonlegende und Peripatos*, RhM 102 (1959), 263-266; A. Barigazzi, *La formazione spirituale di Menandro* (Turin 1965); K. Gaiser, *Menander und der Peripatos*, A&A 13 (1967) 8-40; R.L. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge 1985).

5) *Δύσκολος* and the alternative title *Μισάνθρωπος* have related meanings. While *δύσκολος* assumes the more general meaning of 'hard to please, discontented, fretful, peevish', *μισάνθρωπος* is a word with a stronger philosophical background and means 'hating mankind' (*LSJ*, s.v.). *Δύσκολος* is used rather often; *μισάνθρωπος*, on the other hand, is a rare word in the classical period.

6) Phrynichos' *Monotropos* and several plays of Aristophanes (*Birds*, *Lysistrata*) contain references to the Athenian misanthrope Timon. On Timon, see F. Bertram, *Die Timonlegende. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichte des Misanthropentypus in der antiken Literatur* (Heidelberg 1906); A.M. Armstrong, *Timon of Athens. A legendary Figure*, G&R 34 (1987), 7-11.

misanthropy.⁷⁾ It is clear that Menander created Knemon, the main character in the *Dyskolos*, by taking elements from both these philosophical and literary foundations: the popularity of the play then can hardly have found its origin in the freshness of the themes and characters. In an age when comic themes were repeated perpetually and stock characters were present in every play, the reason for a poet's success must have been different. Therefore, I want to investigate to what extent Menander adapted the ideas of his predecessors to make a new creation. Not just Knemon is important in the matter of character drawing, however: we have to recognize the philanthropic characters in order to know the misanthrope.

Focusing not just on their individual character traits, but also on their mutual influence, their interpersonal relationships and dependencies, I hope to show that the novelty in Menander's *Dyskolos* can be found not in the originality of the character types *in se*, but in the network that was established between the diverse 'personalities'. As mentioned above, I think Menander made his protagonists represent not just their character type, but different stages in one evolution. Unfortunately, we will never know for certain how a contemporary Greek audience interpreted the clues provided by Menander, or more importantly, whether Menander ever meant to offer those clues that we pretend to read in his plays. Given our entirely different cultural expectation horizon, we must certainly keep in mind that our modern interpretation will probably never completely coincide with the playwright's original intentions.

The theories of three ancient authors on philanthropy and misanthropy form the backbone of our argument: Plato, Aristotle and Diogenes Laertius. Μισανθρωπία constitutes the negative side of the idea of φιλανθρωπία, which is much better documented.⁸⁾ Diogenes

7) Antiphanes, *Timon*; Antiphanes, *Misoponeros*; Anaxilas, *Monotropos*; Ophelion, *Monotropos*; Mnesimachos, *Dyskolos*.

8) Some literature on moral values in general (and philanthropy and misanthropy in particular): S. Lorenz, *De progressu notionis φιλανθρωπία* (Leipzig 1914); S. Tromp de Ruiter, *De vocis quae est ΦΙΛΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΑ significatione atque usu*, *Mnemosyne* 59 (1931), 271-306; P. Phitiades, *La type du misanthrope dans la littérature grecque*, *CE* 34 (1959), 305-326; C. Préaux, *Réflexions sur la misanthropie au théâtre à propos du Dyscolos de Ménandre*, *CE* 34 (1959), 327-341; A.J. Voelke, *Les rapports avec autrui dans la philosophie grecque d'Aristote à Panétius* (Paris 1961); K. Dover, *Greek popular morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974); A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: a Study in Greek Values* (Chicago 1975); J. De Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*

Laertius reports a definition of this last term, which he claimed to have found in Plato's writings, but which probably dates from the Hellenistic period:⁹)

Τῆς φιλανθρωπίας ἐστὶν εἶδη τρία· ἐν μὲν διὰ τῆς προσηγορίας γινόμενον, οἷον ἐν οἷς τινες τὸν ἐντυχόντα πάντα προσαγορεύουσι καὶ τὴν δεξιὰν ἐμβάλλοντες χαιρετίζουσιν. ἄλλο εἶδος, ὅταν τις βοηθητικὸς ᾖ παντὶ τῷ ἀτυχούντι. ἕτερον εἶδος ἐστὶ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας, ἐν ᾧ τινες φιλοδειπνισταὶ εἰσι. τῆς ἄρα φιλανθρωπίας τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ διὰ τοῦ προσαγορεύειν, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ εὐεργετεῖν, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἐστιᾶν καὶ φιλοσυνουσιάζειν.

'There are three types of philanthropy. One occurs through a salutation, as when some people speak to every passer-by and greet them stretching out their right hand. Another type is shown when someone is inclined to help everyone who is in trouble. The last sort of philanthropy is the one in which some people are fond of giving dinners. One type of philanthropy occurs through addressing people, another one through beneficence, and the last one through hospitality and being together.'

Diogenes' concept of philanthropy contains three facets: friendliness (saluting or addressing people), charity (helping people) and generosity (or hospitality). The development towards these three aspects started by the beginning of the fourth century. From an epithet for man-loving gods (e.g. Prometheus-Hermes) philanthropy became a quality of kings, and only towards the end of the fifth century it was used for private citizens.¹⁰) Especially in the second half of the fourth century the moral concept became popular.

