

Diogenes in His Own Time

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Abstract

The advancement of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle on the one hand and the Stoics on the other overshadowed the view of the Cynicism of Diogenes which chronologically served as a bridge between them, historically rendering Cynicism for much of its history nothing more than a stopgap. The purpose of this thesis is to show that Diogenes' philosophy was not a stopgap, but rather a viable alternative to the major philosophies which paid it little heed. The use of historical and etymological analysis on trusted sources puts Cynicism in a clearer light. It demonstrates first, that Diogenes' life was an experiment in "plainness of living" which led him to adopt a natural lifestyle akin to the traditional Greek way of life. Second, it reveals that a natural way of life caused him to reject new conventional norms, which he believed encouraged acquisitiveness, class distinctions, and licentiousness thereby undermining the youth. And third, over time Diogenes developed his own philosophy, which focused on freedom of speech or *parrhesia*, self-sufficiency, and autonomy—ideals, which attracted modern philosophers, like Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Foucault. I conclude that a better reading of Diogenes displays an intelligent and witty philosopher who lived as he spoke. His criticism of conventional Athenian norms took the form of humorous satire which entertained as well as instructed, and in that practice he became a man of *parrhesia* — the truth-teller who could be counted on to uphold the truth even in dangerous situations. This took courage, which the stories about him are quick to point out. Thus, Diogenes' Cynicism as a way of life in which one develops the character and courage to speak truly is a necessary companion to any philosophy in any age, not only his own.

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Preface

As this thesis will reveal, cynicism, as the word is commonly understood, is an intellectual attitude that has been consistently with us throughout human history, but it is also a philosophy based on the ideas of Diogenes of Sinope. As a philosophy it has appeared only sporadically throughout Western thought and when it has appeared it was often confused with the cynic attitude. So to attempt any investigation of Diogenes and his school as we are doing here faces many challenges beginning with just the ambiguity of the term.

One issue then in an investigation limited to Diogenes' contribution to Cynicism is to separate and distinguish the two ways we are to understand the term, Cynicism, and to take note of the reasons for its intermittent influence.

A second issue that needs to concern us is that Diogenes' Cynic message is simple and he delivered it in a straightforward, unambiguous way; yet much debate about him concerns what he actually meant. Since he was plain-spoken, confusion does not arise with him; instead confusion arises first, from the fact that all of his writings have been lost, and second, from the problem that ancient interpreters of Cynicism saw him in terms of their own times with their own prejudices. To escape these problems, then, and find reliable information for ourselves is no mean task. One obvious solution is that being alert to ambiguous language and to our own bias can eliminate some errors. More importantly, confusion can be averted if our background knowledge of the ideology and language of the time is made clear from the outset.

Understanding the history of Greece in the postclassical age is a must.

These issues lead to a third, which is the perplexing problem of writing a lengthy work about a philosopher who disavowed lengthy discussions of any kind and instead favoured showing by example. Much of Diogenes' value to Cynicism and philosophy is found in the importance of his living as he spoke. In other words, we must be prepared to accept that philosophy for Diogenes is not what we have come to expect given philosophy's long history of oratory and debate. Diogenes lived at the time of the inception of the idea of philosophy, when those seeking wisdom were permitted to find it in their own way. His path was in some ways unique and some ways traditional. His importance lies in the path he chose to take.

So lest he frown on the attempt here to bring his vision of Cynicism to light through the written word, perhaps he would forgive the attempt since this work is as much about how he has been misinterpreted and misunderstood as about the simple message he promoted. Once we understand the times in which he lived, much of the fog around him abates and his message is seen to be simple and direct—exactly as he intended.

Clearing the fog, however, is not an easy task since it has grown thicker through the ages such that today the Cynic path to the past is almost opaque. The solution and method of this work is to clear the air by going back to the time of Diogenes, inform ourselves about him, sort out the trustworthiness of sources concerning him, use history to understand the peculiar and still barbaric age he lived in, and then sort out his key ideas by bringing the aforementioned information to bear on them.

A fourth issue has to do with entering the mind set of an age very different from our own. The usual means to decipher the past is to use writings when available to understand what that age was about. In the case of ancient Greece, the mind set of that period was determined long before the birth of Diogenes, well into the Homeric age, and so ancient even for fourth century BCE Athens where most of the story of Diogenes plays out. This is the age when written language began and with it the invention of words to illustrate actions and thoughts. Vocabulary at that time was simpler, with one word used in a variety of meanings as the need arose. While thoughts became more complicated and complex, the language did not necessarily develop new words to describe new experiences. Hence, we find much the same language in Homer as we do in Plato or Diogenes with sometimes different connotations to the words and sometimes not. Language can confuse, and this complicates any attempt to decipher ancient thought.

There is one last challenge. Diogenes' thought is dependent upon an understanding of human nature, but the very idea that we have an essential nature has been criticized since his time: so much so that the sensitivity it takes to look at ourselves honestly has gone missing, or has been relegated to psychologists to tell us what is wrong with us. Diogenes' view, however, and that of antiquity generally, demands a reflective attitude that concerns itself with what we are and how our nature informs us of what it is possible for us to be. Diogenes showed us how

to do that. When we develop a sensitivity to the human condition, what we find is that human nature has not changed since the time of the ancients, even though it is commonplace to think that it has. Diogenes shows us that indeed many of the same troubles that challenged the ancients also challenge us. It is shocking to see how little we have corrected for many of them, and inspiring at the same time to see many solutions that worked.

What is so helpful in a study of the kind we are engaged in here is that by peering back in time to the fourth century BCE, we discover humans in a more natural condition, yet beginning to find themselves in trouble as civilized life became more complicated. It is clear that some of the barbarity of his age is with us still—something we need to acknowledge. On the other hand, we have made some progress and that needs to be recognized as well, but we can only do so when we know the path by which we have come. A study of Diogenes can supply that information, and also reveals missed opportunities of what we might have done, and yet did not. In these challenging times of our own civilization, much that Diogenes had to say is a helpful alternative to today's entrenched ideologies that seem only to deepen our problems rather than solve them. Diogenes has some intriguing solutions, as the following chapters will show.

Chapter One

Diogenes: His Tub, His Dog, and His Lantern

The ancient philosophy of Cynicism and just as importantly the figure of its co-founder¹ Diogenes of Sinope, present us with an intriguing and significant puzzle. Lost in obscurity for a millennia, Cynicism arose again in the 18th century CE principally in France in a degraded form (recognized by its modern definition as a jaded view of life), and in its original philosophical sense as a philosophy which competed with that of Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century BCE. The puzzle arises when we ask, “Why was this philosophy so attractive to philosophers in the 18th century when philosophy itself was under attack?” The answer is that they sought within it two things. First, they found in the degraded form of cynicism a way to understand and describe the malaise that had settled over philosophy in the Enlightenment period. Secondly, since they believed that the malaise was caused by challenges to rationalism as the sole means to solve mankind’s ills—a reliance that began with Plato, Diogenes’ disdain for over thinking things and reliance on nature became an attractive and alternative way to look at the world and man’s place in it. Diogenes not only parted ways with Plato, and others concerning the pre-eminence of reason; he also had an alternative view of the purpose of human life—not *eudaimonia* (happiness) -- but rather freedom and that unique path presented to the philosophers of the 18th century new ways to resolve their social problems.

The aim of this study is to determine if possible whether the modern effort to discover answers to the pressing problems of modernity (and to our contemporary times since those problems are still with us) lie within Diogenes’ Cynicism, and to determine what aspects of Cynicism the moderns found valuable. I will argue that Cynicism as practiced by Diogenes deserves our attention and that the original philosophy of Diogenes, as Rousseau, Nietzsche and Diderot discovered, presents us with a very different path from the one we have followed under the influence of Plato,

¹ Antisthenes, a companion of Socrates, is also credited with its inception.

Aristotle, and the Stoics. Diogenes' goal of life was freedom both as freedom of speech (*parrhesia*) and as self-sufficiency such that one could live a life free of entanglements both as an individual and as a member of society. That path at first for Diogenes took the form of extreme poverty, but in time as his path matured became a form of minimalism. I argue further, that poverty or minimalism may have been a necessary condition for Diogenes' freedom, but that condition was not what attracted modern philosophers. What interested them was refocusing on freedom as a human need every bit as important as *eudaimonia*. What also is discovered within this study is that Diogenes retained the traditional mind-set when it came to issues concerning knowledge, education, and morality. This mind-set was the one Socrates and Plato argued against, and their view was the one which philosophy ultimately adopted. However, in the 18th century CE as the influence of Socrates and Plato began to wane, modern philosophers looked back to other ancient Greek ideas, Cynicism among them and found value in other ancient ideologies. The consequences then of investigating Diogenes are very important and involve questions concerning not only the very meaning of human life but also the basis upon which we judge which path is most beneficial to follow.

Given his importance in the 18th century, one would think that Diogenes is a well known figure in philosophy today, but as we will see his image as the philosopher walking about Athens with a lighted lantern looking for "a man" is often mentioned,² but the real philosopher behind this image is hardly known at all. So it seems best first to learn a little about him and perhaps at the same time debunk some of the myths that are often associated with him before we dig deeper into the dilemma of the puzzle surrounding him.

² The image of Diogenes carrying his lamp is a very powerful image and it has been used both in philosophy and in literature. For example, Nietzsche uses it in his story of the Madman and in *Zarathustra*. Rousseau mentions it in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, and Fyodor Dostoevsky speaks of it both in his "The Friend of the Family", and in *The Idiot*. Carrying a lighted lamp in the daytime is an effective metaphor for the search for many things, but it is Aesop who uses it as Diogenes did as the search for a true man.

What we know about Diogenes

Diogenes, the Cynic, (412-323 BCE) is often pictured inside his wine jar or tub, walking with a dog alongside him, and carrying a lantern. Literature portrays him shoeless, wearing only a worn cloak doubled over, carrying a satchel, and using a staff. In reality he probably was shoeless with only a cloak to cover him doubled in cold weather and he may have lived in a tub for a time, but he did not have a dog, he did not use a staff until he reached an advanced age, and he had no trouble procuring a better cloak either by begging for one or “borrowing” one at the local bathhouse.

All of the above characteristics are indicative of the myth that has enveloped the story of his life. So debunking some of the myths is a good place to get at the truth about him. The story of his life in a tub is true, at least in his early life in Athens. Much of the information about Diogenes comes to us from Diogenes Laertius’ (hereafter DL) book *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* written in approximately 100 CE.³ In the book, DL explains that Diogenes arrived in Athens after being exiled from his home in Sinope, a colonial seaport on the south coast of the Black Sea. He was exiled because he and his father were accused of altering the city’s currency—defacing it to render it useless. Diogenes and his father were bankers in the city with the responsibility to keep the currency safe; so conjecture is that they were defacing alternate currency of Persian influence meant to undermine the authority of the city’s rulers. Perhaps because of a change in power within the city, Diogenes and his father were charged with altering the city’s currency. Diogenes escaped prosecution by fleeing the city, but his father was imprisoned and eventually died there.⁴

DL picks up Diogenes’ story upon his arrival in Athens. He had arranged to rent a house in the city itself, but upon arrival there with his slave, Manes, he found that the house was not ready. Since no other housing was available, Diogenes took up

³ Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Translated by R. D. Hicks. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

⁴ DL VI 20

residence in a giant wine jar or tub, and Manes used the opportunity to flee.⁵ DL cites Theophrastus who claims that while Diogenes contemplated his future that night, he observed a mouse which wandered about living successfully with nothing, so Diogenes took it up as what he should do with his life. Whatever baggage he might have brought with him from Sinope was left in his tub as he began to live with just his cloak, satchel, and staff. Additional information from DL's life of Antisthenes explains that Diogenes came to him seeking to follow him. Antisthenes, a companion of Socrates, was initially reluctant, but relented when Diogenes was insistent.

With his resolve to take up the life of philosophy as Socrates and Antisthenes had done, Diogenes decided to live with only the barest of necessities, which included only the cloak and a satchel to carry his few possessions. DL tells us he carried a staff much later when he became infirm.⁶ As he wandered about he may have given up his wine jar as well, since he discovered he could find shelter in public buildings and shrines.⁷

Diogenes did not have a dog (*kunos*). The Greek word for dog, *kunos*, referred to what Diogenes was, i.e., someone who lived like a dog wandering about the city begging for food, sleeping where he could, and performing natural functions in public.⁸ The word *kunos* could also refer to the Cynosarges, a gymnasium and bath, used by exiles and immigrants since they were not allowed to use public facilities used by Athenian citizens. Cynosarges means "white hound", and so Diogenes' use of the baths enhances the dog image.⁹ The word *kunos* from which the word "cynic" was derived could have come from either source. Consistent with the bath image, there are many anecdotes about Diogenes frequenting the bathhouse, so it also probably was not the case that he was the dirty ragged beggar commonly seen in the city either.

Many of the anecdotes about Diogenes show him moving about Athens admonishing people young and old to live a better life. He also praised those who did

⁵ Ibid. 23

⁶ Ibid. 22

⁷ Ibid. 22

⁸ Ibid. 24

⁹ Ibid. 13

so. In that he took on the image of the wise, but poor, philosopher seeking those who were good, and that is where the story of the lantern comes in. DL states that one day Diogenes walked about the city with a lantern seeking, as he said, “a good man.”¹⁰ Actually, Diogenes said, “a man”.¹¹ In Chapter Three we will discuss what he could have meant by this, but it is sufficient to say now that Diogenes was concerned about manliness and he worried over what Athenian youth were becoming.

There is a story in the anecdotes about Diogenes being captured by pirates and sold into slavery.¹² As the story goes, Xenitades, a wealthy man from Corinth, bought him and took him home to tutor his two sons. The story shifts then to Corinth in DL’s account, as he explains Diogenes’ relationship to the boys, and then to his life in Corinth where he had a famous meeting with Alexander the Great. As to the ending of DL’s story, he explains that one morning Diogenes was found by his friends lying outdoors where he usually slept, and when they tried to wake him, they found that he had died in his sleep. He was 90 years old. They regarded him so highly that they had a statue made of him, which they put on his grave located just outside the city gate.¹³ Pausanias verified the grave and the statue located there hundreds of years later.¹⁴ There are many more episodes concerning Diogenes’ life within DL’s account and we will cover many of them as we examine Diogenes’ philosophy,

Diogenes’ Emphasis on Freedom

R. Bracht Branham argues that “Cynicism is the only philosophical movement in antiquity to make freedom a central value, and freedom of speech in particular.”¹⁵ This is arguably true because Diogenes is very explicit about this saying that he

¹⁰ Ibid. 41

¹¹ Ibid. 41

¹² Ibid. 29

¹³ Ibid. 78

¹⁴ Pausanias. *Description of Greece: Books I & II*. Translated by W. H. J. Jones. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1964. Book II, 4.

¹⁵ R. Bracht Branham. “Defacing the Currency: Diogenes’ Rhetoric and the *Invention* of Cynicism”. In *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity*. Edited by R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 104.

“preferred liberty to everything.”¹⁶ What is of concern is that of all of the literature concerning Diogenes his view of freedom is rarely emphasized in the way that Branham has done. Instead, Diogenean literature abounds with discussions of themes which are important to Cynic thinking it’s true, but without a discussion of their connection to the freedom which he held so dear. This connection is a serious omission, which this study will attempt to rectify.

The reason for the lack of understanding of Diogenes’ aim does not arise with him, since he states his view matter of factly. The lack of understanding arises for many reasons. First, whatever books Diogenes wrote¹⁷ are lost to us. Secondly, as we will see, there are many problems with ancient sources, which provide us with the material that we do have. Third, of the sources we have, some of them are seriously misleading. Fourth, the followers of Diogenes and his disciple, Crates, allowed the Cynic message and lifestyle to become as Julian will later say, a band of barking dogs who invent “lying fictions”.¹⁸ The image Julian paints of the misguided Cynics is an image that carries over into the early Christian and Medieval period, and then into modernity garnering the image mentioned above. Fifth, some misunderstandings have to do with the mind set of the ancient world itself—a world far different from our own. It is important for a study of this kind to confront those early misunderstandings if we are to confirm or deny any claims made by modern and contemporary philosophers.

Early misunderstandings make this study a complex one. Our interests will be threefold. We will focus on sources of information, and on historical background of the ancient period. That information provides us with the common themes discussed in antiquity and how the Cynics reacted to them. Those themes are the wellspring from which modern notions of freedom, nature, and custom derive their understanding. Modern philosophers used those concepts in their own works developing them further and augmenting ancient views. The development of those themes in the 18th century

¹⁶ Ibid. 71

¹⁷ DL cites many books written by Diogenes, but he also cautions that they may have been written by others. DL VI 80

¹⁸ Julian. *Oration VII*. Translated by Wilmer C. Wright. Boston: Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library), 1913. 204.

caused philosophers to begin to question the validity of those themes as they played themselves out in modern times.

We will, therefore, follow the chronology of the evolution of those ideas. So in Chapter Two, there is much to learn about ancient sources—what was saved, how it was saved, and how to determine the reliability of what was saved. This method is an old one, which was carried on by Donald R. Dudley, and has been advanced by Jonathan Barnes and Jan Fredrik Kinderstrand. As a result of their efforts, we can assert more information today about Diogenes and Cynicism with a good degree of confidence. There is still much that we do not know, but it is incumbent upon us to attempt to move the discussion forward with the new information we do have.

Chapter Three provides background information concerning the ancient world. It cannot be stressed enough how very foreign and barbarian the ancient world truly was. This chapter aims to immerse us in the life of ancient Athens such that ideas presented in Diogenes' account do not seem so strange. Within the mental framework of the time they are coherent and usually are variations of the same idea presented by many ancient authors with their own peculiar point of view.

Chapter Four looks at the variety of literature to be found about Cynicism and critiques some of the important authors both in antiquity and today who interpret aspects of Cynic thinking. Language plays a key role both in interpretation and critique, so it is important, too, to consider the development of key concepts in Greek thought as they evolve linguistically. We discover that nuance both on the part of the Greek use of terms and of our lack of understanding of this can be a source of confusion. Recent classical scholarship is a great aid to solve this problem, and we make good use of outstanding classicists who clear up misunderstandings that had accumulated for centuries.

In the late fifth century BCE, Greek culture was caught up in an important debate over the importance of human nature and conventional norms. Diogenes' way of thinking about this both benefitted from and was confused by the debate. In Chapter Five, we see that this is not a straightforward debate, because it involves elements of

fifth century thinking concerning the nature of the good life (*agathos*) and how to achieve it, what excellences (*arêtai*) were required, and where those excellences come from, birth or education. In other words we uncover the mind set of the classical ideal of the meaning of life, which is still very influential in Diogenes' fourth century BCE.

Chapter Five also begins to address the major themes of Cynicism and how they relate to traditional Greek thinking in not only the fourth century BCE, but also in the fifth century and even into the time of Homer. Those themes have to do with human nature, conventional norms, the idea of freedom, education and knowledge, minimalism, and cosmopolitanism. It is the classical understanding of life, which had sustained the Greeks for so many centuries, that was openly questioned in the fifth century and openly challenged in the fourth. We find that while Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle held onto some traditional ideas, more so they sought solutions to what they deemed were outmoded ideas in the traditional view. It is here we discover that Diogenes, like Aristophanes, attempted to hold onto tradition, while also adding novel ideas of his own.

It is in Chapter Six that we continue our examination of Cynic themes. Modern philosophy is introduced here as we see philosophers of that time take an interest in the ancient past, generally noting how positively philosophers react to some of the aspects of ancient life. Foremost is the thinking of Georg Hegel. It is within these discussions that we realize Cynicism has important ideas to contribute to political and moral philosophy.

Chapter Seven deals with our original question. Given the information from the previous chapters we are now ready to address the issue as to why Diogenes and his Cynicism captured the minds of modern thinkers. The issue is encapsulated perfectly in Denis Diderot's work *Rameau's Nephew*.¹⁹ All of the hopes and faith in reason, in science, in political freedom, and in education come crashing down with the prospect of a Rameau—a man of intelligence and education who cares nothing for ideals and

¹⁹ Denis Diderot. *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*. Translated by Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen. Introduction by Ralph H. Bowen. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2001.

only for his own comfort. In his debate with Rameau, Diderot explores ways to get Rameau to accept higher standards of dignity for himself, but to no avail. It is in this work, that Diderot explores Diogenes' ideas, and it is in his writings and letters that he refers to Rousseau as a Cynic. It is with Rousseau that true Cynicism returns as a philosophy to be reckoned with as an alternative to 18th century thinking. It is Rousseau, himself, who embodies the Cynic message and who provides one answer as to why Cynicism arrives in the 18th century. His influence is profound affecting Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche.

With these overtures the stage is set for the distinction between ancient Cynicism and modern cynicism and its relation to modern thought. While the modern world and our contemporary world confront many of the same problems which came to light in the 18th century, if anything modern technology tightens the grip of power structures which allow less and less freedom and anonymity for individuals today. This situation is discussed in Chapter Eight. Peter Sloterdijk and Michel Foucault look to Cynicism and put it to the test to see if it can withstand the forces of conformity in our time. Their conclusions are mixed. Sloterdijk sees only the bravura of the Cynic message, but not the reason for the courage behind it—the self-sufficient man. Foucault in spite of his revelations of power structures embedded in seemingly important social institutions like mental hospitals and prisons which preclude any idea of freedom, Foucault finds hope in the courage of the Cynic spy and truth teller whose character stands as testimony to the truth—an outsider who lives freely.

Chapter Nine reiterates the argument made in each of the chapters examining Diogenes' idea of freedom in its origination and as it wends its way through time. We find that the idea of the goal for human life as freedom is original to Diogenes and that it is a unique path, unlike the path prescribed by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Diogenes' approach to philosophy is the path not taken, except by Rousseau and Nietzsche who made the first bold steps to do so.

The Puzzle We Face

There are many kinds of puzzles. There are historical and scientific ones, and then there are the kinds of puzzles children attempt to put together. Some are easy enough to solve because the puzzle pieces are varied and easily distinguished and usually the picture of the puzzle is prominently displayed on the puzzle box. With more difficult puzzles the shapes of the pieces are similar and for the hardest puzzles to solve there is no picture to help guide those who wish to put it together.

The puzzle we are attempting to solve with Diogenes is the more difficult type of puzzle. The bits of information that have come down to us vary slightly depending upon the source that provided them, and with no written works of Diogenes to guide us, we are most often blindly trying one way and then another to fit those bits of information together. There are some philosophers in the past who have made the attempt to put together a coherent picture of Diogenes only to explain in the end that the attempt is vain.²⁰

Based on the information we have today about Diogenes and about the modern world in the 18th century, we have reason to be more optimistic than previous naysayers. An example from the life of Marcus Aurelius explains why. The elements of Diogenes' life can be put together in a way similar to the way Pierre Hadot put together the framework of the life of Marcus. Hadot's main assertion, which we would do well to heed, is that all modern interpretations of ancient thought are wrongheaded if they fail to consider the conceptual framework from which the ancient ideas originate. As explained by Hadot in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* "a profound difference exists between the representations which the ancients made of *philosophia*"²¹ and the representations made today. He explains that philosophy for the ancients was a way of life and not a "theoretical activity".²² Confusion about this

²⁰ Donald Dudley. *A History of Cynicism*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2003. Dudley in his assessment concludes we can "expect illumination of character rather than fact." 17.

²¹ Pierre Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002. 2.

²² *Ibid.* 3

today is caused by changes within the medieval period, and we must correct for them if we are to accurately interpret the works of ancient Greece.

One example used by Hadot, which is particularly compelling and which can be used effectively also in the case of Diogenes, is the problem of understanding Marcus Aurelius and his *Meditations*. Hadot argues that the seeming incoherence and lack of focus in this work is not caused by poor rhetoric or even, as suggested by some, Marcus' use of drugs during the writing of it.²³ Rather confusion over the *Meditations* arises from our lack of understanding as to the nature of what Marcus was about. Any assumption that it was an attempt to create a systematic treatise is wrong. The *Meditations*, in Hadot's view, is a form of *journal* that is a writing down of his daily thoughts as required by the method of training (*askesis*) he was using. That method was advocated by Epictetus, and as Hadot shows in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Marcus followed that method to perfection.²⁴

The same kinds of confusions, which we see demonstrated and resolved in rhetoric concerning Marcus' work, can be found in various interpretations of Diogenes' philosophy and his significance to Cynicism. Hadot's insights provide a framework (or a way of seeing) of ancient times, which creates a better understanding of Diogenes in two ways. First, they give us a criteria by which we can judge the writings and ideas of Diogenes, which has heretofore been lacking, namely that we should think of Diogenes' philosophy as a way of life rather than a system of thought. Second, that same framework can be used to interpret his actions such that the anecdotes about him become more coherent.

As we shall discover, Diogenes was not a philosopher in the way that Plato and Aristotle conceived the philosophical path. Diogenes genius lies in his theatricality such that his interactions with the people of Athens are a performance, a real life morality play displayed with wit and passion. So to read an account of his life as DL provides is to watch as he points here and there saying, "Do you see what we have become today? Do you see the hypocrisy of the politicians, the arrogance of the

²³ Ibid. 6

²⁴ Pierre Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. 180.

wealthy, the effete nature of our youth? Do you see how some among us like philosophers doctors and boat pilots know better how to live?” Diogenes can’t make these claims unless he has a vision of what is better. He is not claiming that the political and cultural climate of Athens was satisfactory and it is only that individual virtue that is compromised by its people. As an argument, that is not interesting, nor is it true. Rather, here is where the cultural and moral threads become both apparent and necessary. It is the rejection of traditional values that is causing the disintegration of society. It is leading to a loss of freedom due to an obsession with wealth and it is leading to the moral hypocrisy of administrators who fill their pockets at the expense of the citizenry. Diogenes calls upon the people of Athens (and later of Corinth) to change what has caused them to become what they are. He does not call for outright rebellion as some critics have said.²⁵ He simply shows the consequences of continuing to live such as they are. He does so rhetorically using his brilliant use of wit and sarcasm. Diogenes fights with words and as we shall see his method is a comedic masterpiece.

There is a reason why Cynicism has been such a long-lived philosophy. In times of crisis and change, its insistence on freedom as the foundation of any polis is the theory, which has been consistently been there noticed by countless generations even to our own time. Cynicism, more than any other philosophy, actively upholds and fights for the ideal of man as it is interpreted by each age. It follows the dictates of its founder that philosophy cannot just be discussed; it must be lived and fought for. Since this is not a position taken by any other philosophy, arguably this noble stance should remove it from any category of marginal philosophy. Thus, with this glimpse of where we are going we’ll move on to an investigation of source materials and their reliability in the following chapter.

²⁵ As for example, Luis E. Navia. *Diogenes the Cynic: The War against the World*. New York: Humanity Books, 2005. 156.

Chapter Two

What Source Materials Can Tell Us about Diogenes

There are many elements to consider when dealing with source material generally, such as corrupted texts, errors by copyists, and misinterpretations by later commentators and we will consider those elements in this chapter. Since very little of the actual writings of ancient authors have survived, almost all of our information about the ancient world comes from sources written 200 to 800 years after the great flowering of Greek thought and literature in 300 BCE. One of the challenges concerning Diogenes is to sort out the truth about him from the legend that was later constructed around him and that is almost a legendary process itself. But thanks to new information about the ancient world and new methods of assessing that information, it is achievable. Having said that, we are also embroiled in a controversy over why one should insist on accuracy of sources at all. We can more easily know how Cynicism evolved over time since sources concerning this aspect of Cynicism are more readily available. So to insist on Diogenes' particular views is perhaps to ask more than is necessary to determine the nature of the Cynical view. In this chapter I argue that given the further developments of both Cynicism and the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, all of which showed serious flaws in the Enlightenment period, Diogenes' original ideas serve as effective alternatives to those flaws and so choosing the best sources for Diogenes is vital to philosophy generally.

The issue of sources includes problems concerning which ones apply in the case of Diogenes and Cynicism and whether our copies of those sources are corrupted. If some of them are corrupted then it's important to discover how that might have occurred, whether by accident or by intent. If they are corrupted by intent, then it's necessary to learn why that occurred, how damaging is the corruption, and how the damage might be circumvented. As we will see, the idea of accuracy of transmission of any text is a modern invention, and we should not be surprised to find that a word-for-word account of any ancient text is difficult to find.¹ Finally we must look at the language used in the sources in relation to the words used

¹ L. D. Reynolds & N. G. Wilson. *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 208.

and their ancient meanings vs. their modern counterparts. This issue is especially acute in the case of Diogenes, so it demands careful attention. So in this chapter we'll look first at which sources generally apply to Diogenes and Cynicism, and we'll consider the types of rhetoric used in these sources. We will then tackle the issue of language and transmission of meaning in chapter Four.

As we will discover, Cynicism is more than just the ancient view and its aftermath. After Diogenes, Cynicism devolved into a sorry philosophy of angry diatribe and reckless conniving pictured by Julian and that image continues into the Enlightenment era. However, a Cynicism truer to the Diogenean perspective revived with Wieland, Diderot and Rousseau and thereafter is presented by, for example, Nietzsche as a viable alternative to the scientism and the rationalism of his time. So we are really dealing with three versions of Cynicism: Diogenes' original path which his disciple, Crates, shared; the angry carping cynicism pictured well by Julian from which our modern definition of cynic derived; and a contemporary view of Cynicism attuned to the ideal of Diogenes as exemplified in the later works of Foucault. A closer look at source material illustrates how various attitudes and interpretations of Cynicism came to be.

Problems with Sources

There is much commentary on ancient sources as to how information was collected and compiled and the types of problems that arise from their collection. Whether those commentaries come from the sources themselves, classicists, philologists or historians, the essential debate is over their trustworthiness. The fact is philosophers today have more methods in their methodological toolbox to decipher and resolve problems within ancient texts. This is in addition to continuing research by classicists and philologists who have uncovered much about practices in the ancient world unknown until our past century. So the question is, "Can new methods and information help us resolve present-day disputes concerning Diogenes?" Some issues can be clarified, e.g. his asceticism, cosmopolitanism, and views concerning the natural life, and we will attempt to do so in subsequent chapters.

The main source for information about Diogenes is Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and yet DL himself uses and cites many sources for his book on Diogenes. As

we will see in the discussion below, he was a writer who used materials available to him to compile a biographical book of the lives of philosophers beginning with the first philosopher, Thales. Living approximately in the third century CE, we know little to nothing about DL himself beyond this; even his name is debatable.² We do know, however, that he was not the first person to write such a book; that honour goes to Antigonus of Carystus who lived *circa* 250 BCE. He was the first to write about various philosophers and DL used him as a source.³

The Sources Diogenes Laertius Used

In addition to Antigonus, DL used many sources to compile a work of 10 books, of which Book VI details the Cynics including Diogenes. Some of them are used in Book VI, so a short perusal of who they are provides background for the general discussion of sources, which follows.

In Book VI, DL uses five major sources. The first is Hermippus of Smyrna whose credentials include the fact that he, a peripatetic, was able to use the Library at Alexandria and he left a careful catalogue of the sources he used.⁴ Another source, Sotion of Alexandria (200 CE), wrote a book on Diogenes and he is cited by DL as the source of literary works which he compiled using the Library of Alexandria.

Another source, Diocles, is controversial. Nietzsche claimed that virtually all of DL's Book VI on Diogenes was actually written by Diocles.⁵ Diocles was a contemporary of Aristotle who was especially interested in the Cynics. Another favourite source for DL was Favorinus, a Sophist who lived in the time of Hadrian. DL quotes his work, *Miscellaneous History*, frequently.⁶

Additional sources DL uses in Book VI are disciples of Diogenes and Stoicism and they include Menippus, creator of Menippean Satire; and Metrocles, a Cynic who first studied

² R. D. Hicks ix in his Introduction to *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press (Loeb Edition). 2005. His work is dated by the last entry, Saturninus, who lived at the end of the second century CE.

³ Ibid xxiii

⁴ Ibid xxiv

⁵ Ibid xxvii

⁶ Ibid xxix.

with Theophrastus. DL was not above using noted public figures as well, citing Eubulus the finance minister who rebuilt the Athenian economy after the Peloponnesian War.

How to Evaluate Diogenes Laertius' Sources and Those of Late Antiquity

Our first task is to picture how the methodological landscape has changed such that one might hope for a better understanding of ancient ideologies. Since we are concerned here with Diogenes, a good place to begin is with Donald Dudley's work on Diogenes, which is the first modern monograph on Diogenes and the source of some of our present confusions. Dudley's work is detailed and is built upon the insights of Kurt von Fritz in his *Quellen-Untersuchungen zu Leben und Philosophie Des Diogenes von Sinope*, written in 1926.¹⁵ Von Fritz' basis for judging ancient sources was historical and chronological accuracy and consistency. For example, he considered the various views concerning Diogenes' death.¹⁶ Some accounts suggest Diogenes died in Corinth. Pausanias in his travels saw Diogenes' tomb outside the city gates.¹⁷ However, DL, who cites Pausanias, also includes Diogenes' statement that they could throw his body in the Illissus if they wished. However, Illissus is a river in Athens, not Corinth. So where was this conversation taking place?¹⁸ While we are inclined to trust Pausanias, an accurate observer, what shall we think of DL who combines reliable and unreliable reports with no discernment? Is the only recourse to conclude with Dudley that in most cases "it is hard to establish about him anything that by the severer standards of historical criticism can be admitted as fact"?²¹ Unaccountably, Dudley then proceeds to use the anecdotes from DL to make certain assertions about Diogenes and his significance, which depend upon those questionable details. These assertions will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

What is of value in Dudley's book is his investigation of Stoic influences on Cynic literature. Both Dudley and von Fritz reject works by Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, and Julian because Stoic views were so incorporated into their ideas that it was impossible to dissect

¹⁵ Kurt Von Fritz. *Quelle-Untersuchungen Zu Leben Und Philosophie Des Diogens Von Sinope*. Leipzig: Dieterich. 1926.

¹⁶ Ibid. 29-30.

¹⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece, II-4*, translated by H. S. Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

¹⁸ DL VI 79-80

²¹ Dudley, *A History of Cynicism*. 17.

them out. For Dudley that left only the work of DL as a source worthy of our attention in spite of occasional errors.