Aristotle's ideas on philanthropy are especially interesting for us. A passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1108 a 26-30) calls *φιλία* the opposite of *δυσκολία*:

Περὶ δὲ τὸ λοιπὸν ἡδὺ τὸ ἐν τῷ βίῳ ὁ μὲν ὡς δεῖ ἡδὺς ὦν φίλος καὶ ἡ μεσότης φιλία, ὁ δ' ὑπερβάλλων, εἰ μὲν οὐδενὸς ἔνεκα, ἄρεσκος, εἰ δ' ὠφελείας τῆς αὐτοῦ, κόλαξ, ὁ δ' ἐλλείπων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ἀηδῆς δύσερις τις καὶ δύσκολος.

'With regard to the general agreeableness of life, a man who is agreeable as is appropriate is friendly and friendliness is the mean; the man

(Paris 1979); W.G. Arnott, *Moral Values in Menander*, *Philologus* 125 (1981), 215-227; D. McKerlie, *Friendship, Self-love and Concern for others in Aristotle's Ethics*, *AncPhil* 11 (1991), 85-101; R. Bosley, *Aristotle, Virtue and the Mean* (Edmonton 1995).

9) Diog. Laert. III 98.

10) J. Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World* (London 1958), 103-106.

who exaggerates, if it is for no purpose, is obsequious, if for his own benefit, a flatterer; one who is deficient and is unpleasant in everything, is contentious and peevish.'

These seem to be the moral concepts Menander had in mind when he wrote the *Dyskolos*. Aristotle deals with three attitudes, which are related to each other as three stages of one moral quality. Of these obsequiousness (ἀρεσκειά) is the excess. The obsequious man can be recognized since he always plays up to everyone and approves of everything. Also in the *Erotikos*, a work ascribed to Demosthenes, an excess of φιλανθρωπία is thought of as servile.¹¹⁾ Aristotle calls the opposite attitude δυσκολία, which is the deficiency. The perfect attitude is situated in the middle. It is clear that the word φιλία is not used in its usual meaning of 'friendship' here. In 1126 b 10-1127 a 12 Aristotle treats the same virtue more extensively. These passages are quoted in LSJ as the only examples of the use in the sense of 'friendliness'. Even if this virtue is not entirely identical with φιλανθρωπία, it is certainly close. Everything a man characterized by this quality does is done with regard to the good of others and of society.¹²⁾ What is important in Aristotle's treatment of these matters is the right measure; one should possess virtues in the right amount, not in excess, not in deficiency either.¹³⁾ As we will see later, all these characteristics can be linked to specific characters in the *Dyskolos*.

In Menander's plays φιλανθρωπία denotes the right attitude towards men, not too close, like obsequiousness, but not too asocial either. Misanthropy becomes for Menander and his contemporaries analogous to what ἀπραγμοσύνη was in democratic Athens: an excess of privacy and isolation. However, it is no longer isolation from the polis, but from humanity.¹⁴⁾ Since the value of philanthropy was so important, it obviously attracted people's attention if someone acted in the opposite way. Unfortunately, evidence on the use of the term

11) LXI 18; 21.

12) 'Friendliness' is not an accurate translation, since a man should not always be friendly, if it is not beneficent: P. Gottlieb, *Aristotle's Nameless Virtues*, Apeiron 27 (1994), 1-16.

13) J. Moles, *Philanthropia in the Poetics*, Phoenix 38 (1984), 328; F. Sparshott, *Taking Life seriously. A Study of the Argument of the Nicomachean Ethics* (Toronto 1994).

14) G. Bodei Gigliani, *Comunità e solitudine. Tensioni sociali nei rapporti fra città e campagna nell'Atene del quinto e del quarto secolo a.C.*, SCO 32 (1982), 89.

μισανθρωπία is scarce, so we have to be careful with drawing conclusions. Δύσκολος is used more often, with all kinds of meanings.

In the eyes of both Plato and Aristotle, misanthropy is a flaw that comes with experience. Elderly people are inclined to be δύσκολοι and therefore find it harder to begin friendships.¹⁵⁾ The young are still inexperienced and their illusions are still intact, while the old people only feel pity because of the knowledge that the same bad things could happen to them.¹⁶⁾ A man who is strongly virtuous and even φιλόανθρωπος can turn into a misanthrope when disappointed in his fellow people over and over again.¹⁷⁾ So disillusion is a very important cause of misanthropic behavior.

Another way of becoming μισάνθρωπος is explained by Plato in the *Laws* (791 d). Luxurious living, he tells us, makes young people morose and irascible, whereas the opposite, harsh subjugation, makes them base, servile (as the opposite of a free gentleman), and misanthropic, so that they become asocial towards their neighbors. Isocrates also connects συκοφαντία with misanthropy in *Antidosis* (315). Here we can clearly see the anti-democratic flavor of the vice, as also in section 131 where Isocrates defends a fleet-commander against allegations of being anti-democrat, misanthropic and arrogant. His only flaw, according to the rhetor, is his proud attitude, accompanied by a natural incapacity to communicate with people (ἀφουής ἦν πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων θεραπείαν). Misanthropy is clearly not acceptable in Athenian society, which can explain the behavior of some of the characters in the play, who obviously do not accept Knemon's choice to live an isolated life.

Several scholars have stressed Knemon's role in the *Dyskolos* as a blocking figure.¹⁸⁾ As many other old men in New Comedy, he obstructs the marriage between two young lovers; to end the play happily a major change will have to take place. Yet, Knemon is more than that. The obstruction he causes is not based on external elements, but it is inherent in his character. Therefore, the play

15) Arist. *NE* 1158 a 3.

16) Arist. *Rhetorica* 1390 a 19.

17) Plato *Phaedo* 89.

18) W.T. McCary, *Menander's Old Men*, TAPhA 102 (1971), 315; S. Ireland, *Menander, the bad-tempered Man, edited with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Warminster 1995), 15.

is not just about the obstructed marriage, but about Knemon himself. The double title of the play, *Δύσκολος* or *Μισάνθρωπος*, draws the attention of the modern reader to its moralistic nature. Menander chose as blocking figure a character type popular both in philosophical and literary circles. Portraying him as a misanthrope is crucial. The changes his personality undergoes are elaborated into a very important part of the plot.¹⁹⁾

Any profile of Knemon must consist of how other characters present him, as well as what Knemon thinks about himself and how he explains his actions. Menander presents his grouchy old man several times in many different ways before the audience even sees him. Every single character new on stage has something to say about him. This allows the poet to play with diverse points of view. Not only do we receive information from insiders, like his family members, but also people who barely know him give their opinion and even an all-knowing god provides information. The audience does not have the chance to form their own unbiased opinion about the man's personality but is led by the opinions of his fellow characters. In a way, this holds true for all the characters in this play, but for none as extensively as for Knemon.

In the prologue we learn what the god Pan thinks about Knemon.²⁰⁾ The god tells us about Knemon's behavior towards other people. He does not speak to anyone and even Pan receives a very cursory greeting, and this only because he is a god.²¹⁾ In two strong lines (6-7) Pan summarizes what he thinks about Knemon. He is *δύσκολος* and *ἀπάνθρωπος*, a word that has the implication of unsociable as well as inhuman. This summarizes in fact all we will learn about Knemon in the first half of the play. Extra information will be offered, sometimes an explanation or an example, but nothing that could not fit in this description. Because he is so insufferable, Knemon lives isolated, except for his daughter and his servant. This

19) A. Schäfer, *Menanders Dyskolos* (Meisenheim 1965); P.G.M. Brown, *The Construction of Menander's Dyskolos. Acts, I-IV*, ZPE 94 (1992), 8-20.

20) P. Photiades, *Pan's Prologue to the Dyskolos of Menander*, G&R 5 (1958), 108-122; S.M. Goldberg, *The Style and Function of Menander's Dyskolos' Prologue*, SO 53 (1978), 57-68.

21) This is reminiscent of several of Theophrastes' characters, especially the *Αἰθιάδης*; cf. P. Steinmetz, *Menander und Theophrast. Folgerungen aus dem Dyskolos*, RhM 103 (1960), 185-186.

seems to be an unexpected circumstance: earlier misanthropes, as for example the famous Timon of Athens, were told to live alone and not to have anyone to take care of, or who took care of them.²²⁾ Menander seems to be well aware of the fact that marriage would be strange for a misanthrope, so he anticipates comments by pointing to this fact himself (13). This new element is interesting: Menander adds novelties to a character he borrows from older stories to make his play more substantial. Thus he provides it with an interesting blocking figure, one that could grow into the most substantial character in the play. By the end of the prologue, we mainly know Knemon as a misanthropic, ill-behaved hermit, who makes other people's lives hard. Then comes Sostratos, whom Pan caused to fall in love with Knemon's daughter. Even before they see him, the spectators probably feel compassionate, knowing more than he does, namely that convincing her father will be a trial. Before the audience gets any opportunity to contemplate this fact, however, the poet provides more insight about Knemon. While Sostratos and Chaireas, his friend, are discussing what they have to do, Sostratos' slave, Pyrrhias, runs in frantically, complaining about the old man's behavior (81). He was sent out to Knemon by Sostratos himself to inquire about the girl, and the old man, upon seeing the slave, mistreated him severely. He obviously does not like to be approached by other people.

In this first act we see an interesting procedure. The suspense has been built up quite well. The audience is gradually drawn closer to Knemon's character, and more specifically his misanthropy. Pan, an all-knowing god, gives us an image from the distance. He tells the story in a rather unattached way. In fact, he is the only one who does not suffer immediately from Knemon's bad habits. Although he is unwilling, Knemon has to greet him because he is a god. Then the slave, who has just experienced Knemon's temper and who is very excited, tells us about the old man's actions. He certainly has a closer perspective than the god does, but it is still second-hand information.²³⁾ Because of Pan's introduction, however, we know much more than Sostratos at this point and even if the slave

22) Cf. Phrynichos *Monotropos* fr. 20 (K.-A.): ἄπαις ἀγόναικος.

23) On Pyrrhias, see M. Di Marco, *Pirria φαρμακός* (*Men. Dysk. 103-117*), ZPE 117 (1997), 35-41.

is exaggerating everything, what he tells still adds to the main picture. The scene with the slave fulfills our expectation and then again removes us from the fulfillment, by making Sostratos explicitly disbelieve his slave. In this way, the spectators become really curious about what sort of a man Knemon actually is. They have a very strong idea about the misanthrope, even before they have seen him. When Knemon eventually comes on stage, he shows himself immediately as a true misanthrope, everything the audience expected him to be. The misanthrope's appearance is a confirmation of Pan's and of Pyrrhias' words.