Research concerning sources reveals today that we have two means to access ancient material. The best source is from the authors themselves which we have with Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippos, Sextus Empiricus and others and which is, of course, the most reliable. The other source is from compilations, which vary in reliability. For example, R.D. Hicks relates that the βιοç of Hermippus “is remarkable for its fullness of detail” and its “malicious gossip,” and while accuracy was not his main concern, nevertheless as a peripatetic he had “access to the Library at Alexandria, he gave careful catalogues of his writings,” and he availed himself of the “wills of Aristotle and Theophrastus.”²² Thus, we have good cause to use this source and yet still be cautious.

Following Dudley, Hicks looks further into the issue of the trustworthiness of ancient sources. He explains that ancient works were saved through the industry of compilers and DL was a compiler. What some might consider flaws in an author, in the case of information concerning ancient authors, Hicks claims that those flaws are assets. He shows that DL did not write from a knowledge of the subject, rather “he is borrowing, copying, making excerpts and citations.”²³ He was not a philosopher himself and had no knowledge of philosophy such that his own biases could affect the information he was disseminating to us. So essentially, Hicks concludes that the “impression left upon the unprejudiced reader by close acquaintance with our author is that he is dealing with a “Dryasdust, vain and credulous, of multifarious reading, amazing industry, and insatiable curiosity.”²⁴ In other words, DL was not capable of contaminating the material as other authors had done. He was simply a compiler of information from more ancient compilations of philosophical writings and for that reason is as trustworthy as one can get given the tradition of his time.

The tradition of compiling information has a long and illustrious background. It began with Aristotle and most notably continued with his student, Theophrastus, who collected information both for teaching and for writings on topics like politics and nature. For example,

²² Hicks. xxiv. It is Hicks who provides the English translation of Diogenes Laertius for the Loeb library edition.

²³ Ibid .xi.

²⁴ Ibid. xiv.

Aristotle's vast collection of information concerning various governments and constitutions was necessary for his text on politics.²⁵ Theophrastus and others continued this method such that in time, these compilations became a literary form in themselves. We are fortunate that it did so. Because of the loss of ancient texts, those collections have become invaluable.

Barely mentioned by Dudley, but of great importance to our efforts here, is the major advance made by Hermann Diels²⁶ who pieced together the various compilations to find their original sources. For compilations were made from compilations and often mixed together with such randomness one could only guess at the authenticity of information from many compilers. This is essentially what we see in DL. He begins with biographical information and cites his sources, then lists the various tenets or beliefs that Diogenes espoused, and then lists the various stories and anecdotes about him sometimes citing the sources, but often not. Seneca, Cicero and Plutarch, too, were such storytellers gathering information from compilations to write their stories of ancient people. Plutarch's *Lives* and Cicero's works are notable for the bulk of information they contain, but they often lack citation. Where did they get their information? It was Diels who sorted this out in his two works *Doxographi graeci* and *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

Working at first with his teacher, Hermann Usenger, Diels recognized that passages from different sources were identical and so concluded that they must be copied from some original source.²⁷ Diels followed the thread back to the original sources and discovered the long history of compilations that lead to the works of late antiquity.²⁸ He reasoned that if we knew the source of the original material we would have better reason to accept or reject that information. He found that authors like DL, Cicero, and Plutarch, copied their information from compiled sourcebooks. The tradition of creating source-books of tenets of past thinkers created a writing form called doxographies, from the Greek word "doxa", or "tenets". According to Burnet, doxographers in this tradition "derive their material, directly or indirectly, from the great work of Theophrastus, Φυικω δοξων ιη (*Opinions of Natural*

²⁵ *The Basic Works of Aristotle* edited by Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941. xv.

²⁶ John Burnet in his *Early Greek Philosophy* includes an appendix on source material. See Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892. 370-376.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 373

²⁸ *Ibid.* 372

Philosophers).²⁹ One chapter of that book survives in fragments, and so for Diels the ultimate goal was to find the thread of authors from Theophrastus to later compilers.

What Diels did discover is that one source provided the information for others. That oldest source was the *Vetusta Placita*.³⁰ It includes much from the original work by Theophrastus, and much of Cicero is copied from sources close to that original work. In turn, those were copied, providing the information for people like Simplicius and Alexander of Aphrodisias. However, as we ourselves, as well as Dudley and von Fritz have noticed, later doxographies have information that is contradictory and we need to account for this if we are to find a solution other than that of historical consistency which is the basis of the analysis of von Fritz.

Also classified as doxographers were, according to Burnet, biographical doxographers. These compilers used two sources; i.e., *The Refutation of All Heresies* by Hippolytos and the work of ps-Plutarch, *Stromateis*. Burnet categorizes Diogenes Laertius as a biographical doxographer. He also classified him as a biographer proper. Biographical compilers like DL derived their material primarily from Sotion's "Successions of Philosophers," from Hermippos of Smyrna, and Satyrus' "Lives of Famous Men."³¹

According to Japp Mansfield,³² the quest to discover the thread of sources proved more complicated than Usenger or Diels envisioned. The ancient works of Plato and Aristotle collected tenets or views and also cited opposing views to resolve differences. Later doxographies were not structured in this way, and hence, become compilations rather than vehicles for resolving truth and falsity. More importantly, Mansfield cautions about how historical information is to be assessed because our "objective view of philosophy is a 19th century invention."³³ The ancients' use of historical sources was different. Authors used historical information as a "springboard" for their own ideas, and thus traditional materials "were often updated and reflected the interests and predilections of their times."³⁴ So not

²⁹ John Burnet. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892. 371.

³⁰ Ibid. 373

³¹ Ibid. 372-375

³² Japp Mansfield. "Sources" in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* edited by A.A. Long Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

³³ Ibid. 22

³⁴ Ibid. 22

only is the transmission of ancient material “fragmentary,” it is also “often coloured or even biased.”³⁵

Today we know better as to how and why those compilations were compromised. John Whittaker claims it was the mind-set of ancient compilers to interpret or change ancient works. If one failed to do so, one would be simply a copyist, an idea anathema to most ancient writers, but they did not make changes indiscriminately. They might change the word order, or use a different or similar word or cognate to add their personal touch to the piece.³⁶ In other words, the tradition was to put one’s own personal stamp on the writing to be added to a collection. So our idea of accuracy was not the view of ancient compilers and we cannot expect that of them.³⁷ On the other hand, the compiler was not to change the meaning of ancient passages, only clarify or restate them. DL’s value then becomes apparent. As Hicks states, he was simply inept and did not alter the works he compiled. He copied information and then attempted to restate the meaning in separate poetry verses, thus leaving the copied information intact.³⁸

With this information we are better prepared to assess discrepancies in various interpretations of texts. We will do so here as we look at the various issues concerning Diogenes. In answer to the question of reliability of ancient sources, we can add to the method of historical accuracy and consistency of von Fritz, the idea of accuracy of transmission. Ancient works were copied and insofar as anecdotes are reasonably close to each other we can claim that the essence of the story is true. We can also see in some instances that where only one source of questionable reliability is the source of a story, we would be wise to be wary. Such is the case of the story of Diogenes’ enslavement. This story comes only from Menippus, and as von Fritz relates, Menippus was a noted satirist who was fully capable of inventing the whole episode.³⁹ Subsequent commentators on Diogenes have dismissed this story based on this evidence. However, Hicks counters that citing Menippus

³⁵ Ibid.23

³⁶ John Whittaker. “The Value of Indirect Tradition in the Establishment of Greek Philosophical Texts or the Art of Misquotation,” in *Editing Greek and Latin Texts: Papers given at the Twenty-Third Annual Conference on Editorial Problems University of Toronto, 6-7, November 1987* edited by John Grant. New York: AMS, 1989. 71.

³⁷ Ibid. 69

³⁸ Hicks. *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. 1, xvi.

³⁹ Von Fritz, 24-26.

simply may have been a mistake on the part of DL for the reason that in his account of Menippus, he does not cite a book called the *Sale of Diogenes*, nor is Menippus cited by him in any other place. Hicks cites Hermippus as the author of the slavery story⁴⁰ and in doing so gives better credibility to it. Hermippus was a peripatetic at the Alexandrian library and had access to ancient material including the work of Theophrastus, who wrote a book on Diogenes. For that reason, we have some reason to favour the slavery story. To do so makes the story of Diogenes' life more coherent. Diogenes' story begins in Athens and ends in Corinth. Dio Chrysostom states that Diogenes travelled between the two cities to avoid the harsh climate in Athens in the winter.⁴¹ If that were true, the stories about Diogenes should be equally distributed between Athens and Corinth, but they aren't. The scene seems to shift from stories of his early life in Athens to his later life in Corinth with a brief mention of Xenias and his sons in the middle. In the slavery story, Diogenes was said to have been captured by pirates, purchased by Xenias and taken by him to Corinth to raise his two sons.⁴² This information would account for the long gap between anecdotes concerning Diogenes' public life, it would account for how Diogenes was able to have enough money to write books, and account for the costly statue to him found in Corinth by Pausanias, since Xenias and his sons held Diogenes in high regard.

As with any copying, mistakes are bound to occur like the one concerning Menippus v. Hermippus. Compilers can have mistaken memories or simply read too quickly. Slater offers effective examples of this. Citing L. Robert, who explained that "Stepanus of Byzantium read his Strabo so fast that he put the Tauropolion of Ikaros in Samos, and Cannae near Carthage, and understood the verb *αρτεαται* in Herodotus as the name of a Persian people," and in "an epitome like the so-called Anti-atticist almost half of the references must be inaccurate."⁴³ Yes, we can cite carelessness in these cases, but for want of rejecting all compilations

⁴⁰ DL VI 29

⁴¹ Dio Chrysostom, see "Discourse 4."

⁴² DL VI 30

⁴³ W. J. Slater. "Problems in Interpreting Scholia on Greek Texts," in *Editing Greek and Latin Texts: Papers Given at the Twenty-Third Annual conference on Editorial Problems University of Toronto 6-7 November 1987* edited by John Grant. New York: AMS, 1989. 71.

because of the possibility of error, we could also heed the remarks of Plutarch, a noted careful compiler.⁴⁴ In his story of Demosthenes, Plutarch writes:

But if any man undertake to write a history, that has to be collected from materials gathered by observation and the reading of works not easy to be got in all places, nor written always in his own language, but many of them foreign and dispersed in other hands, for him undoubtedly, it is in the first place and above all things most necessary, to reside in some city of good note, addicted to liberal arts, and populous;⁴⁵ where he may have plenty of all sorts of books, and upon inquiry may hear and inform himself of such particulars as, having escaped the pens of writers are more faithfully preserved in the memories of men . . .⁴⁶

The use of memory is not all bad. Plutarch defends his use of memory in his story of Pericles. He says, “These things coming into my memory as I am writing this story, it would be unnatural for me to omit them.”⁴⁷ This statement is in defence of his interjection of Aspasia’s influence on Pericles. He was right to include it for the inclusion does not intrude, and in fact is a welcome bit of information to broaden the scope of understanding about Pericles, the man. So even though Plutarch provides no citation, we trust that his memory has essentially gotten the facts right. We think well of him, too, when he rigorously condemns fabricated stories. He warns us to take no notice of Andocides for he “feigns” information about Themistocles in order to

exasperate the oligarchical faction against the people: and there is no man living but knows that Pylarchus simply invents in his history; where he all but uses an actual stage machine, and brings in Neocles and Demopolis as the sons of Themistocles, to incite or move compassion as if he were writing a tragedy.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See Brad L. Cook. “Plutarch’s Use of λεγεται: Narrative Design and Source in Alexander” in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*. 42 (2001). 329-360. Plutarch himself could have been an outstanding source for ancient materials, because just in *Greek Lives* alone, there are over one thousand citations. As Cook recounts, 521 are named citations, 492 are unnamed, and 311 are introduced with the phrase “he/she said.” (331) He argues that Plutarch used the phrase “he/ they said” often to indicate traditional material – not needing citation. So while Plutarch has much to tell us, a judicious use of his material is justified since we do not always know from whence they came.

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes 2*. See *Plutarch’s Lives*. The Dryden Translation. Digireads.com Publishing. 2016.

⁴⁷ Op cit. Plutarch. *Life of Pericles*. 24, 47

⁴⁸ Op cit. Plutarch. *Life of Themistocles*. 32, 3

What we can conclude is that all compilers can make mistakes and with sufficient attention and diligence we can possibly discover them. We also can determine which authors feel free to fabricate material to suit their own agendas, and which authors attempt to retain the truth of the information passed on to them. This is more complicated than it first appears for mere copying, as DL does, was not the norm. It was expected that compilers add their own personal stamp to the material they included in their texts. But in the case of DL, the dry-as-dust compiler, we appreciate his value and as Long concludes, “Diogenes Laertius wrote a life of the Cynic Diogenes rich in material that has a good chance of being authentic or at least true to the spirit of Diogenes’ discourse, even though parts of it are contaminated by Stoicism to a degree that is often difficult to determine.”⁴⁹ We will conclude, too, with Long, that DL should be our main source for information about Diogenes.⁵⁰

Anecdotal Material and the Problem of *Chreia*

Diogenes’ extensive use of anecdotes is an issue for the value of his work on Diogenes for as Dudley suggested, “a people who enjoy a good story, can always invent one”,⁵¹ and then can conclude because Diogenes’ life cannot be verified our goal should be to set about an “illumination of character rather than fact”.⁵² Louis Navia, too, recommends we “appreciate the character of the man and his philosophical orientation” rather than attempt to make something of sources material consisting mainly of anecdotal material.⁵³

Some scholars differ, however, like W. K. Guthrie who argues that “simply because something is an anecdote does not necessarily mean that it is untrue”.⁵⁴ In his discussion of Socrates as portrayed in Aristophanes’ *The Clouds*, Guthrie considered the reliability of a portrait. In the end, he quotes A. E. Taylor who states:

⁴⁹ A. A. Long,. “The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics,” in *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy* edited by R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 30.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 31

⁵¹ Dudley 7.

⁵² W.K. Guthrie. *Socrates*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971. 332.

⁵³ Navia 8.

⁵⁴ Guthrie *Socrates*. 332

A successful burlesque must be founded on notorious fact, or what is believed to be such. It is caricature, admittedly, but we should be 'foolish' not to ask ourselves what are the real facts which explain the caricature, whether we cannot discern them reappearing from a different angle of vision in what we are told by Plato and Xenophon.⁵⁵

Arguing from Taylor's position, Guthrie claims that if some of the traits mentioned in *The Clouds* can be seen in other accounts "we may regard this as confirmation of their historical verisimilitude, and perhaps even feel encouraged with due caution, to use Aristophanes".⁵⁶ It's possible we can go one step further in our evaluation of anecdotal material. Unwilling also to settle for characterizations as did Dudley, Jan Fredrik Kindstrand looked more closely at the nature of ancient anecdotes. He found that the ancient collections of biographies and anecdotes had been "generally neglected"⁵⁷ since the studies by F. Bansch in 1868, E. Schwartz in 1905, and A. Elter in 1900.⁵⁸ Cautioning that there are no final solutions to the type of ancient literature found in DL's accounts, Kindstrand nevertheless put together a wealth of information about ancient sources and when used in conjunction with the work of others like Mansfield as discussed above, they go a long way in helping us decide what is reasonable to accept concerning material on Diogenes and Cynicism.

Essentially what Kindstrand uncovered is that there are many different forms of ancient biographical and anecdotal material, and not only this, the nature of the material changed from early antiquity to later antiquity retaining common nomenclature even though the material itself was vastly different. Early biographical material was passed down orally and as an aid to memory and it was formulaic. On the other hand, the same type of material found in late antiquity at the time when DL was writing was used differently—as a rhetorical technique taught in schools as a preparation for young men's oratorical and political careers. There is a world of difference in the intention behind the writings of the older and later materials with the earlier paying special heed to veracity and the later to wit and cleverness.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 42

⁵⁶ Ibid. 43

⁵⁷ Jan Fredrik "Kindstrand. Diogenes Laertius and the Chreia Tradition." *Elenchos*. *Rivista di Studi sui Pensiero Antico* no 7:217-243.1986. 219.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 219-220

Both of these forms of writing today are labelled “*chreia*” (χρεία), and lack of making a distinction between the two has led to contemporary rejection of *chreia* of both kinds as we see in the studies done by Dudley and Navia. This need not be the case.

The best way to uncover the full dimension of all of this is to look at the collections of these materials both etymologically and then historically. We’ll begin by sorting out what the ancient world meant by sayings or anecdotes. Kindstrand found that for the ancients, short sayings were originally called “gnomologies” (γνώμει) and they reflected generally accepted moral truths. On the other hand, apothegms (αποφθεγματα) were pointed sayings or dictums. In addition to these were απομνημονευμαί or personal reflections of sayings and actions belonging to a noted personage, like Diogenes, which tended to be longer than apothegms.⁵⁹

One interesting fact about all of this is that Kindstrand found that the word, *chreia*, was originally used as a collective term for all of the above whether it be biographical in nature or alluded saying.⁶⁰ The word was used in particular in the Socratic schools with Antisthenes’ books as a good example of its use. More importantly here, the term *chreia* was popularized by the Cynic school for the reason that Diogenes was known as the exemplar of this form of rhetoric.⁶¹

Kindstrand found that the use of *chreia* as an aid to memory to preserve ancient information began long before Socrates. The earliest sayings were about the Seven Sages in the archaic period.⁶² No authors were associated with the early compilers of this information and the information about them was handed down to subsequent generations orally. All this information had to do with a famous person and included biographical information as well as any quotations the person was known for. Thus, we should think of this type of compilation as a formulaic method used as a mnemonic device to orally pass on information to subsequent generations before the advent of written communication.

The information Kindstrand has uncovered is significant in the case of Diogenes. Once alerted to the various types of *chreia* in early antiquity, it’s not too difficult to pick out the

⁵⁹ Ibid. 219

⁶⁰ Ibid. 219

⁶¹ Ibid. 224

⁶² Ibid. 231

various types DL used in his compilation and to determine whether they are of the more ancient or later variety of late antiquity. In the early pages of DL's account, biography and anecdotes are mixed together indicating that they are from very early accounts of απομνημονια or reminiscence. DL credits Diogenes himself in *Pardolus*⁶³ and Theophrastus' *Megarian Dialogue*⁶⁴ for this type of information. Without Kinderstrand's insights we would no doubt do as others have done and question those opening details of his life. It's true we could use Whitaker's information about ancient sources generally, but uncertainty about the sources would still linger. With Kinderstrand's analysis we can look at DL's Life of Diogenes more secure in our ability to assess what we are seeing. In addition, we can add more information from other sources before we proceed with a careful look at Diogenes as DL has pictured him.

In addition to Kinderstrand, Henry A. Fischel investigated the nature of *chreia* and why it was such a popular form of rhetoric. He defines *chreia* in this way as:

A terse realistic anecdote originally and usually on a sage-Philosopher, that culminates in a meaningful action or a truth in the form of a gnomic, apothegm or proverb. The Cynic (or Cynicizing) *chreia* distinguishes itself by the odd, extreme, and often burlesque action (or basic situation or final statement) of the central Sage-Hero that becomes the basis for a demonstration of Cynic ideals and values. The climatic finale is usually witty, approximating a 'punch line'. Double entendre, invective, and altercation abound. It was thus an ideal vehicle for teaching the non-conformist ideas of the cynics.⁶⁵

Diogenes used this form of rhetoric effectively and while later forms of rhetoric like the diatribe and satire, arising from later Cynics, is much discussed, little attention has been paid to Diogenes' use of *chreia*. DL noticed this, however. He saw that *chreia* about Diogenes were much more numerous than was attributed to or about other historic figures. After the section in which DL lists the sayings, he says 'Many other sayings are attributed to him, which it would take long to enumerate'.⁶⁶

⁶³ DL 20

⁶⁴ DL 22

⁶⁵ Henry A. Fischel. "Studies in Cynicism and the Ancient Near East: The transformation of a Chria." In *Religions in Antiquity*. Edited by Jacob Newsner. Leiden: S. J. Brill, 1968. 372.

⁶⁶ DL VI 69

The number of *chreia* attributed to Diogenes are at least a thousand, and of that total only a small number were said by Diogenes himself or said by those who knew him. By and large the bulk of the *chreia* were not from early antiquity, but rather from late antiquity and should be labelled as another form of rhetoric altogether, as *progymnasmata*—textbook sayings fabricated by school boys as instruction in rhetoric.

One of the first textbooks on *Progymnasmata* is that of Aelius Theon of Alexandria (c. 100-200 CE) with many textbooks written after him even into the 10th century CE. Throughout this period, the purpose of this type of rhetoric changed from initially “the development of skills for all professionals”⁶⁷ to a more narrow focus on oration beginning in the first century CE.⁶⁸ Different types of *progymnasmata* developed as well including in addition to *chreia*, fables, narratives, reflections, and maxims.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the underlying standard for the later *progymnasmata* was the same as the standard for early *chreia*, namely that the saying be about a famous individual and that the saying be apt, or as Kindstrand says, “a concise reminiscence aptly attributed to some character.”⁷⁰ This rigid insistence on aptness is in keeping with the above remarks made by Whitaker that some licence was allowed in reproducing ancient information, but changing the meaning or intent of the original statement was not allowed.

We can see this method of copying in some of the sayings about Diogenes. Hock and O’Neil illustrate this in a series of *chreia* about Diogenes in which experienced students using the *Progymnasmata* style wrote elaborate *chreia* all on the same subject, but overtly different. They quote famous *chreia* by a variety of authors, and here is an exchange from Plutarch:

Diogenes says that it is amazing if Manes [his slave] is able to live without Diogenes, but Diogenes is not able to be cheerful about Manes.

Stobaeus’ version is:

⁶⁷ Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O’Neil. *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric: Volume i. The Progymnasmata*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 14

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 17

⁷⁰ Kindstrand 23.

Diogenes, when his household slave ran away, did not fret but said: "it is terrible if Diogenes is not able to live without him, but he can do without me."

Seneca writes it this way:

Diogenes' only slave ran away, but he did not even think it was worthwhile to take him back home when he was pointed out to him. Rather, he said, "It is a disgrace if Manes can live without Diogenes, but Diogenes cannot without Manes".⁷¹

Here is the version found in DL:

When he was advised to go in pursuit of his runaway slave, he replied, 'it would be absurd, if Manes can live without Diogenes, but Diogenes cannot get on without Manes.'⁷²

True to the standard, we see that in each case while the description varies and even the message, the understanding that Diogenes can get along very well without Manes is the same, thus retaining the aptness of the description. So while it cannot be said that Diogenes necessarily used a particular expression or turn of phrase, we can say that "the point of the *chreia* is not obscured".⁷³

In addition to the criterion of aptness, there is also a case to be made for historicity in the use of *chreia*. A case in point is Hock and O'Neil's example of a letter written by King Philip of Macedonia to the Laconians. Here is the *chreia*:

When Philip wrote many threatening letters to the Lacedemonians, they wrote back to him. "Lacedemonians to Philip: Dionysius in Corinth; alphabet."⁷⁴

The history and gist of the Spartan reply is that just as Dionysius II, the once powerful tyrant of Syracuse who had received Plato into his court and who had written poetry and philosophy, ended up exiled in Corinth as a teacher, so too Philip would come to a lowly end. Hock and O'Neil concede that there is no "proof" that the Lacedemonians actually did send a reply of this kind to Philip, but they do argue that this passage was "careful to keep the

⁷¹ Hock and O'Neil 39

⁷² DL VI 55

⁷³ Hock and O'Neil 39

⁷⁴ Ibid. 326

content not only apt to the individuals and situation involved, but also appropriate to the historical reality of the time.

So in considering the value of *chreia* as an account of Diogenes or any other famous individual in antiquity, it is more accurate to think of *chreia* as a rhetorical device to enhance memory of the orator and as an aid to memory for the audience. As the examples show, the writers of this form of rhetoric both in early and late antiquity demanded a standard of aptness in all examples of that style and in so doing give weight to their veracity.

One final example from late antiquity brings this home. Since the writing of *chreia* in the early Christian era was such a popular form of writing, we find that *chreia* were written about many people including Jesus. Vernon Robbins focused his attention on the *chreia* written by Christian Gospel writers. He found that *chreia* are prevalent in much of early Christian literature. Here are a few examples.

In the Gospel of Mathew, it says,

Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead."⁷⁵

In the Thomas Gospel we find,

They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, "Caesar's men demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give Caesar's men what belongs to Caesar, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine."⁷⁶

Given the advice of Dudley or Navia stated above, these famous pieces of Christian literature would be considered anecdotes and questionable as to their reliability. In Robbins' view this would be incorrect. He states:

The brief stories and sayings which Christians used both in speech and writing to communicate their commitment to God's activity through the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples were a powerful and natural form of communication in Mediterranean culture.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Gospel According to Matthew 8-21-2.

⁷⁶ Thomas Gospel. 100.

⁷⁷ Vernon K. Robbins. *The Chreia in Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*. Edited by David E. Aune. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988. 22.

Therefore, this type of communication was common, and therefore unavoidable. Robbins avoids a discussion of their reliability, but as Guthrie reminds us, there is certainly a kernel of truth to be found in ancient literature as the basis for the ideas expressed in them. This admonition applies even more so for Diogenes whose fame rested on his wit and who wrote *chreia* himself and was quoted soon after his death by Metrocles.⁷⁸

Robbins notes too that *chreia* are a very special and important form of writing, and arguably he is right that the vigorousness of a statement or act emerges from its “apt” attribution to the person who is the subject of the *chreia*. It would be hard to overemphasize the attribution of *chreia* to a person since this is the aspect which distinguishes it from other forms of rhetoric in the first place.⁷⁹

Unfortunately in the case of *Progymnasmata* the strictness of aptness gave way to fabrication in late antiquity. One of the ways in which this occurs is with the invention of expanded *chreia* or a manipulation of the sayings by amplifying the circumstances surrounding the saying or action.⁸⁰ As we shall see in Chapter three, Dio Chrysostom admits to fabricating information beyond the aptness found in the original anecdote, and we will examine how he does so with his story of Alexander the Great.

Another example of alteration of the old form of *chreia* is that in *Progymnasmata*, aptness can also apply to a situation. So if two individuals found themselves doing the same action, the same *chreia* could apply to both. Here is an example from Hock and O’Neil:

When Thrasyllus the Cynic asked Antigonus for a drachma, the King said: “But the gift does not befit a King.” When the other responded, “Well, then, give me a talent!” The King said: “But to receive that much does not befit a Cynic.”

Hock and O’Neil explain that in the *Gnomalium Vatianum*, the *chreia* is different. There it states:

⁷⁸ As to this comment DL quotes Sotion on this and DL lists also the many books that Diogenes wrote including one on *chreia*. DL VI 80

⁷⁹ Robbins 47.

⁸⁰ Hock and O’Neil 40

Alexander, when Diogenes begged a drachma, said: "The gift does not befit a king." When Diogenes replied, "So give me a talent," he said: "But this request does not befit a Cynic."⁸¹

There are several instances of aptness of situation in DL's account of Diogenes, DL mentions those instances where the same words or actions can be attributed to more than one person. We appreciate his contentions about this. We can also appreciate our ability now to discern this kind of thing in our own reading. We do not necessarily have to stereotype all *chreia* as unreliable anecdotes and disregard the lot. So thanks to Kindstrand and others, knowledge of this important subject helps us to be more discerning.

The Transmission of Ancient Literature

One obvious question about sources is to ask where did DL get the copies of ancient materials that he had in order to write his biographies? And then the related question, How did his books come down to us? To answer the first question is to provide information for the second. The first collections of writings in Greece were the product of private collections. According to Luciano Canfora,⁸² the first person to collect copies of books was Pisistratus, archon of Athens. With the conquest of Athens by the Persian Xerxes, the books were taken away, only to return when King Seleucus came to power. Of more interest is the other person to create a large collection of writings and that was Aristotle. Canfora argues that Aristotle and his school saved not only his own writings but also his lecture notes, and writings of other authors. This entire collection passed to Theophrastus at the exile and then death of Aristotle, and some of his works found their way to the Library of Alexandria.⁸³

As to DL's sources of information, Peter White's investigations led him to believe that ancient Greek and Latin texts were readily available in Roman marketplaces even in the time

⁸¹ Ibid. 44

⁸² Luciano Canfora. *The Vanished Library: A Wonder of the Ancient World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

⁸³ Ibid. 26-29 Canfora relates that at Aristotle's death, his personal library was left to Theophrastus, who in turn left it to Neleus at his death. Neleus left Athens with all of the volumes and brought them to Alexandria where they became the source of a power struggle between Neleus and those governing the Alexandrian Library.

of Galen (c. 150 CE).⁸⁴ He found that there was a portion of Rome where the booksellers gathered; it was “south of the central forum or the Viscus Tuscus.”⁸⁵ One could find there “newly authored books and established titles, recently copied manuscripts and antiquarian ones, books written to order as well as books ready made.”⁸⁶ White claims that book merchants provided books to the general public and to scholars and this industry served as the basis of Rome’s first public library which opened in 30s BCE.⁸⁷ From the access to these books various libraries were established including Pollo’s in the Forum, The Temple of Apollo Library on the Viscus Tuscus, the Temple of Peace Library in the Forum, and the Ulpian Library in Trajan’s Forum.⁸⁸ So from the influence of Aristotle with his collection of books to the time of DL, the ancient world valued its literary and rhetorical traditions and the private and public spheres put time and money into amassing valuable collections.

The availability of books applies to Diogenes Laertius since he was a copyist living far away from the great centres of learning in the ancient world.⁸⁹ He lived long after the time when Strabo (c. 40 BCE) was complaining that the “copyists employed by Roman booksellers” were copying them for sale, but they did so badly by not taking the time “to collate the texts.”⁹⁰ In contrast and in testimony to DL’s diligence far away from the allure of money making, DL created excellent work not only compiling his seven volume work on the lives of eminent philosophers, he provides one of the only two lists of Aristotle’s works which have come down to us: one is in the *Vita Menagianer* and the other is in DL’s book V 22-27.⁹¹ Both of these works show a common origin in Ariston. In addition to the Aristotle list, DL “gives impressive listing relating to Theophrastus (V 42-50) and Democritus (IX 46-48).”⁹² In turn, DL’s *Lives* was copied and handed down and in 1433 was translated into Latin by Ambrogio

⁸⁴ Peter White. “Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome” in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*. Edited by William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 271

⁸⁵ Ibid. 271

⁸⁶ Ibid. 276

⁸⁷ Ibid. 276

⁸⁸ Ibid. 276

⁸⁹ We have very little information about Diogenes Laertius, not even his name is certain. There is conjecture that he may have lived in Bithnia.

⁹⁰ Canfora 173.

⁹¹ Ibid. 173

⁹² Ibid. 178

Trraversari, but his book contained only the first five books.⁹³ It is Erasmus' *Apophthegmatum*, which provides the *chreia* associated with Diogenes⁹⁴ providing, as Nietzsche said, a veritable "jewel" of information.⁹⁵

Preliminary Conclusions

Given all of this we can reach some preliminary conclusions. First, we can correct for many errors in ancient literature by studying historical sources to check for accuracy and consistency, as von Fritz suggested. Second, cultural biases of ancient times are often glaring to us, as for example, Aristotle's views of slavery. However, we must be equally vigilant concerning our own cultural perspectives such that we don't impose them on ancient trains of thought. In other words we cannot suggest that their words have meanings they could not possibly have had at the time. Third, Whittaker's list of problem areas within the compilations of ancient sources is a sound criterion by which we can judge them. This corrective is a good reason why we need to engage in rediscovery of ancient ideas at all. Some ancient ideas are lost to us and many are simply glossed over or misunderstood.

Finally, our thorough study of ancient sayings and anecdotes proved to be extremely valuable. Information about *chreia* indicates that DL's anecdotes should not be dismissed so easily because of their anecdotal character. We found that it is likely that the basis for the information in DL has as a foundation sayings that Diogenes used himself, or since Metrocles wrote a book on *chreia* shortly after Diogenes' death, sayings that are very close to the source. All of this means there is good probability that the *chreia about* Diogenes were inspired by something he said or wrote or were written about him at the time. This information helps not only with our investigation, but aids in evaluations of all writers

⁹³ S. Matton. "Cynicism and Christianity." In *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy*. Edited by R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 242.

⁹⁴ Ibid 242.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche's remarks are quoted in "Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius" in *Nietzsche—Studien*. Vol. 15, ed. Wolfgang Mueller-Lauter and Karl Pestalozzi. 1986. 20. In context the quote is "no-one would waste a word on the philistine features of this writer were he not, by chance, the guardian of jewels whose value he does not recognize. He is in fact a night-porter to the history of Greek philosophy: no one can enter unless Diogenes has given him the key." Barnes cites this passage from "Laertius Diogenes und seine Quellen", BAW V, p. 126 (Winter 1868/9)

whether in early or late antiquity and that includes Christian writers as well. With these conclusions in mind, we will apply this information to the life of Diogenes and see what we can uncover.

The significance of these conclusions is important for without them we have no good reason to return to the ancients except in so far as they support some idea or other that we wish to promote, thereby often distorting the ancient view in order to make it fit. Since most of us would reject such a motivation, finding a way to see as the ancients did is one of the most important challenges in intellectual history. Some ideas simply resonate and we hope for good reason.

In all of the works that we will be looking at, one can't escape noticing that there are strong hints and suggestions of something deeper in Diogenes—something timeless and therefore important for us that captures the imagination of the commentators who investigate him. If we can discover that something, then that will justify our in depth look at this ancient and very curious person, Diogenes of Sinope.

Chapter Three

Diogenes' Life and Times

Historical and cultural background information is central for a fair appraisal of Diogenes and his version of Cynicism since he is too often portrayed as a bizarre, mad (Plato's view) and shameless rogue—nothing more than the means of a line of succession between Socrates and Zeno's Stoicism. Delving into history belies that negative picture depicting rather a moral authority who, although ragged and poor, nevertheless stood as a traditional moral figure during important political and cultural changes within Greece during his lifetime. Since Diogenes' books no longer survive from which we can assess his thinking, this chapter enlarges the picture of ancient Greece to include historical information to orient us in his ancient world, and provides background information to establish context so that we understand his thoughts and behaviour. We'll try to by set the historical stage as accurately as possible given the cautions gleaned from investigating source material in the previous chapter.