The second and third acts can be seen as a further refinement of the character drawing. We see Knemon in different situations, being confronted with different persons, whom he reacts to in his own misanthropic way. For instance, he hides for Sostratos' mother and her companions, who are preparing the sacrifice to Pan (431-455). Knemon's little monologue here provides us with an interesting new element: he is basically a moral person. He hates not being able to work and he hates people, partly because of their hypocrisy, selfishness and greed. Sacrifices are in fact not so much for the gods as for the sacrificers (451-453). Furthermore, it becomes evident that Knemon has a special distaste for rich city people, even more than for his colleague farmers (356-357). The opposition between city and country people is certainly important in the *Dyskolos*, as in many of Menander's plays; but in maintaining that it is the main conflict in the play, Trencsényi-Waldapfel overstates the case.²⁴ It is mostly a consequence of Knemon's view on the world, which is colored by his experiences. The country allows him to live isolated, while probably most of the people he despises live in the city.

What follows is the preparation of Knemon's reversal. When Knemon accidentally falls down his well, his stepson Gorgias shows himself to be a real hero and rescues him (666-690). Knemon then realizes that his way of life causes trouble and he embarks upon an apology for his life, in which he admits that self-sufficiency is impossible and that his idea about the inferiority of other people was wrong. He starts his defense declaring that the way of life he

24) I. Trencsényi-Waldapfel, *Die Voraussetzungen der menandrischen Humanität im Dyskolos*, AA 10 (1962), 286.

chose was a mistake that brought his life into danger. Then Knemon explains how he came to that life. We saw before that he was shocked by the selfishness of the sacrificing company. And now he confirms this. A conscious choice made him a misanthrope. This is exactly what is crucial in misanthropy: disillusion, which makes a man bitter, and drives him to a life in isolation. Also Timon of Athens tends to be represented as a good man embittered, a person who detests base people (ἄνδρες πονηροί).²⁵ Because of Gorgias' selfless deed, Knemon accepts the fact that he has made a mistake and that his obsession with self-sufficiency was wrong. Yet, he does not really change drastically, he wants to continue to live quietly, in isolation. It is significant that he regrets his pursuit of *autarkeia*, but not his unkindness or his moral fanaticism (713-717).²⁶ The speech forms the basic turning point for the play, not only for Knemon's life, but also for the romantic theme: the main obstacle for the marriage is gone. So far, Knemon has been presented to the audience as a very bitter, grumpy, difficult old man. Not many things have been offered to make him look good. But here we see that in the light of what he has experienced, he made his choice with the best purposes. He is a human being after all and with this apologetic speech, he raises sympathy in the audience.

If Menander had left everything the way it was at this point, he would have painted the character of a man, who, out of disappointment, became very bitter and chose to live in isolation. After he realized that he had made a mistake, he made some changes, especially with regard to his negative influence on other people's lives, but basically, his way of life remained the way it was.

In the fifth act everything changes. While the wedding is being celebrated, Knemon stays home to recover from his injuries. This provides two slaves he has insulted earlier on (act 3), Sikon and Getas, with the perfect opportunity to take revenge on him (910-969).²⁷ They start teasing and torturing him and do not leave him

25) E.g. Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 805-820.

26) W. Goerler, *Knemon*, *Hermes* 91 (1963), 283.

27) Diverse interpretations of this scene can be found in A. Garzya, *Il Dyscolos di Menandro alla luce della tradizione teatrale*, *Le parole e le idee* 1 (1959), 156-157; J.C. Kamerbeek, *Iets over de figuren van Menanders Dyskolos*, *Hermeneus* 32 (1960), 38; W.G. Arnott, *The End of Terence's Adelphoe*. *A Postscript*, *G&R* 10 (1963), 142; W.G. Arnott,

alone, until he gives up his opposition and joins the rest of the party. This could be a good thing, if it were not obviously done with ill intentions (889-909): the slaves do not use force because Knemon is welcome, but because they want revenge. It seems as though, even if Knemon accepts other people's way of life, he is not allowed to live his life the way he wants. Since our view of Knemon changed after the fourth act, it comes as a surprise that he is tormented at the end of the play.

Menander wanted to elaborate Knemon into an interesting character. He used many of the basic features of the previously existing type of the misanthrope. Knemon definitely fulfills all the requirements: he lives isolated in the country because he lost his belief in his fellow human beings. He is bitter and lacks friendliness. However, the playwright wanted something more than a caricature.²⁸⁾ Knemon's character traits are exaggerated, but not made ridiculous. The old man is represented in two different ways. On the one hand, he is portrayed as a terrible person, with a very unpleasant character, who made a conscious choice to live in this way;²⁹⁾ but on the other hand, he is a moralist, with a certain noblesse connected to old-fashioned virtue, living in the country.³⁰⁾ One thing must be clear: Knemon does not mean society any harm. He is convinced that the life style of other people is much more harmful than his own quiet way. Although he is irascible and hard to deal with, he still has enough sense to understand that he has made a mistake and that he can still correct it. Knemon may be a misanthrope in the true sense of the word, but the playwright made it clear that he was not a bad man and that he originally made his mistakes with the best intentions. When he is aggressive, it is only because he wants to defend his isolation and his insulting language is mainly caused by frustration. In fact, the notion of misanthropy is a very refined concept: although it is definitely a negative feature, usually the misanthrope himself is not ultimately to blame for it, because flaws in society drove him away.

Menander, qui vitae ostendit vitam, G&R 15 (1968), 13; N. Hesse, *Dyskolos oder Menschenfeind? Versuch einer Charakteristik des Dyskolos von Menander*, A&A 15 (1969), 90; N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation and Originality* (Bloomington 1995), 112.