There is one additional caution in dealing with any study of history, and that caution is made plain by the great critic of historical knowledge, Pierre Bayle, whose *Historical and Critical Dictionary* published in the 17th century dramatically changed scholars' outlooks on history. Commenting that Bayle carried out a Copernican Revolution in the field of history, Cassirer explains why Bayle is important to historical accuracy:

Error must be pursued to its last retreat whether its object is great or small, sublime or humble, important or trifling . . . Here we see how the most insignificant error in the transmission and continuation of tradition can have the most fateful consequences, and how it can lead to the most radical falsification of the true situation. Every such mistake must therefore be ruthlessly exposed, and this purely negative work of the historian must not weaken at any point or shun any detail however unmeaningful it may appear.¹

Cassirer adds that history lay before Bayle like “an enormous heap of ruins” which as Cassirer also explains would be impossible for anyone to master, including the indefatigable Bayle. Human fallibility is demonstrated all too well with the very man who puts everyone to task—Bayle himself.

¹ Ernst Cassirer. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* translated by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951. 206.

In a recent essay by Michael B. Gill which is intended to be a comparison between Diogenes and the Earl of Shaftesbury on the issue of the display of good character, Diogenes comes up short and is portrayed as taking human nature too far by copulating in public. Gill quotes from Bayle as the source of his information, claiming that Diogenes “condemned the niceties that normal people use to conceal the full truth about themselves and in his day-to-day life pushed rejection of polite dissembling to its logical conclusion.” He continues that Diogenes believed we should conceal nothing, “not even his sexual relations”, which he had with his wife ‘in the middle of the street’. (Bayle 95-6).”² Gill continues by claiming that Bayle was “disgusted by Diogenes behaviour and the argumentation that led to it” adding “how much human reason is capable of misleading us.”³ We can be embarrassed for Bayle who obviously confused Diogenes with Crates, since Diogenes had no wife and Crates did, and we can be embarrassed for Gill, too, since he trusted Bayle instead of checking further, but the mistake they made is exactly the thing Bayle warned us about. It’s a vivid reminder that it’s so easy for slips like this to occur.

There is no attempt here to do the impossible in our attempt to place Diogenes absolutely in his own time, but it is to say that in a study of this type, one can’t help but notice that inconsistent ideas from past interpretations about Cynicism and Diogenes in particular recur in later periods without correction. Mainly the errors are linguistic as Adkins warns us in the next chapter, but in this chapter we see that historically, Bayle is correct to say that paying attention to details will help us immeasurably to accurately piece together what details we have of Diogenes’ life and as it turns out, there is a good deal of important history that surrounds it.

Historical Period

Diogenes’ lifetime (404–323 BCE) was a period of internecine wars between the various city-states of Greece, and Diogenes’ early home in Sinope was as much in the thick of trouble as any other Greek city. One reason for the turmoil was the jockeying for power by some of the cities after Athens’ loss to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War in 423 BCE. As a consequence of its surrender, Athenian democracy was disbanded and in its place a

² Michael B. Gill. “Shaftesbury on politeness, honesty, and virtue.” Retrieved from www.Michaelbgill.arizona.edu/sites/michaelbgill/faculty.arizona.edu/files/Shaftesburyonpoliteness. 1.

³ Ibid. 2

tyrannical government was imposed by Sparta. This is the time of the Thirty Tyrants; Athenian citizens with Spartan loyalties who took control of Athens and proceeded to steal the wealth of many members of the aristocratic class and murder 1,400 of them. In time, the tyrants were deposed and Athenians reinstated their democratic form of government.⁴

With democracy restored, Athenians faced the problem of restoring the power of the city without its fleet, which had been destroyed by Sparta and without the hegemony it held over the other Greek cities. At the same time, Sparta assumed the role of hegemon, but proving itself inept in such a role,⁵ Sparta was eclipsed by Thebes in the Battle of Leuktra in 371 BCE. Theban power was not to last either, however, and Thebes too succumbed to the ascendancy of Macedonia first under Philipp II and then under his son, Alexander.

Eventually Athens also fell to the power of Macedon, but it was allowed to rule itself and maintain its democratic government. With no political and military power to bolster its identity as a diminished power, Athens turned to trade to rebuild its wealth and its influence in the Mediterranean. However, the more successful Athenians became at trade, the wealthier some citizens became and the wealthy few in time came to challenge traditional political and class structures, adding to Athenians' woes. In order to do so successfully, wealthy traders had to challenge the cultural traditions, which established the class structures in the first place.⁷ Tribal and aristocratic lineages were traced back to ancient mythic heroes, so to establish a new social order, the authority of old myths had to be questioned.⁸ Traditional Athenian education had to be challenged as well since it promoted the values of the older traditions requiring new teachers with new methods and new outcomes for learning.⁹ Those new educators were called Sophists, travelling teachers who sold their services to anyone and promised "education for leadership and social success"—the Sophist concept of the Homeric ideal.¹⁰

All of the above-mentioned turmoil and cultural changes are the mix into which Diogenes stepped into Athens. He had come from Sinope, a colonial city on the southern coast of the Black Sea. In effect, Diogenes stepped from one hotbed of trouble in Sinope to another in

⁴ David Sansone. *Ancient Greek Civilization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 159.

⁵ Ibid. 171

⁷ Frederick A. G. Beck. *Greek Education*. London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1964. 302-3.

⁸ Ibid. 303.

⁹ Ibid. 305.

¹⁰ Ibid. 148.

Athens. It is in Sinope, however, that we see an entirely different Diogenes from the picture most often painted of him. Sinope reveals the portrait of a prosperous banker following in his father's footsteps securing and protecting the wealth of his city. It's a side of him that we need to look at.

Diogenes' Life in Sinope

Diogenes arrived in Athens in approximately 340 BCE as an exile from his home city, Sinope. We know that the city was experiencing political upheaval at the time, but, then, the history of Sinope was one of consistent upheaval. Settled for 10,000 years, Sinope is located on a small peninsula jutting out from the southern coast of the Black Sea. It is strategically located close to the Hellespont [Dardanelles], the opening to the Aegean Sea, and hence to all of the markets in Greece, Persia, Egypt, and other coastal cities in the Mediterranean. Sinope's location became more and more important as nations' increasing reliance on trade to supply vital needs became ever larger and as populations increased. Timber and grain were two such needs and it was the lands north and east of Sinope, which could supply them. Many peoples recognized the importance of the city, and consequently, it had been fought over repeatedly in its long history.¹¹

Sinope is one of those special places blest by nature to be a perfect settlement for any culture. Formed by volcanic activity, the region was then and is now endowed with fertile soil, spring water, and a protected harbour.¹² According to David M. Robinson, the area was rich in fish, timber, olive oil, fruits, and minerals—in short everything Greece lacked. As for the fish, Strabo says that tunny (especially liked by the Greeks) found their way to Sinope were much larger than in other places; they were “much larger and the hauls were immense.” The fish were then “salted or pickled and sent to Greece, where they were a staple article of diet for the common people.”¹³

A region of extraordinary beauty, the land shows “scattered areas of wheat, barley, corn, rice, and other grain interspersed with vineyards and orchards of fruit trees of the widest variety.” The account continues that

¹¹ Stanley M. Burstein. “The Greek Cities of the Black Sea”. In *A Companion to the Classical Greek World*, edited by Konrad Kinzl. London: Blackwell Publishing, 140-1.

¹² David M. Robinson. *Ancient Sinope*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1906.127

¹³ Ibid. 140

There are apples, pears, figs, peaches, plums, medlars, apricots and cherries. The last are natives of this southern shore and are believed to have been carried from this place of origin to Italy and thence to other lands. Cerasus, a colony of Sinope on this same shore got its name from the abundance of its cherry trees. The olive tree was more abundant than now, and Sinope is its westward limit on the Pontus.¹⁴

Robinson paints a very good picture of the landscape:

I saw but few groves, whereas Strabo seems to think of the whole region as covered with them. Further away in the background and to the eastward and westward are noble forests of oak, pine, walnut, chestnut, maple, elm, beech, box, cypress, and other trees, with an undergrowth of shrubs. There are also many of the latter out in the open. In the distance is the purple, waving outline of the mountain rampart, which separated the old Greek civilization of the coast from the barbarian people of the interior, and in fact, performs a similar function today. The mountainous district, however, must not be thought as rugged and infertile; for, on the contrary, it is like the maritime plain, richly productive, the mountain slopes and valley especially possessing a high degree of fertility.¹⁵

This is the place Diogenes spent the first 50 years or so of his life. The contrast with Athens could not be more stark. Granted Athenian culture and monumental art were extraordinary, but the landscape itself was a desolate geography of rocky ground punctuated by groves of olives, grapes, and figs which struggled in times of drought.

In the seventh century BCE, Sinope was part of the Lydian kingdom and as Bury recounts,¹⁶ the Greek cities used it to exchange handcrafted goods for vital needs, especially grain. For its own protection, Greece itself colonized the region three times, in the seventh, fifth, and fourth centuries BCE and the last time in an expedition led by Pericles, the famous Archon of Athens.¹⁷ Two factors contributed to the extraordinary wealth accumulated by that city. The rich agricultural lands were for eons out of reach of the coastal city because they existed on high promontories or bluffs (the forbidding Pontic Mountains) to the south of the peninsula. Sinope at first provided a hospitable port for sea trade.¹⁸ Once those promontories were made accessible, the products of the people who grew them could more

¹⁴ Ibid. 128.

¹⁵ Ibid. 129.

¹⁶ J. B. Bury and Russell Meiggs, *A History of Greece*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. 83.

¹⁷ Owen P. Doonan. *Sinop Landscapes: Exploring Connection in a Black Sea Hinterland*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. 74-5.

¹⁸ Ibid. 70.

easily move directly to the port and facilitate trade.¹⁹ The second factor that made Sinope an absolutely indispensable city for the trade at that time was the Lydian invention of coinage. Bartering can only sustain trade to a limited extent. One must have valuable products to barter with. The invention of coinage changed trade forever by allowing goods to be exchanged for coins, which could be used to buy other products as they became available.²⁰ These two factors came together in Sinope and created for a brief time a city and area of extraordinary wealth.²¹

Such wealth would be a coveted prize for any ambitious tyrant, and so many peoples, especially in Diogenes' time, vied for control over the region. In the 360s BCE, the Persian Satrap Datomes attempted to take the city by sea,²² but a coastal wall and gate built by the Greeks held them back.²³ Those stonewalls are still there, yet the modern city stands as a pale reflection of its illustrious past. So it was that Diogenes and his father were the guardians of the monetary wealth of an extremely important city. Diogenes was no simple moneychanger. Hicesias, Diogenes' father, as "master of the mint," along with Diogenes were responsible for protecting the currency from any threat, and as Dudley recounts²⁴ even from counterfeit coins introduced by Persians attempting to undermine the stability of the Lydian state.

Coins made of gold or silver were immune to counterfeiting since their value depended upon their weight. Bronze coins, however, had no intrinsic value other than the reputation of the authority which issued them. A state could be undermined in that flooding the economy with too many coins or counterfeit coins could undervalue the money in circulation and also cause panic as to the reliability of the coins one held.²⁵ As protectors of the Sinopean economy, Hicesias and Diogenes had to deface and destroy inauthentic coinage.

¹⁹ Ibid. 96. This accessibility occurred in two stages; the first in the fourth century BCE benefitting Diogenes and his father and the second in Roman times.

²⁰ Bury. *A History of Greece* 83-4.

²¹ Starr. "Economic and Social Conditions in the Greek World," In *A Companion to the Classical Greek World* edited by Konrad Kinzl. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 431.

²² Doonan. *Sinope Landscapes* 73.

²³ Ibid. 76.

²⁴ Dudley. *A History of Cynicism*. 54

²⁵ G. J. Oliver. "Economic Realities." In *A Companion to the Classical Greek World* edited by Konrad Kinzl. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 303. There was no shortage of counterfeiters in the ancient world, even in Athens.

Eventually, pro-Persian elements that introduced counterfeit money gained control of Sinope and Hicesias was arrested and Diogenes fled.²⁶

Diogenes' Life in Athens

The events and loss Diogenes suffered in Sinope led him to Athens. Even in its diminished state after the war, it was still known as hospitable to foreigners.²⁷ That said, it cannot be stressed too much how very different Athenian culture was in comparison to our culture today and even to that of late antiquity. Ideas common to both the old world and new might suggest that life in the time of Diogenes would have many elements common to our world, but nothing could be further from the truth. Ancient Greek culture generally was harsh and crude; not a life that many of us would embrace, and unfortunately Athens had even graver problems to deal with beyond that of other city-states. Some aspects of Greek life deserve a closer look.

Athens and exiles

According to Nick Fisher, Athens was generally amenable to immigrants from other Greek cities, but it did have some restrictions.²⁸ In the first place, someone like Diogenes could not just have walked off a boat in the port city of Piraeus, trekked to Athens some three miles away, and arranged to rent someplace to live. At that time, immigrants and exiles would first need to register with an Athenian citizen, a *prostates*, before they were even allowed off a boat. In some cases, immigrants were forced to wait months before the requisite paperwork was accepted, and so in those cases individuals languished in their boats anchored in the harbour.²⁹

Housing for immigrants and non-citizens was provided in Piraeus. As an example, Antisthenes, Diogenes' teacher and a non-citizen, relates how he walked three miles to and from Athens from his home in Piraeus each day to study with Socrates.³⁰ Exceptions were made so that some people could take up residence in Athens itself, but since housing was

²⁶ Dudley. *A History of Cynicism*. 54.

²⁷ Nick Fisher. "Citizens, Foreigners and Slaves in Greek Society," in *A Companion to the Greek World* Edited by Konrad Kinzl (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 339.

²⁸ Ibid. 339.

²⁹ Ibid. 339.

³⁰ DL VI 2.

scarce, a chance for that was not likely. What's interesting is that Diogenes obviously did contact a *prostates* since he was allowed off the boat which brought him to Piraeus and he was allowed to rent a home in Athens. This situation prompts the thought that his entry into Athens was in some way privileged. We can't be sure. In any event, the fact that his home was not ready when he arrived was the catalyst that precipitated a series of decisions that led him to a new way of life and to philosophy.

In addition to the housing restriction, exiles and immigrants were forced to pay a poll tax of one drachma a month.³¹ Even as the beggar Diogenes was to become, he would have had to pay the tax or be exiled again or even enslaved. Somehow he found the money to pay it.

Exiles, too, had no legal protections under Athenian law. Athens needed workers, like craftsmen, boat yard workers, and bankers, as trade became more and more important, but the city was never willing to grant citizenship to immigrants unless there was an unusual circumstance. *Metics* (exiles) who became very wealthy could sometimes apply for citizenship and it was granted, although rarely.³²

Living conditions

In his story of Diogenes' life, DL makes much of Diogenes' supposed vulgarity and shamelessness. Loathe to spell out exactly what he meant by that, DL resorts to metaphor to say that Diogenes shamelessly performed acts of "Demeter and Aphrodite" in public.³³ He mentions that on one occasion Diogenes was found masturbating in public.³⁴ If DL knew more about life in Athens at that time, such things would probably not have dismayed him.

If there is one place where the anachronism of Greek thought meets the dismal reality of Greek life, it is here in the everyday life and misery of the Athenians. While the choice of living there provided an ideal setting for early Mycenaean settlement because the acropolis afforded them a place of safety, in later centuries, because of its larger population and lack of rivers to dispose of waste, Athens became a veritable cesspool. According to Garland, the stench was so bad the odours from the city could be detected many miles away.³⁵

³¹ Ibid 339

³² Ibid.340.

³³ DL VI 69.

³⁴ Ibid. 46.

³⁵ Robert Garland. *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*. London: Greenwood Press, 2009. 133.

Unlike the Roman city DL was used to, which provided canals for the removal of waste and provide public facilities for its citizens, Athens had none of this. Walls and sides of buildings were used for male urination, while women used chamber pots. Lest we think that chamber pots were an aid to sanitation, we find that the contents of those pots found their way into the streets too.³⁶ Debris and filth in the streets of Athens were consistently inches deep.³⁷ As for defecating, that also was done in the street if necessary. In Aristophanes' play *Women in Assembly*, the character Blepyros uses the street to defecate each morning. Even in the earlier time of Hesiod, he takes time to describe what is deemed proper in this regard:

Do not urinate standing upright facing the sun but remember to do it either when the sun has set or when it is rising. Do not make water either on the road or beside the road as you go along do not bare yourself. The nights belong to the blessed gods. A good man who has a wise heart sits or goes to the wall of enclosed court.³⁸

Hesiod's counsel went unheeded in the congested and highly populated city of Athens several centuries later. So before we allow DL to cast too many stones in Diogenes' direction, we need to ask, How far did Diogenes really deviate from the norm in the episodes DL mentions? It's hard to say given the temerity of his attempt to tell us exactly what happened, but it's clear that ignorance of Athenian life colours DL's account of at least this aspect of Diogenes' life. As for Aphrodite, sexual mores in third century BCE Athens were unusual as well, as we move on to visit that aspect of Greek life.

Sexuality

Much of the scorn Diogenes reaped on the people of Athens had to do with what he viewed as sexual misconduct. In one sense, it's difficult to see how any sexual practice could be shamed given the acceptability of almost any practice in Athens at this time. Adultery would be the only taboo for both males and females and was subject to severe punishment.³⁹ However, for males, limiting oneself to only one partner was deemed

³⁶ Ibid 133. See also *Ancient Athens on 5 Drachmas a Day* by Peter Matyszah. There is a vast compilation of facts in this book about life in Athens which paint a delightful picture of what life was like for the everyday citizen and non-citizen.

³⁷ Ibid. 133

³⁸ Hesiod. *Works and Days*. Translated by M. L. West. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2008. 727-32.

³⁹ Ibid. 173

unhealthy, and so male sexual activity included as partners: prostitutes, courtesans, slaves, young males as well as spouses.

DL's comment that Diogenes performed acts of Aphrodite in public is simply the claim itself. It was Diogenes' follower, Crates, who performed sexual acts in public with his wife, Hipparchia.⁴⁰ From Athenaeus we know that Diogenes enjoyed the favours of the courtesan Lais, but that was done in the privacy of her home.⁴¹ DL gives no evidence that Diogenes performed any sexual acts other than masturbation in public. In any case sexual education of the young fits into a broader and more important picture of conflicting values, which will be discussed below.

A Beggar in Athenian Society

In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, the time-honoured view of work, slavery, and beggary are depicted in Socrates' dialogue with Aristarchus.⁴² With the loss to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, many Athenians were reduced to poverty. Rather than put to work to solve their problems, one choice was to resort to begging. That is the situation Xenophon describes in Socrates' encounter with Aristarchus. Work is out of the question remarks Eutherus because as he says, "I have no inclination to expose myself to any man's censure."⁴³ Aristarchus' agrees and his abhorrence of work is so strong that Socrates must devise a very strong case to prevent him from joining the ranks of the begging class. Socrates suggests he have his household work while he administers their activities, which in the end he decides to do.

There is a long history to this debate and it involves many elements, all of which would have been known to Diogenes as he decides his next step upon arrival in Athens. Those elements consist of Homeric values of equality and the mystique of the beggar, the moderate traditional values of equality, wealth, and surplus, and the elite values of aristocracy, power, and wealth. The lines between these views are not finely drawn and so over time elements within them mix and mingle with the others. It is this complex ideological web from which Diogenes makes his decisions over time as to how to live. No claims as to Diogenes'

⁴⁰ DL VI 97.

⁴¹ Athenaeus. *Deipnesophiste*. Book XIII. Translated by Charles Burton Gulick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. 588c.

⁴² Xenophon, *Memorabilia*. London: St Edmundsbury Press, Ltd., 1923. II. viii 5.

⁴³ Ibid. II vii 5-12.

motivations concerning his life can be made without a thorough understanding of the Greek mind-set from its beginning with Homer until the Athenian period in Diogenes' time, approximately 340-320 BCE. Let's look at some of the elements of this mind-set.

Equality in Ancient Greece

Ancient political philosophy is replete with discussions of Thersites' conversation with Odysseus during the siege of Troy because of what it has to say about equality.⁴⁴ In that conversation, Thersites, the ordinary citizen-soldier, gripes about the living conditions in the camp. Odysseus responds by berating him, not for speaking out of turn to his betters, even though Odysseus was King of Thrace, but because of the wretched looking person he was. The Greeks, even in that time, valued excellence and beauty, a test Thersites obviously failed in the eyes of Odysseus. It's clear that in the work of soldiering some are more skilled than others, as for example Achilles, who was honoured for that. Greater skill could translate into a greater prize, Briseis, but it did not translate into a greater political status. Some individuals could, for one reason or another, be first among equals, but it is the assertion of equal citizenship that is consistently held (and yet tested) throughout the ancient period in Greece.⁴⁵

Equality was tested in several ways, but in each case increasing accumulation of wealth was the culprit. Since the earliest times in Greek history, citizens were citizen-farmers and soldiers, and ill fortune could strike a family due to war, illness, or a poor growing season or poor land. In each case, the solutions to these problems depended upon and reasserted the Greek belief in equality for its citizens.

Solon's solution to the growing number of families falling into poverty was a programme of reforms.⁴⁶ Some of the issues with success or failure in farming had to do with the quality of the land itself, which Solon's reforms could not cure. In the end Solon's actions failed to solve Athens' problems, for trade created other issues, which again tested equality.

⁴⁴ Walter Donlan. *The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece* (Coronado Press, 1980), 21-23.

⁴⁵ Ibid 2

⁴⁶ A. Andrewes. "The Growth of the Athenian State " In *The Cambridge Ancient History: Part 3, Expansion of the Greek World, 8th to 6th Centuries B.C.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 377.

Trade introduced other occupations into Greek society.⁴⁷ A class of craftsmen grew to provide luxury items to those who could afford them, moneylenders proliferated to make cash exchanges, and teachers became increasingly necessary to provide the kinds of education needed for this new type of polis. The kinds of luxury goods one had, the amount of facility with money one developed, and the quality of the education one bought for one's children began to set the wealthier class apart from the ordinary and poorer citizens.⁴⁸ So in a city-state like Athens with a long history of equality, political equality was still asserted, yet class distinctions became more and more apparent. It was specifically these visible class distinctions that were the focal point of Diogenes' diatribes and ire. At no time does he ever disparage the polis itself; after all, it was due to the largess of the city that he was allowed to live there at all. As a man skilled in monetary policy, more than any other person in Athens at that time, he was qualified to weigh in on the problem of wealth and what it could do to individuals and the society itself. Diogenes' solution to all of this was to live as simply as possible, even to beg, and far from thinking it was a desperate decision, as it happens, it was a fairly ordinary one at the time.⁴⁹

In contrast to Diogenes, Plato as in many things was a constant antagonist to Diogenes' views and vice versa as we see them spar within DL's account. Plato, as is obvious in reading the *Republic*, was no friend to democracy. Instead he defended the superiority of the aristocracy and he did so using a traditional argument. He does so in the *Timaeus* where he says,

To know or tell the origin of the other divinities is beyond us, and we must accept the traditions of the men of old who affirm themselves to be the offspring of the gods—that is what they say—and they must surely have known their own ancestors. How can we doubt the word of the children of the gods? Although they give no probable or certain proofs, still, as they declare that they are speaking of what took place in their own family, we must conform to custom and believe them. In this manner, then according to them, the genealogy of these gods is to be received and set forth.⁵⁰

There is more than meets the eye with Plato's claim. As we will discover in Chapter Four, the acceptance of traditional views was a contentious problem within Athenian culture, and

⁴⁷ Starr. *Economic and Social Conditions in the Greek World* 427.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 440

⁴⁹ As the previously mentioned account of Aristrarchus by Xenophon shows.

⁵⁰ Plato. *Timaeus*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1961. 40d-41.

there is a temptation to see the traditionalists and those who oppose them in rival camps of ideology. Plato shows that while inroads in new thinking (of which Plato played a major role) were seriously undermining Athenian society, such activity left most Athenians holding onto old traditions or new ideas as it suited them, making the old views, based on what nature prescribes, and new views based on reason, a jumbled mess. Diogenes is not immune to this development, but we discover that he held onto tradition more so than other philosophers in his time. This underlying tension and even schizophrenia troubles Athenian debates making various positions hard to fathom, and Stoicism succumbs to this problem repeatedly as we see in Chapter Five.

The Mystique of the Beggar

We will limit our investigation to Greek views concerning the beggar as it changed over the centuries. It changed because of the pressures on Greek societies to deal with problems concerning wealth and the resulting conflicts between the classes. Homer's views are a good place to start for two reasons. First, he establishes the original view concerning the role of the beggar in Greek culture from his own time to the end of the fifth century BCE, and because Diogenes is influenced by him, given his numerous allusions to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Imbued as ancient peoples were with the interaction between gods and men, it is no wonder that the Greeks in Homeric times would speculate as to how that interaction could occur. We know our family members and family friends and relatives are not gods, but we cannot make that assertion about strangers. Any stranger had the potential to be one of the gods among them. Here are a few examples of this attitude from Homer:

For it is Zeus who sends to us all beggars and strangers; and a gift however small means much when given by a man like me.⁵¹

What if he is somehow a god from heaven; and indeed, go, putting on all sorts of shapes likening themselves to strangers from other lands, visit cities, watching over the violence and lawlessness of men.⁵³

⁵¹ Homer. *Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fagles. Book XIV.

⁵³ *Ibid* .17.484-87.

[Odysseus to the Cyclops] Respect the gods, O best of men—We are your suppliants, and Zeus the guest god, who stands behind all strangers with honours due them, avenges any wrong toward strangers and suppliants.⁵⁴

Over the years something happened to change this sympathetic attitude. A passage in Athenaeus gives us the elements we need to sort out the change. In the second volume of his *Deipnosophiste*, he discusses various foods and eating habits of his time. At one point, he mentions what is proper etiquette concerning when and where to eat. He scorns those who do not eat in private with the following: “What say you? Will you bring me something here to the door to eat? If so, then like beggars, I will sit on the ground here and eat . . . and everyone will see.”⁵⁷

Athens had some cultural taboos and eating in public was one of them. A reputable person would take his morning meal at home, and his afternoon meal either there or in one of the gymnasiums. One passage in particular is a very good example of the view of beggary in Athens at this time. Diogenes is castigated for eating in the Agora. He replies that that is where he was hungry.⁵⁹ While on the surface this may appear to be a rebuke of Diogenes himself, actually it is a rebuke of his station in life in which poor people lived on the street. However, only Athenian citizens were permitted to own homes and join such groups, leaving the poor, slaves, and immigrants or exiles like Diogenes with a dilemma. Where could they eat? He could have eaten in the house promised him, but that arrangement fell through. Athens had no accommodations for visitors: it had no hotels and no apartments, although the port city of Piraeus did. It was for that reason that Antisthenes, Diogenes’ mentor and an exile himself, walked the three miles from Piraeus to Athens each day to hear Socrates. So Diogenes was not alone in living in a tub; it was that, on the street, or in a stall with animals.⁶⁰

Given all of this information, the decision Diogenes made concerning his lodging was no simple matter. It had its practical side, e.g., should he return to Piraeus where he disembarked from the boat that brought him there, or was there an alternative? We want more from DL’s account here than he gives us. Unfortunately the lack of information has not

⁵⁴ Ibid. 9.269-71.

⁵⁷ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophiste* Vol. 1, Book 1-3 106e translated by Charles Burton Gulick (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library) 71f 5-13.

⁵⁹ DL VI 58.

⁶⁰ Garland. *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks* 127.

stopped scholars and critics ascribing a motive of asceticism to him, and not only to him, but to Socrates and Antisthenes as well. Such a view is hasty.

Based on the evidence that we have from DL, it is more reasonable to assume Diogenes faced the same situation as Aristarchus, and whereas Aristarchus could choose to have his family work to support all of them, Diogenes did not have that option. Like Aristarchus, Diogenes' problem was the problem of work itself. No man of any consequence could work for another, nor do manual labour, for such a life would be "worse than that of a slave".⁶¹ As a banker, Diogenes would most probably have had slaves do the work. His role, like that of his father, was to manage or administer the work. Decisively, Diogenes chose not to take that option in Athens. A chance encounter with a mouse changed the world for him.

In the best-attested episode in DL's life of Diogenes, he quotes a passage from Theophrastus' book on Diogenes. In the *Megarian Dialogue*, Theophrastus says,

Through watching a mouse running about, not looking for a place to lie down in, not afraid of the dark, not seeking any of the things which are considered to be dainties, he discovered the means of adapting himself to circumstances.⁶²

Incredibly, that seems to be the inspiration for his dramatic change in life, and as we shall see he stuck to it, training himself to endure the inevitable hardships that such a decision would incur, and gaining more inspiration to continue the course as he encountered people also poor, who learned to live simply, but well. He didn't live in seclusion, however, so it was bound to happen that the life Diogenes chose would confront those in other classes of Athenian society—those who, according to Hesiod, considered the poor to be rabble. Diogenes was all too ready to correct them, and those opposed views set the stage for the battle he would wage against what he considered to be the decadent class of the newly rich. One way to assess the conflicts between the classes is to read Aristophanes.

Aristophanes, Drama, and Traditional Education

Because Diogenes lived in a time of social upheaval, the problems he faced were complex and so were the solutions given by many thinkers in that time, such thinkers were Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Isocrates, and Epicurus to name a few. Aristophanes fits in this

⁶¹ Ibid. 231

⁶² DL VI 22

category as well following the Greek tradition of outspokenness within Greek tragedy and comedy. Aristophanes doesn't simply express a point of view concerning societal troubles, through his plays he paints vivid pictures for us so that we can imagine life at that time. In doing so Georg Hegel expressed high praise for Aristophanes' accomplishments, stating he "preserved entire political seriousness of his people at the time when it was being corrupted" with the goal of his "country's weal."⁶³

Aristophanes demonstrates that comedy is an effective way to picture political reality. In his play the *Clouds*, for example, we see the complexities of Athenian social upheaval in full display. The play depicts conflict between old and new education, between *nomos* and *physis*, freedom of speech and democracy. The history of ancient comedy explains much about all of this and the reason this was possible is because there was something distinctive about the world of the dramatist, and especially the comic dramatist, in the ancient world. So a pause here to examine the origin of ancient drama is beneficial.

Aristophanes' comedies evolved from an older form of comic play---a *komos*. It was part of the ritual honouring Dionysus and Phales his companion—"a bacchic ritual of singing and licentious dancing" part of the phallophoia—"a procession in which the phallus was carried, the symbol of creative power."⁶⁴ The bawdiness of that type of comedy carried over into the fifth century BCE into the plays of Aristophanes and less so into the fourth century in the plays of Menander. For our purposes we will focus on Aristophanes since he has much to say about the Socratic period and Socrates himself and those are the influences which affect Diogenes.

As a play, the *Clouds* is a microcosm of the forces at work in fifth century Athens particularly as to the social forces at work and the place education has within this picture. A careful look at this play, while containing much of Aristophanes' own prejudices, nevertheless reveals the foibles of the various sides all vying for supremacy in the Athenian polis. In the play old traditional values and new education confront each other head on with Socrates playing a leading role in the conflict as well he should.

Socrates is not depicted kindly. He is shown to be every bit a sophistic opportunist who uses his wits to hoodwink gullible people for money. The gullible yet scheming citizen is also

⁶³ Georg Hegel. *The Philosophy of History*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991. 261.

⁶⁴ Dana F. Sutton. *Ancient Comedy: The War of the Generations*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993. 1.

a not-too-bright and newly rich country farmer who married into money and fails to know what to do with it. He spoils his son by acceding to his requests to live the life of the upper class horseman and chariot driver who his mother hopes will someday win the Olympiad. Unfortunately, the amount of money needed to realize such a dream does not match the money Strepsidades has on hand. He finds himself heavily in debt with no means to make payments to his various creditors and the payment is due in a few days' time.

It occurs to him that there are people who teach others how to win cases in the courts and win whether the cause is just or not. He decides that is just the kind of instruction he needs to solve his debt problem, and happily enough right next door is a school, the Thinkery, headed by the ideal person to teach him, namely Socrates. Socrates is depicted as the ideal Sophist—poor, dirty and ragged, and one who spends his time hanging suspended in the air solving great problems like measuring the footprints of a flea.⁶⁵

Strepsidades decides to go next door to the people who he believes are called philosophers and beg them to take him on and let him know how he can “win your case—whether you are in the right or not.”⁶⁶ Socrates quickly deemed Strepsidades mentally incompetent; so Strepsidades sends his son Pheidippides to be taught in his place. Socrates agrees to teach his son even though his speech indicates he's nothing more than a country bumpkin. To teach Pheidippides, Socrates decides to allow the arguments for Right and for Wrong to speak for themselves.

The characters of Right and Wrong come on stage and it is clear that they are representing with Right, the old education and its traditional values and with Wrong, the new education of the Sophists. Right goes first and he launches into a typical explanation of Athenian education, but before long he makes comments that reveal how much that education has gone awry.

Right is reminded of the way boys used to be brought up when “it was fashionable to be decent. They were taught to be “quiet and decorous and to walk together with their music teacher without a coat even in bad weather”.⁶⁷ They were taught to walk and sit modestly such as not to be attractive to other boys or men. They should not fancy things and fancy

⁶⁵ Aristophanes. *The Archarians, The Clouds, Lystrata*. Translated by Alan H. Sommerstein. London: Penguin, 1973. 118.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 116

⁶⁷ Ibid. 152

food and should live simply instead. Right tried to state the traditional educational method, but in fact his own sexual appetites and fantasies about young boys tripped him up in the telling. Wrong chimes in by laughing at him, but Right plods on criticizing the new education for allowing young boys to wrap themselves in heavy coats and become so enfeebled they can no longer carry their shields. So he tells them to “stay away from the marketplace with all of its sexual dangers to respect their parents, and not to run after dancing girls, and spend time in the gymnasium getting sleek and healthy.”⁶⁸ In the end, Right is shown to be a hypocrite advising against the very things that he is drawn to.

There is a passage in the life of Diogenes that is similar to Right’s description of a good education. DL took the following from a book by Eubulus called *The Sale of Diogenes*:

After their other studies he taught them to ride, to shoot with the bow, to sling stones and to hurl javelins. Later when they reached the wrestling school, he would not permit the master to give them full athletic training, but only so much as to heighten their colour and keep them in good condition.