28) Cf. also M. Lossau, *Unwandelbarer Misanthrop*, WJA 12 (1986), 93-103.

29) K. Treu, *Die Menschen Menanders*, in: R. Müller (ed.), *Mensch als Mass aller Dinge* (Berlin 1976), 410.

30) D. Konstan, *Greek Comedy and Ideology* (New York – Oxford 1995), 101.

Menander has used existing character traits, but he has softened the sharpest traits and has turned the misanthrope from an almost mythical figure to a more acceptable character, one that could survive in the real world and not just in the world of the imagination.

Throughout the play a gradual change takes place, but nothing grotesque. As Sutton suggests, Menander offers us the picture of a man's transformation, which may not have existed in earlier comedy.³¹⁾ Menander seems to have tried to manipulate the spectators' feelings, not only by playing with the structure of his play, but also by creating a negative image of a character in their minds and then demanding that they feel sympathy for Knemon.

The playwright uses several techniques to build up this image: comments made by the other characters, Knemon's actions, and his self-explanatory monologues. There is one other device, however, which so far we have not examined: the drawing of other characters. Knemon is not the only figure who reflects Aristotelian ideas. By opposing the misanthrope to characters who answer the features of the two other moral concepts Aristotle connected to misanthropy—on the one hand, obsequiousness, on the other hand, friendliness, or more specifically philanthropy—Menander brings out Knemon's own characteristics more clearly.

The flaw Aristotle considers to be the excess of the moral concept of philanthropy, flattery or obsequiousness (*κολακεία*), can be connected more or less directly with two of the characters presented in the *Dyskolos*. Chaireas, Sostratos' friend, who plays a role only in the first scene, is described in the list of characters as *παράσιτος*. We would expect him to be a *κόλαξ*, since usually flattery and submissiveness are the main characteristics of the comic type of the parasite. Yet, Chaireas does not have these traits and does not seem to exhibit many of the other aspects of the traditional parasite either. He is probably described as such because of his boastfulness and because it is typical of parasites to help their friends to obtain women. In addition, he does not really help Sostratos but escapes before he has to act, which could be typical as well.³²⁾ Still, given the fact that he lacks the main characteristics of the type, Menander

31) D.E. Sutton, *Ancient Comedy. A War of Generations* (New York 1993), 49.

32) A.W. Gomme, F.H. Sandbach, *Menander: a Commentary* (London 1973), 131.

may not have meant to portray Chaireas as a parasite. The later commentator who provided the character descriptions was probably led by the tradition according to which the parasite was one of the permanent types in New Comedy. Starting from the idea that all these should be present in the play, he characterized Chaireas, who as Sostratos' friend came closest to the type of the parasite, as such.³³

Another character belongs more clearly to the category of the flatterer. In a monologue (487-499), the cook Sikon boasts that he is very skilled in the art of flattery (κολακικόν 492). Boasting is typical of cooks in Greek comedy and this particular one adds to that the flaw of flattery, which he himself sees as an art rather than as a shortcoming. Of course, in his profession, a glib tongue could be very useful. Yet, his monologue about flattery would be expected rather from a parasite than from a cook.³⁴ Sikon has worked out a system to approach people by addressing them in a pleasing way. When he tests his words on Knemon, however, his flattery does not have the right effect. Yet, even when Knemon becomes aggressive, Sikon remains extremely polite, addressing him as βέλτιστε (503) and wishing him all the best (512). It is obvious from the confrontation between Sikon and Knemon that the misanthrope and the flatterer are each other's opposites on the scale of misanthropy-philanthropy. While the flatterer is extremely friendly, Knemon would in the same situation assume a completely different pose.

In the *Dyskolos* Menander is more concerned with φιλανθρωπία than with obsequiousness, though. While this last characteristic is restricted to the side characters, the protagonists show peculiarities typical of φιλανθρωπία. At times, their behavior is exactly the opposite of that displayed by Knemon, the misanthrope. Menander seems to have divided the different features of φιλανθρωπία over several characters. While the rich among them (Sostratos, Kallippides) mostly show their generosity on the financial level, Gorgias is very considerate and helpful.

Before looking at Knemon's antagonists, Sostratos and Gorgias, we should examine briefly some of the minor characters. Except for Sikon, the slave Getas and Knemon, most of the characters

33) B.A. Van Groningen, *The Delineation of Character in Menander's Dyscolus*, *Recherches de papyrologie* 1 (1961), 103.

34) S.M. Goldberg, *The Making of Menander's Comedy* (London 1980), 84.

have a kind disposition. Pyrrhios, for example, explains that he greeted Knemon from a distance and that he was very φιλόανθρωπος and ἐπιδέξιος (105-106) in dealing with him. Pan, who delivers the prologue, remains present throughout the play. He orchestrates everything and is the driving force behind all that happens, as is clear not only from the prologue but also in the dream recounted by Getas (407-417). The god's attitude in the play could be considered a form of philanthropy (as in the patronizing relationship between immortals and humans). Pan always acts for the advantage of the concerned parties; even in Knemon's case, he drags him out of solitude, which is arguably a noble deed. Yet, the god's actions are not just inspired by arbitrary benevolence: he wants to thank the girl for her attentions and also the two young men are rewarded for their good character. Pan's actions are founded on some sense of retributive justice.³⁵) Philanthropic feelings are more clearly elaborated in the human characters.