The boys used to get by heart many passages from poets, historians, and the writings of Diogenes himself; and he would practice them in every short cut to memory. In the house too he taught them to wait upon themselves, and to be content with plain fare and water to drink. He used to make them crop their hair close and to wear it unadorned and to go lightly clad, barefoot, silent and no looking about them in the streets. He would also take them out hunting.⁶⁹

DL cites this information twice. At the end of his story of Diogenes as he mentions Xenocrates and the slavery episode, DL says “Xenocrates used to go about saying, ‘A good genius has entered my house.’”⁷⁰ This account has importance beyond the importance DL gives it. Diogenes’ education of Xenocrates’ sons is an indication that his sympathies not only toward education, but toward life in general, are in sync with Aristophanes’ traditional view.

Almost every activity mentioned in these passages indicates a decided moral point of view within Greek culture. Each characterizes the qualities of the older tradition. Diogenes was not alone in holding to older educational practices. The similarities between Diogenes’ view related by DL and Aristophanes are interesting and indicate a common view at that time of what education should be for the traditional class. The practices mentioned were not haphazard. They signalled the kinds of behaviour acceptable to aristocratic and middle

⁶⁸ Ibid. 153

⁶⁹ DL VI 30-31

⁷⁰ DL VI 74

classes in opposition to the class of the newly rich. For the tradition minded, the bi-sexual practices of the elite class were signs of dissolution of Athenian culture. Certain practices indicated that decline, so a mention of effeminacy, or hairstyles, or the mention of catabos was not idle chatter. It was a condemnation of the elite class and Diogenes criticized these kinds of behaviours often.

Of the many examples in the anecdotes DL provides, he cites that Diogenes was leaving a public bath and was asked if “many men were bathing. He said, no. But to another who asked if there was a great crowd of bathers, he said, yes”.⁷¹ In another episode, DL quotes that “When a youth effeminately attired put a question to him, he declined to answer unless he pulled up his robe, and showed whether he was man or woman”.⁷² In another, “A youth was playing catabos in the baths. Diogenes said to him, “The better you play, the worse it is for you”.⁷³ Ultimately, Diogenes worries over the virtue of manliness.

It seems, too, that Diogenes’ criticism is not only a moral condemnation; rather it is, and for Aristophanes as well, a practical one. The young men had become weak and dissolute and if they didn’t have the strength to hold their spears, how could they be trusted to help defend the city? However, in order to find a “man” Diogenes would have to have a good idea of what a real man is. These anecdotes tell us at least what Diogenes thinks a real man is.

Anecdotes within DL’s account tell us a good deal about all of this. Many are signals about class distinctions with wrestling as a case in point. On the surface it seems to be a manly occupation, but not so for the traditional Athenian. As we see above, Diogenes believed wrestling exercise should only be used to enhance strength and colour, but the elite with their emphasis on *arête* (excellence) in the field of wrestling took the sport to another level. At that time, as it does today, training to be the best required lots of time and money in order to compete at the various competitions including the one at Olympus. Only the elite could afford to do so.⁷⁵ The training itself became something other than what it was designed to do for the physical wellbeing of the participants. It became a way to display oneself to others, especially older males. When Diogenes was asked why athletes are so

⁷¹ DL VI 40

⁷² DL VI 46

⁷³ DL VI 58

⁷⁵ Beck. *Greek Education*. 136-137

stupid, his answer was “Because they are built up of pork and beef.”⁷⁶ On the bigger stage at Olympus, a successful competition became a ticket to success in high places, and brought esteem for oneself, one’s family, and the city-state to which one belonged.⁷⁷ All of this was out of reach for the average citizen and even the older yet poorer aristocracy. Diogenes’ disdain of Olympians is vulgar and comic all at the same time.

Since the wealthy elite had many advantages and used education for their own gain, once they gained prominence they were often prone to misuse that power. Diogenes is quick to criticize this. In one encounter when “some strangers wished to see Demosthenes, he stretched out his middle finger and said, ‘There goes the demagogue of Athens’”.⁷⁸ In another, “Once he saw the officials of a temple leading away someone who had stolen a bowl belonging to the treasurers, and said, ‘The great thieves are leading away the little ‘thief’”.⁷⁹ Such criticism was a common theme in third century Athens.

Thus, while the Sophists allowed the newly rich to gain sophistication such that they were able to effectively compete on the political arena, it was an education to gain advantage over others, not to be first among equals. Diogenes called “demagogues the lackeys of the people and crowns awarded to them the efflorescence of fame”.⁸⁰

What Aristophanes doesn’t get into is that education in his time was not simply about old versus new approaches. Education went through a time of adjustment, and Diogenes when entrusted with the care of Xenocrates’ sons, was part of that change. Old education was done in stages. Young boys, especially of the elite, were taught individually by tutors at home. They were taught reading, writing, math and wrestling or physical fitness. Some were also taught music, including playing the lyre. They could then move on to higher education if they wished.

When democracy became the new political system, the lower classes also wanted education for their sons. In order to accommodate larger numbers of students, boys were sent to schools where they were taught different subjects by different teachers. This challenged the role of the tutors like Diogenes who taught young men at home. Tutors who were free men could move on to become teachers in the schools. Many of the tutors,

⁷⁶ Ibid. 137. Meat eating led to stupidity, not to mention its cost.

⁷⁷ Beck. *Greek Education*.137.

⁷⁸ DL VI 34

⁷⁹ Ibid. 45

⁸⁰ Ibid.41

however, were, like Diogenes, enslaved. All tutors, whether free or slaves, were called *paidagogos* and their duties included more than tutoring. They were entrusted with the intellectual and moral development of the boys, as well as their safety. So even if a tutor joined a family as a slave, all *paidagogoi* were treated as members of the family and highly respected.⁸¹ These old traditional tutors eventually remained in the home of the charges even after the young men were on their own and the *paidagogoi* were cared for even in the old age.⁸²

Cynic Humour and Socratic Irony

Many scholars remark that Diogenes is funny.⁸³ Yes, he really is. The anecdotes are full of wonderful, comedic one-liners. Zellar, for example called him witty and eccentric, admirable even in his excesses a fresh and vigorous mind.⁸⁴ He says, too, that both Diogenes and Crates “loved to clothe serious teaching in the form of a joke, or of poetry, and to land sharp-pointed words at the folly of mankind.”⁸⁵ Diogenes, maybe inspired by comedic theatre, brought the use of humour into everyday conversation, even conversation about very serious matters as no one had done before. In doing so he made his moral message all the more palatable. Much is made of later Cynics like Bion and Menippus and their contributions to the use of witticisms and satire in literature,⁸⁶ but their methods were not created in a vacuum and much about them come from styles of rhetoric which preceded them. Those styles are found in the works of Aristophanes, Socrates and Diogenes. To understand Diogenes’ intentions in all of this a contrast in the methods used by Socrates, Diogenes, and Aristophanes.

As noted in the preceding chapter, Diogenes’ rhetorical method is simply an absolute mastery of the use of *chreia*. In fact, *chreia* itself is defined by Diogenes’ use of it. Perhaps one could even say the greater the brilliance of the quip, the greater the likelihood Diogenes was responsible for it. As we shall see, even Nietzsche who tried his hand at writing these, was not equal to his ancient master. Some of Diogenes best ones include: “Seeing a bad

⁸¹ For a full discussion of the *paidagogos*, see *Greek Education* by Frederick A. G. Beck. London: Methuen & Co. 1964. 103-109.

⁸² Diogenes died in Corinth and was found by the young men whom he cared for. DL VI 77

⁸³ See Branham, 100.

⁸⁴ E. Zellar. *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*. London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1877. 287

⁸⁵ Ibid. 334

⁸⁶ Ibid. 11

archer, he sat down beside the target with the words “in order not to get hit.”⁸⁷ In another “He was returning from Lacedaemon to Athens; and on someone asking, ‘Whither and whence?’ Diogenes said, “From the men’s apartments to the women’s.”⁸⁸ And also, “He was begging of a miserly man who was slow to respond; so he said, ‘My friend, it’s for food that I’m asking not for funeral expenses.’”⁸⁹

In contrast to Diogenes’ style, Socrates frequently used irony. Unfortunately, the use of irony (*eironia*) was well known as a form of speech, but it was frowned upon. Guthrie calls Socrates’ use of *eironia* “misleading”⁹⁰ because it was perceived as a way to “deceive” or “swindle”. Aristotle called it “blameable”, and Aristophanes included it “in a list of villainous qualities along with imposture and all sorts of blackguardly conduct.”⁹¹ But it is Hippias who pointedly says of Socrates, “his is always mocking at others, questioning and refuting everybody, but not willing to submit to examination or reveal his own opinion about anything.”⁹²

Guthrie, in his discussion of this, argues for Socrates’ use of irony all the while explaining how out of favour the practice was. One example that shows Socrates’ use of irony and its result is his confrontation with Thrasymachus over the question of justice.⁹³ In *The Republic* one scene opens with Socrates and Thrasymachus in a small group discussing the definition of justice. Thrasymachus is in the background and he is visibly agitated. He doesn’t like the way the conversation is going, so he breaks in and says, “What is all this nonsense, Socrates. Why do you go on in this childish way being so polite about each other’s opinions: If you really want to know what justice is, stop asking questions and then playing the gallery by refuting anyone who answers you. You know perfectly well that it is easier to ask questions than to answer them.”⁹⁴

It is exactly here that Socrates’ method of irony is on shaky ground. In defence of Socrates, Guthrie argues that Socrates was not a pretender to truth as the old definition would imply. They argue that he actually was engaged in a quest for knowledge in his

⁸⁷ DL VI 67

⁸⁸ Ibid. 59

⁸⁹ Ibid. 56

⁹⁰ Guthrie. *Socrates*. 126

⁹¹ Ibid. 126

⁹² Ibid. 126

⁹³ Plato. *The Republic* translated by Paul Shorey. Book I 336-337b

⁹⁴ Ibid 336c

dialogues with others, so there was no deceit about him. Guthrie claims the basis of Socrates' thinking was "an unshakeable conviction that knowledge was in principle attainable, but that, if there was to be any hope of attaining it, the debris of confused and misleading ideas which filled most men's minds must first be cleared away."⁹⁵ This answer speaks to Socrates' intention, but it does not answer the question as to whether he should have used the method of irony to achieve it.

There is more to this story of Socrates' problems with his Athenian audience than his use of questionable methodology. It is this which prompts Aristophanes to portray Socrates as he does, and that image follows him, and prompts charges against him which he defends in Plato's *Apology*. Even more so, as we discover the traditional Athenian mind set in the following chapter, Socrates argues against tradition, which he blatantly ridicules, and that is one of the factors that leads to his condemnation.

In accord with new thinking about Socrates, Martha Nussbaum's view of Socrates method is not favourable. Stating that today influence of Socrates' influence is beginning to wane, she argues that perceptions about Socrates are mixed. In fact, she goes so far as to say, "We might think that anyone whose teaching is so radically critical of tradition had better be more careful not to be misunderstood."⁹⁶ She states that because Socrates had no solution as to the final good we seek, his use of hedonistic premises, his "mistrust" of *nomos*—all lead to difficulties with his method. Nussbaum offers this as she evaluates the success of Aristophanes' method of comedic plays of which she does approve.

The contrast of Socrates and Diogenes reveals that Diogenes is more like the dramatist, Aristophanes, than the philosopher Socrates. Diogenes shares much of Aristophanes' moral perspective and like Aristophanes' plays, the anecdotes about Diogenes display a cast of characters illustrating the same moral criticisms as do the characters in Aristophanes' plays. The humour is similar as well. It is bawdy with biting sarcasm such that the victim and audience around him are made to laugh at the situation the victim has found himself in. The people Diogenes chooses to chastise may be individuals, but they are also types of people displaying common moral lapses—exactly the way they are displayed in Aristophanes' plays.

⁹⁵ Guthrie. *Socrates*.129.

As a part of the religious practice of the Dionysia, tragic plays and drama held a special place in Athenian culture—they were immune from political censure and were a time-honoured means for playwrights to freely criticize political decisions and moral failings of the high or low born. Given what became of Socrates' using *eironeia*, one can see why someone like Diogenes, so gifted with wit in any case, would use the very same style of shaming Athenian citizens as did Aristophanes. It would have been familiar to the citizens of Athens and Corinth, the only difference being it was outside the theatre, rather than in.

Diogenes and Plato as Adversaries

The open rivalry between Diogenes and Plato is very apparent in the anecdotes of Diogenes that are handed down to us. Diogenes' disdain for Plato is matched by Plato's civil yet veiled contempt for Diogenes, so Plato calling Diogenes a Socrates gone mad is but the tip of the iceberg in their relationship. DL offers us six exchanges between the two of them and all of them are instructive. The dialogues hint at basic ideological differences, but they reveal differences in character too.

One of the exchanges is of dubious quality for it succumbs to many of the warning signs of *chreiai* that have been tampered with to the degree that they are no longer credible. The exchange in question has to do with Plato's invitation to his friends coming from a ritual at the temple of Dionysus. Diogenes joined the group and upon entering Plato's house stepped onto the carpeting and said, "I trample upon Plato's vainglory".⁹⁷ Not to be outdone, Plato replied, "How much pride you expose to view, Diogenes, by seeming not to be proud."⁹⁸ DL continues the story by explaining different variations of it with different wording. These would be acceptable interpretations of the event in late antiquity falling under the style of *progymnasmata*. According to DL, though, Sotion, has a different version reversing who says what in the dialogue. Since *chreia* must be apt for the person it is intended to depict, reversing what is said by the speakers would violate the rule of aptness.

Other exchanges between Diogenes and Plato are more reliable *chreia*. The first one we will discuss here has to do with Plato's involvement with the governance of Syracuse, an episode criticized by Diogenes and by the people of Athens. Plato tackles the criticism

⁹⁷ DL VI 26

⁹⁸ Ibid. 26

against him for interfering in the Syracusan government in his *Seventh Letter*, one of the better attested letters written or supposedly written by him.⁹⁹ Since we are interested in what Diogenes had to say about this event, we'll start by looking at the dialogue. In DL the exchange is as follows:

Plato saw him [Diogenes] washing lettuces, came up to him and quietly said to him, "Had you paid court to Dionysius, you wouldn't now be washing lettuces," and that he with equal calmness made answer, "If you had washed lettuces, you wouldn't have paid court to Dionysius."¹⁰⁰

Reading Plato's *Seventh Letter*, we find he is at pains to explain his relationship with the tyrants of Syracuse, Dionysius I and at his death with his son, Dionysius II. In the letter, Plato attempted to defuse general criticism of his actions there.¹⁰¹ According to R. W. Hare, Plato came to Syracuse in his travels after the death of Socrates looking for information about Pythagoreanism.¹⁰² Instead, he met Dionysius I and the members of his court including his son, and his nephew, Dion. Plato and Dion were attracted to each other and formed a relationship. In his conversations with Dion, Plato introduced him to his political ideas as described in *The Republic*.¹⁰³ Very much taken with Plato's views of governance, Dion attempted to use his influence to implement Plato's idea of the philosopher king within the court at Syracuse.¹⁰⁴

There were two consequences of this attempt to influence the tyrant's government. The first result was that in working closely with Dion and Dionysius I, Plato was absorbed into the intrigues of the court and eventually was subject to the dictates of the tyrant. He may even have been paid for his services. The second consequence has to do with the result of his meddling. Eventually, at the death of Dionysius I, his son, Dionysius II, took power, and while he made many promises to the effect that he would consider Plato's suggestions, he did not.

⁹⁹ Plato. *Seventh Letter*. In *Plato* translated by R. G. Bury. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1929. Guthrie delving into the reliability of the letters found that of the notable commentators on Plato, 24 reject the idea that he wrote any of the letters, and eight accept all of them as reliable. Guthrie rejects a few of them as "spurious" singling out the First letter as particularly so. He does believe that the Seventh Letter discussed here and the Second and Sixth are interesting and of value. See *A History of Greek Philosophy Vol. V*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 400-401. Bury in his introduction to the Letters (Epistles), claims that only two letters are completely reliable, the Seventh and Eighth, Letters Three, Four, and Thirteen are accepted by most scholars, Six, Ten, and Eleven are less confidently accepted, and One, Five, Nine, and Twelve are forgeries.

¹⁰⁰ DL VI 58

¹⁰¹ Bury. *Plato*. 469.

¹⁰² R. W. Hare. *Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 7.

¹⁰³ *Seventh Letter* 327.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* 328B

Instead, he held Plato captive and exiled Dion as a threat to his power.¹⁰⁵ Dion did usurp Dionysius II, and became tyrant himself. In his attempt to take on Plato's king-like stance within the city state, he executed the leader of a rival faction, which in turn caused him to be assassinated,¹⁰⁶ That event led in the end to many, many years of civil uprisings. Therefore, Plato's interference in this case destabilized the state for a long period of time.

Generally, the reaction of Athenians to Plato's actions was to criticize him for subjecting himself to the rule of a tyrant. As mentioned above, the people of Athens valued their autonomy and would never permit themselves to be dictated to by another. As a man, Plato was diminished by his actions with Dionysius. This is the point that Diogenes is making in the dialogue with Plato. The second consequence of this dialogue moves beyond Diogenes' criticism, but it bolsters Diogenes' criticism of demagogues of any stripe whether they be Athenians, Macedonians, Syracusans. The reaction to Plato in Syracuse was that the people themselves saw that the substitute of a king for a tyrant was a slight of hand, the same person with a different cloak and far more power. Of course, Plato saw this differently and that is what he explains in his Letter, but in the end people like Diogenes, as we see in this anecdote, and Isocrates¹⁰⁷ in his writings were not convinced that Plato's conniving brought no political harm to the citizens of Syracuse.¹⁰⁸

One other altercation between Plato and Diogenes also has to do with Syracuse, but the message is different. It is explained this way by DL:

Observing Plato one day at a costly banquet taking olives, "How is it, he [Diogenes] said, "that you the philosopher sailed to Sicily for the sake of these dishes, now when they are before you do not enjoy them?" "Nay, by the gods, Diogenes," replied Plato, "there also for the most part I lived upon olives and such like." "Why then," said

¹⁰⁵ *Seventh Letter*. 345-50.