Diogenes Laertius' threefold definition of philanthropy stresses the importance of social intercourse and hospitality, as well as generosity. Sostratos' father, Kallippides, is a very sedate person. When he arrives on stage, all he thinks about is his dinner; in spite of Gorgias' admiration for him, the first impression he leaves is one of a rich, self-indulgent man, a characterization that would likely produce a sympathetic smile in the audience.³⁶) Yet, in the fifth act his importance becomes clear. The last act opens with a brilliant dramatic game. Sostratos protests indignantly against a decision that his father has made (784-785). For a short while, the reader is led to believe that Kallippides is being unreasonable and has denied Sostratos' wish to marry Knemon's daughter. Kallippides' reply immediately makes evident that this is a wrong interpretation: Sostratos can marry his beloved. Still, the suspense remains until in 794 the reader finds out that Sostratos has made a second request, namely to give his sister in marriage to Gorgias, which his father refuses. In a certain sense, Kallippides is also a blocking figure, although not as important as Knemon. He blocks a subplot, but

35) This should not be confounded with Sikon's naive interpretation of the events: he thinks Knemon is being punished for treating him badly (639-665); A.W. Gomme, F.H. Sandbach, *Menander*, 234 (cf. n. 32).

36) B.A. Van Groningen, *Recherches de papyrologie* 1 (1961), 103 (cf. n. 33).

the playwright first briefly gives the impression that he is a barrier for a more important plot, namely his son's marriage.

This device of delay draws the attention to Kallippides' philanthropic attitude. At first he is doubtful whether he should marry off his daughter to the poor farmer. Urged by Sostratos, who gives a speech about the transitoriness of money (797-812), he gives in. From that moment onwards he is extremely generous. Not only does he give his consent for Gorgias to marry his daughter, but he also convinces the young man not to spend his money on a dowry for his own half-sister, who will marry Sostratos. Moreover, the dowry Kallippides sets for his daughter is very large, amounting to three talents.

After 860 we no longer hear about Kallippides. Menander uses him in the play to introduce the double marriage, but a more important reason for his appearance may be that he is the exact opposite of Knemon, both as a father and as a man of society, in generosity and kindness.³⁷⁾

The two young men in the *Dyskolos* are more clearly provided with these characteristics. Both Sostratos and Gorgias are well endowed with philanthropy, contrary to Knemon. Yet, they are not similar in character. In them, Menander has opposed two young men of very different backgrounds, with different feelings, reactions, attitudes and principles. On a superficial level, the difference is immediately evident from their looks.³⁸⁾ The more important contrasts between the antagonists are rooted in social distinctions.

Sostratos, the son of a rich farmer, spends his life in town and only comes to the country for pleasure. Although he is a bit spoiled, Pan has chosen him as the future husband for Knemon's daughter. The god contrives to bring the two young people together. From the first act on, Sostratos appears as a decent and honest man. All he can be accused of is that he has too high an opinion of himself and that he is indecisive. His comfortable attitude towards other people is probably caused by his social rank and his flaws are a consequence of this as well. It is clear that he expects others to work for him and is not used to arranging things on his own: he

37) The contrast between the two old men emphasizes the character traits of Knemon; cf. D.E. Sutton, *Ancient Comedy*, 50 (cf. n. 31).

38) Cf. Gorgias' comment on Sostratos' rich cloak, *Men. Dysk.* 257.

needs his friends and slaves to deal with his problems. At first he does not understand why he cannot accompany Gorgias and Daos in his rich clothes and watch them work (365).

After this first introduction of the hero, the second and third acts focus on the distinction between the two young men and on bringing them together. Sostratos' behavior towards Knemon's daughter causes Gorgias' distrust. Being the girl's half-brother, he feels responsible for her; and since he assumes that Sostratos has dishonorable intentions, he addresses him severely (269-298). Sostratos is extremely polite to him, even when he is falsely accused. He defends himself by stating that he has nothing but honorable intentions and that he plans to speak to the girl's father and is willing to marry her even without a dowry (308). In the dialogue that follows, Sostratos seems to accept Gorgias immediately as an equal (370). Yet, one slightly negative aspect becomes obvious. Sostratos seems to consider Gorgias in the first place as someone useful to him. Although he calls him *γεννικός* (321), 'noble', a term with strong moral connotations, his first characterization of Gorgias stresses his utility (calling him *χρήσιμος* [320]). This is clear later in the play as well. Until he asks his father to give his sister as bride to Gorgias, their whole relationship is based on what will benefit Sostratos, while Gorgias acts without expecting a reward.

Menander focuses on the philanthropic side of Sostratos' character especially from act four onwards. He invites Gorgias and Daos to the party (573), using the word *φιλανθρωπεύσομαι*. This word, with which he closes his prayer to Pan, has been interpreted also in a broad sense, that he wants to be a good host in general in everybody.³⁹) In this context, however, it seems more likely that it should be applied only to Gorgias and Daos. In act five, then, he has obviously turned into a real friend of Gorgias, even more than a philanthropic benefactor. Without thinking of his own gain, he wants Gorgias to marry his sister, which is very generous, and he claims that he has been his friend for a long time, even before he had seen him (611).

39) S. Jaekel, *Menander's Dyskolos: Sostratos the secret Hero, or the Idea of Humanity*, *Eos* 67 (1979), 265.

Throughout the play, intertwined with all his actions, is the plain truth of Sostratos' failures. Although some scholars consider him to be a hero,⁴⁰) at times Menander presents him as a helpless fool. The rich young man obviously has two sides to his personality: in spite of his self-confidence on some occasions, he makes blunders at other times. He is not a very practical man and, in fact, all his plans fail until Gorgias saves Knemon and arranges everything. Sostratos does not contribute to this important change and does not help to save the old man, but just stands there gaping at the girl and even drops the rope three times. Later as well, when Gorgias is taking care of the old man, Sostratos is just standing to the side, without contributing anything positive. He owes to Gorgias Knemon's approval of him as his future son-in-law.

On the whole, however, it seems as if Sostratos is much more mature in the last act than in the first four. In act one Sostratos thinks mostly about himself, however enthusiastic he is; towards the end he is more considerate of other people's feelings. In 522-595 it becomes clear that he has worked very hard in tending the fields, although he is clearly not used to it. Even though he is tired, he does not hesitate to come back the next day. While in the beginning he took everything for granted, after his day with Gorgias and Daos he understands that some things are harder than they seem. Regarding his ideas about the transitoriness of money, we do not know whether Sostratos had such enlightened opinions before the play, but now they are definitely confirmed by his contact with Gorgias and Daos. Moreover, in the fifth act it is not Gorgias, but Sostratos who wants to invite Knemon.

His new, more mature attitude may be aided by the fact that Sostratos is more confident in his own world: the last images we have of Sostratos are of a self-assured man, while Gorgias, who in his own social milieu always knew what to do, clearly feels out of place. Sostratos then obviously has more than one side to his personality: he is at the same time a self-centered young man, a sensitive, sophisticated dandy, practicing the virtue of generosity, and

40) E.g. L.A. Post, *Virtue promoted in Menander's Dyscolus*, TAPhA 91 (1960), 152-161; S. Jaekel, *Eos* 67 (1979), 257-265 (cf. n. 39).

a helpless and failing figure of comedy.⁴¹⁾ Menander seems to make the connection between these aspects through Sostratos' characterization as a lover, which contributes significantly, not only to his gallantry, but also to his ineptitude and to his self-centeredness. Only a rich man can afford to fall in love, as Gorgias, the poor young man, tells us (341-344). His wealth, then, is also an important contributing factor to Sostratos' character.

The first glimpse of Gorgias' character is given by the god Pan in the prologue. The young man lives in poverty together with his mother and takes care of her. Experience has made him mature and wise beyond his years. The first act does not tell us anything more about him. When we see him for the first time in the second act, it becomes clear immediately that he is a very serious young man. In all the instances in which he appears the young farmer obviously shows his sense of responsibility. Not only does he take care of his mother, but also the girl can count on his protection. He wants the best for everyone regardless of his own happiness. Already in his first dialogue with Sostratos he points out that he has no money and no time to fall in love. When he is invited for the party, he makes sure his mother does not stay alone. He makes attempts to help and wishes to find a husband for the girl.

Some interesting remarks are made in his dialogue with his slave Daos (233-258). He knows Knemon is a very unpleasant old man, but he does not want to imitate his behavior. It is fascinating that even in this most virtuous character philanthropy is accompanied by a certain form of condescension: he looks down on Knemon in a way and he wants to change the old man's way of life. The similarity between Knemon and Gorgias is their ἀπιστία,⁴²⁾ but Gorgias can more easily be convinced that it is unnecessary in this case. Knemon adds to this an extreme amount of misanthropic distrust.⁴³⁾ The connection of misanthropy with rustic life seems natural, since isolation is hard to establish in city life. Of course, the circumstances in which

41) H.A. Khan, *Conflict and Solidarity in Menander's Dyskolos*, Nottingham Classical Literature Studies 1 (1992), 41.

42) Neither of them trust strangers, as is clear from Gorgias' first meeting with Sostratos (act 2), and from Knemon's meetings with several people (in act 3).

43) E. Méron, *La paysannerie pauvre d'après Euripide et Ménandre, un même sujet, deux attitudes opposées*, BAGB (1972), 67.

the poor farmers live contribute to their attitudes (e.g. 129-131). Gorgias warns Sostratos that poor men who are treated unjustly are likely to become misanthropes (296). This is indeed the situation in which both Knemon and Gorgias find themselves. Knemon has already turned into a misanthrope and if nothing changes, Gorgias may go the same way, however *φιλάνθρωπος* he is at this point.

Gorgias is the most selfless character in the play and this is stressed especially in the next act. When Knemon falls in the well, it is not, as might have been expected, Sostratos who saves him.⁴⁴ Gorgias shows himself a true hero who exposes himself to danger; he goes down in the well and rescues the old man, even though he has never had a kind word from him and has nothing to expect from him now. This is what surprises Knemon. On the other hand, some form of gain for himself always motivates Sostratos' actions. The advantage to Sostratos would have been more evident if he, needing a favor from Knemon, had saved the old man. Menander really needed to have someone who would do this without expecting any personal gain. This selfless behavior is exactly what convinces Knemon to change. The fact that it is not done from mutual affection is typical of philanthropy. It is not the same as friendship. Very closely connected are forgiveness (*συγγνώμη*)⁴⁵ and compassion (*ἔλεος*). These are character traits Gorgias definitely possessed.

Yet, he is not very sociable with people, although that is also an important aspect of the philanthropic virtue. This more mundane side is represented in Sostratos and his father. In 723 Gorgias shows himself shy when praised by Knemon. When Sostratos offers him the opportunity of marrying his sister, he does not want to accept this gift without effort. He now has a possibility to climb higher on a social scale, but he refuses at first, because of his pride. This extreme pride pushes him in the direction of misanthropy again. As we saw above a man may be accused of misanthropy because he is proud and uneasy with people.⁴⁶

The relationships between the characters in the *Dyskolos* are, as Anderson points out, based on "an interlocking pattern of helping

44) N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander*, 105 (cf. n. 27).

45) K. Metzler, *Der griechische begriff des Verzeihens: untersucht am Wortstamm συγγνώμη von den ersten Belegen bis zum vierten Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Tübingen 1991).

46) Isocrates *Antidosis* 315.

each other".⁴⁷⁾ All the characters are related to one another by mutual assistance. The binding element is philanthropy. While misanthropy forms the main part of the plot on both a superficial level, as a blocking device, and on a deeper level, in the psychological change of a character, the virtue of philanthropy is always present and gives depth and coherence to the action.⁴⁸⁾ Virtue and personal merit are the only elements through which the characters are valued. Menander makes Sostratos say this explicitly in 797-802 and 806-808, where he preaches that one should not put value in money. In the mutual assessment that Gorgias and Kallippides make of each other (766-770; 835-836), no evaluation is based on money either.

Characters that exist outside of the pattern of friendly interrelations are rare, and, in fact, Knemon is the only one who manages to stay out of its reach for most of the play. By rescuing Knemon, Gorgias brings him into society without his consent; it becomes impossible for the misanthrope to retire from it again, although he tries. There has been some scholarly discussion of what actually causes the change in his misanthropy. It seems to be the philanthropic attitude of the two young men, Gorgias in particular, which restores some of his lost trust in mankind. Barigazzi says that philanthropy has defeated misanthropy,⁴⁹⁾ but of course it is not until two scoundrels—Sikon and Getas—meddle in his affairs that the misanthrope really steps into society. Before, the misanthropic character lived on in the shadow of philanthropy.

It is clear that Menander used moral concepts as the foundation for his play. They provided him with a fine basis to think about contemporary society, and to present moral problems to the audience to reflect upon. Menander has tried to paint a real picture of society, without oversimplifying or exaggerating. In the *Dyskolos* he has dramatized three levels of friendliness, which are personified by different characters. The division between the moral concepts is not strict, however; nor is it in real life. Different characters display different stages of philanthropy. The first level, an excess of friend-

47) M. Anderson, *Knemon's Hamartia*, G&R 17 (1970), 205-207.

48) A. Barigazzi, *Il Dyskolos di Menandro o la commedia della solidarietà umana*, Athenaeum 37 (1959), 188.

49) A. Barigazzi, Athenaeum 37 (1959), 193 (cf. n. 48).

liness equating with obsequiousness or flattery, is represented in a base character. Sikon, the cook, is in fact presented as bad and self-centered, the personification of this vice. He was probably cast in this role because he is a lower-class character. The second and best level is friendliness or philanthropy itself, and many characters in the play exhibit this quality. Gorgias is the best example of a philanthropic character, but Sostratos can count as well. These two represent separate aspects of φιλανθρωπία. While Sostratos has a pleasant character and is the perfect host, Gorgias illustrates the moral basis of the virtue. Both lack what the other has most: Gorgias lacks social grace, Sostratos lacks selflessness. As I have argued above, Gorgias runs the risk of turning into a misanthropist like Knemon if his economic situation would remain as hard as it is. We can say that it is Sostratos who prevents this. The basic elements (distrust, hardship) are present, and in addition Knemon seems to have started life as a philanthropist. He now represents the last level of the three: a lack of friendliness, or misanthropy. His disillusion turned him into a misanthrope, and he can only be dragged out of his isolation with much effort.

Menander's game with ethical ideas is fascinating. The different characters represent simultaneously varying stages of an evolution toward virtue. In one play he manages to illustrate how people are influenced by their surroundings and by other people, how people with the same disposition can adopt entirely different attitudes, and how people from different backgrounds can live according to the same moral disposition.

In Menander's *Dyskolos* existing ideas are elaborated into a new creation. While Knemon is obviously a misanthrope, he is definitely not a caricature. He is indeed an old man, disappointed in life, who has taken up a life in isolation, far away from other people. He has been married, however, and his daughter and servant continue to provide some link to society. Knemon seems to have been a φίλάνθρωπος originally, as is clear from his apology. Disappointment has turned him into a misanthrope. Towards the end of the play he understands his mistake and wants to adapt his attitude. The gradual change is very important. Knemon does not turn from a misanthrope into a convinced philanthropist in one day. He probably never will. He only becomes somewhat more agreeable.

The other characters are mostly characterized by philanthropy. Gorgias is an image of what Knemon might have been if his life had been easier. On the other hand, Knemon is what Gorgias might become if his life is hard. The supporting characters serve as a foil to depict Knemon, but they also have independent functions in the play. The two young men, Gorgias and Sostratos, represent separate parts of the virtue philanthropy. The cook Sikon personifies the opposite, obsequiousness. The other characters often have philanthropic features, even if they also have negative character traits.

Since he does not limit each character to one virtue or vice, Menander creates a fascinating social system. Characters are related to each other, communicate all in their own way and create a potential for other developments. The poet used moral concepts to enrich a stock theme. Although unfortunately we cannot establish how original Menander's play was, he may well have been the first comic playwright to mix the cliché of the misanthrope with more profound ideas to create a form of comic theatre that was more complex, more socially relevant and gratifying to his contemporary Athenian audience.

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