¹⁰⁶ Bury. *Plato*. 471. He was assassinated by one of Plato's students at the Academy, Callippus a supposed friend of Dion.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 474. According to Bury, Isocrates' *Antidosis* was a speech contemporary with the *Seventh Letter*. Bury found that the points made in the letter directly relate to Isocrates' criticisms of Plato suggesting Plato wrote the letter to defend himself, not only against Isocrates, but also against those who held similar critical views of him, which for our purposes would be Diogenes.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 471. The letter itself is the argument for this claim, for as Bury remarks, the bulk of the letter attempts to defuse criticism of his actions by explaining his intentions. Guthrie's interest in the letter by contrast is the awkward section in the middle of it, which is a discussion of Plato's concept of Forms. Guthrie dismisses the rest of the Letter as being simply of historical concern. (400), but Bury claims most philosophers find the philosophical "digression" to be "spurious", and the insertion is an attempt by Plato to demean Dionysius' understanding of philosophy, thereby giving a rationale for Plato's failure to convert the Syracusan court to his political ideas.

Diogenes, “did you need to go to Syracuse? Was it that Attica at that time did not grow olives?”¹⁰⁹

Diogenes is questioning Plato’s motives for leaving Attica at the death of Socrates. Much has been written on this subject, and the consensus is with Hare that Plato was distraught and wished to get away from the scene of the tragedy he had witnessed.¹¹⁰ In this passage Diogenes is taking Plato to task for not continuing the work of the man he so much admired. Plato retreated from the power struggles within Athens to far flung places in the Mediterranean, and then upon his return retreated to the safety of his school, the Academy, and to the world of the pen, works written in seclusion well away from everyday citizens.

Right here in this exchange, Diogenes is questioning Plato’s commitment to Socrates and also questioning his courage to live as Socrates did. This criticism comes from a man who did have the courage to engage the Athenians and confront them with their ignorance and hypocrisy. The criticism would have been hollow, had it not been for the integrity of the person who directs his pointed remarks to Plato and who lived as Socrates did, i.e., Diogenes.

Today we recognize how important Plato’s work was, even though in these last exchanges between them, Diogenes would have been dubious about his importance. We turn now to another famous passage that has to do with Plato’s definition of “Man” and Diogenes reaction to it. DL recounts it this way:

Plato had defined Man as an animal, biped and featherless, and was applauded. Diogenes plucked a fowl and brought it to the lecture-room with the words, “Plato’s man.” In consequence of which there was added to the definition, “having broad nails.”¹¹¹

Another passage along the same line is as follows:

As Plato was conversing about Ideas and using the nouns “tablehood” and “cuphood”, he [Diogenes] said, “Table and cup I see; but your tablehood and cuphood, Plato, I nowise see.” “That’s readily accounted for,” said Plato, “For you have the eyes to see the visible table and cup; but not the understanding by which ideal tablehood and cuphood are discerned.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ DL VI 25

¹¹⁰ R. M. Hare. *Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. 5-6.

¹¹¹ DL VI 40

¹¹² *Ibid.* 53

Diogenes' reaction to Plato's rationalism is concisely stated when he claimed of Plato that he "neither gives as you are asked, nor answers as you are questioned. Thus he [Diogenes] scoffed at him as one who talked without end."¹¹³

Diogenes' reaction to the definition of man was brilliant and witty, the mark of an intelligent sceptic, and rightly so in this case. Aristotle was sceptical of some of Plato's ideas, too, and in agreement with Diogenes about the non-existence of cuphood and tablehood, although Aristotle was kinder in how he approached his criticism.¹¹⁴

What Aristotle recognized and Diogenes did not, is the reason for Plato's argument for a transcendent reality. Because of the work of the Pre-Socratic philosophers who were naturalists interested in cosmology, the real world as we perceive it does not sufficiently explain the universe as it is.¹¹⁵ It is for this reason that early philosophers focused on the cosmos, its origin and its nature. Plato following Socrates' lead, saw that to make claims about the nature of anything required that we understand its true nature or essence.¹¹⁶ So while Plato and Socrates were not naturalists like Heraclitus or Parmenides, they still were caught up in questions about the nature (physis) or essence of the things we speak about.¹¹⁷ What is the true nature of justice, or even of a cup or table?

Diogenes ridiculed Plato in the anecdotes just quoted, but they were Plato's attempts to understand the nature of the real world. Even though Aristotle rejected Plato's transcendent world of true essences, he accepted that there is an essence or true nature to all things. That essence for Aristotle resides within the thing itself. Diogenes was not inclined to entertain this kind of questioning. We find no discussions of this kind in the anecdotes.

There is much information to glean from the encounters just mentioned. The ideological differences are clearly marked and are based on Diogenes' rejection of Platonic rationalism. From what we see here we can claim that Diogenes thought Plato talked too much and did too little. It's not that Diogenes faulted reasoning; it's that he faulted certain kinds of reasoning, for example those things asserted at the expense of human experience, empiricism. Diogenes and Aristotle were alike in this.

¹¹³ Ibid. 26

¹¹⁴ See Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Edited by Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941. 990b—993a

¹¹⁵ On this, see, for example, T.H. Irwin. "Plato the Intellectual Background". In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 51-58.

¹¹⁶ Guthrie. *Socrates*. 32-33.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 33

Conclusion

Although democracy was born in Athens in the fifth century BCE, it was still a government ruled by the upper class males for males, leaving the underclass of women, slaves, craftsmen, and exiles and immigrants to serve their needs. Because it was not blessed by nature to supply its needs as was Sinope, it was a society geared for war to take by pillage what it did not have. Its prowess in war brought about its dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Inroads into that culture were breached outwardly by the military power of Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander, and inwardly by democracy itself which allowed for the rise of the male underclass supported by trade and by the Sophists who educated the sons of the newly wealthy. The hold of the aristocratic class began to erode as did the traditional beliefs, which supported the position of the elite.

In the time of Diogenes we begin to see the positions of various individuals stand out more clearly. Aristophanes upholds tradition while recognizing its flaws. Aristophanes portrays Socrates as a Sophist of the worst sort, and that image follows him for the rest of his life. Plato, too, upholds the position of the aristocracy in spite of the fact that his school, the Academy, is open to all, slaves as well as women. We see Diogenes upholding tradition as a teacher of the traditional system, but even more strictly with Xenias' sons, adhering to the simplicity and minimalism of Athens' past to show the young men how to be self-sufficient. Were it not for this story, we would be hard pressed to claim any stance that Diogenes took in the Athenian culture wars. So this information is key to understanding the Cynic path.

In one of the notorious episodes of Diogenes' life where he masturbates in public, he does not teach that it is acceptable; he shows that he simply succumbed to it as a natural occurrence, which is true. Far too much commentary is made of this, when in reality we see more to suggest that Diogenes' admonishments to the Athenians are not extreme. They are what any educator or parent would say today; e.g., get proper exercise, eat well but moderately, don't hang out with the wrong people, be modest in your own person. He admonished everyone about this, elite and slave alike.

In contrast, Aristophanes depicts Socrates as extreme, and compared to Diogenes he is. Socrates limited his teaching to elite males, he challenged traditional thinking, and his use of irony was criticized broadly even by Plato who is the best judge of his behaviour. The contrast deepens when we contrast Diogenes with Plato and Aristotle. As we see here,

Diogenes is unwilling to engage in theoretical discussions, whether they are about the universe or the reality of things in our everyday world. His focus is on our practical lives, how to live successfully in the world in which we find ourselves. So it is within the historical context pictured here that the image of Diogenes begins to emerge. In the next chapter, placing Diogenes within the Athenian ideological context reveals even more.

Chapter Four

Cynic Language and Literature

Misunderstanding of terms used in language can lead to misunderstanding of meaning and/or intent by an author and this can set the stage for erroneous judgements about an event, and ideology, or a person's actions. Without an understanding of the full scope of ancient Greek thought, many later critics have made serious mistakes in interpretation. Such is the case of many critics of Cynicism and Diogenes both in antiquity and into modern times. In this chapter we will attempt to address some of the more significant errors in order to better appreciate what Diogenes was more likely thinking.

As we discovered in the preceding chapters, shortly after Diogenes arrived in Athens, he took up the life of a beggar. He could have made that decision for a number of reasons, but Dudley claims Diogenes chose to be an ascetic. In this chapter we will look at this issue to see whether Dudley is correct about this. It is important to do so because Diogenes' decision gets to heart of his philosophy—why did he choose the path that he did? If we can find one reason more compelling than the others, we would be one step closer to understanding his form of Cynicism.

We begin by looking at Dudley's argument. In Dudley's account of Diogenes and Cynicism, he claims that a passage "probably derived from Theophrastus suggests that he [Diogenes] arrived in Athens already a devotee of an ascetic mode of life."¹ Dudley adds that additional evidence for his asceticism came "in light of his career."² His claim is not evidenced further although a few passages later he proposes that Diogenes "was a man with a mission" who engaged in the most "uncompromising criticism it [Greece] had ever known."³ It was from this attitude, adds Dudley, of a person who was a 'penniless exile, already devoted to an extreme form of asceticism, and originating from the far ends of the Greek world"⁴ that Diogenes' life can be understood. Perhaps Dudley believed that simply the choice of poverty justified his claim of asceticism, but the issue cannot be settled quite so easily for there are many connotations of the use of the term "asceticism", not to mention some questions as to the extent of Diogenes' poverty and why he chose it.

¹ Dudley. *A History of Cynicism* 21

² *Ibid.* 21

³ *Ibid.* 24

⁴ *Ibid.* 24

So there are many issues which need to be addressed concerning Diogenes' supposed asceticism. What was the nature of it? Is the term appropriate given his lifestyle? Would Diogenes understand the meaning of the term? We will answer these questions in turn and begin by considering what it means to characterize a person as ascetic. Tackling the derivation of the word from which asceticism is derived gives us some answers.

Modern dictionaries like the OED are not much help with this, specifying monks or hermits who "retired into solitude to exercise themselves in meditation and prayer."⁵ This early European definition dates to 1682, and it includes references to self-denial, rigorous self-discipline, and celibacy. It is a modern definition of the term and embedded in it is the long history of Stoic and Christian ideals. However, in the same way that Diogenes' life-style led to later forms of asceticism, we should not thereby call him an ascetic. Some qualities like rigorous self-discipline do fit, but it is questionable that he really lived a life of self-denial, and if Athenaeus is to be believed, Diogenes was most certainly not celibate.

A different definition from the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* shows that later Cynics used the term to mean renunciation of "world desires in order to pursue virtue in independence."⁶ This is closer to what we see displayed in Diogenes' life, but even here we need to clarify what virtue means. Confusingly (although certainly not to the Greeks), the Greek word "arête" is most often translated as virtue, but in the ancient world it meant an excellence of some kind. So following this approach can lead to more confusion, not less.

A better approach is to look at the word "ascetic" itself. It is derived from the ancient word *askesis*, and *askesis* has a long history as it evolves into the word we know as ascetic. In her work, *The Usage of Askeo and Its Cognates in Greek Documents to 100 AD*,⁷ Hermigild Dressler traced that long history and shows that in the time of Diogenes it had a limited meaning—very unlike the modern definition. According to Dressler, the term appears first in Homer and it had a specific meaning, i.e., "the act of adorning something in which technical skill is involved, or of doing artistic work."⁸ That word is restricted to making beautiful things like spinning wool or making chariots. It can also mean something like "cleverly wrought" as in the case of Odysseus' bed. There is no

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. "Ascetic."

⁶ *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* edited by Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan Press, 1967.

⁷ Hermigild Dressler. *The Usage of Askeo and Its Cognates in Greek Documents to 100 AD*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947.

⁸ *Ibid.* 1

change in the term's meaning until Thespis, where it is used to mean "practice" or "pursue."⁹ The original Homeric meaning is retained as well. So until the time of the Persian Wars, Dressler concludes that *askeo* simply means to work raw materials, or expend some kind of physical energy, skilled or otherwise on a material object.¹⁰ She mentions Xenophanes as one who uses the word consistently in this way.

The first time *askeo* is used in reference to a person is with Simonides who uses it to mean "a person who has an established reputation for specialized skill or proficiency in the sculptor's art."¹¹ Later, Pindar uses the term to mean "venerate" or "honour" and later still it is Sophocles who introduces the verb to express self-discipline or training oneself.¹² Dressler claims that over time asceticism accumulated three components to its meaning. It connotes poverty and virtue and that is what has been applied to Diogenes. But it has an additional connotation mistakenly assumed by many that was not added until 100 CE by Philo.¹³ That other aspect is religious benefit. This meaning is often assumed since the Christian era, but it does not arise until late antiquity and it is not a characteristic of Diogenes discernable in DL's anecdotes. So it is not appropriate to him, nor would he understand the term if it were used in this way. When we look at the chapter on Diogenes, DL uses *askeo* several times. In each case, Hicks translates the word as training in the sense of training one's body. It's not an easy thing to live the life of simplicity which Diogenes chose to live and so one must train oneself in order to be able to handle it. That is the obvious meaning in each use of the word.

When we consider whether asceticism is appropriate in its application to Diogenes, we can cite one passage in which, Hegesias, one of Diogenes' students, asked him for one of his books. Diogenes responds by asking why he wants a book of rules when "true training" is right in front of him.¹⁴ In this case Diogenes is using *askeo* as training.

In another example, Diogenes used the work of craftsmen and musicians to illustrate a comparison of the development of the mind through practice. If the mind is trained to think better, then one's labours would not have been unprofitable or ineffective. This is not a moral scenario; this is just practical advice. Further, we can avoid "useless toils" by focusing the mind on what "nature recommends" rather than what convention says is

⁹ Ibid. 3

¹⁰ Ibid 4

¹¹ Ibid. 5

¹² Ibid. 6

¹³ Ibid. 60

¹⁴ DL VI 48

important. If we apply this rule to Diogenes' situation in a society increasingly enamoured of wealth and power, it would take "strenuous practice" not to follow along.

At the end of the passage in which DL expresses his views on training is a passage with as good a summary of Diogenes' approach to life as can be found in literature. DL says,

This was the gist of his conversation; and it was plain that he acted accordingly, adulterating currency in every truth, allowing convention no such authority as he allowed to natural right, and asserting that the manner of life he lived was the same as that of Heracles when he preferred liberty to everything.¹⁵

If Diogenes' goal was freedom, following the path of Heracles, how is asceticism a factor in such a life? So at no time do we ever have an instance where Diogenes uses *askesis* to mean anything other than to train oneself for the strength to be self-sufficient and free in the way that he states here.

For Diogenes and all Greeks, Heracles was their ideal hero and Heracles was no ascetic. He was a tragic figure of prodigious strength, the product of the union of Zeus and a mortal, Alcmene.¹⁶ Zeus' wife, Hera, took that union as an affront that provoked her to make Heracles' life as miserable as possible. Nothing Heracles did led to a happy ending as Hera dogged his footsteps every step of the way. All successes led to tragedy, yet he persisted through his famous labours, killing of his wife and children, and finally to his excruciating death at the hands of his third wife, Deianira. It was the final act of his death that moved Zeus to grant him his rightful place as an immortal. Heracles was bawdy, violent, licentious, and the epitome of what Greek ales wanted to be. This statement by Diogenes as to who he admired should be the defining statement as to his intent. If we take it as such, given this and the preceding discussion, there is no ambiguity in understanding what Diogenes meant in living the way he did. His way of life was meant only to gain him freedom.

If we can now agree that *askeo* means to train oneself, we must ask why he does so if it is not for a spiritual or uplifting reason. To be dependent on no one, to be independent of any civic or family responsibilities, is to be truly free and to ready for any eventuality. The Fates were not kind to him in Sinope, and so a person of good sense would be wise to be ready for any fate that might come his way. If he began a life similar to the one in Sinope, he would be subject to the same kinds of possible calamities of the past. Why

¹⁵ DL VI 71

¹⁶ Garland. *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*. 299.

would one allow oneself to be vulnerable again? The cynical person, and this is where the label fits him, would avoid the mistakes of the past. One would rely on no one but oneself, and that is exactly what he sets out to do. If he can toughen his body to deal with the weather, he has no worry about that. He knows he can sleep anywhere it suits him: temples, the countryside, even along the road as he travels. And if he begs, he knows he will have something to eat.

Given the information above, asceticism seems an inappropriate characterization of what Diogenes was about, given his avowed goal in life as expressed here. The problem could also be, as Dressler shows, a simple linguistic one. From the way we see *askesis* used in the anecdotes, it's clear that Hicks' translation of "training" is right. Even in the passage where Diogenes says how easy it is to move from gymnastic training to virtue, it makes no sense to interpret the passage with a contemporary definition of asceticism in mind; here's the passage:

He used to affirm that training was of two kinds, mental and bodily: the latter being what whereby, with constant exercise, perceptions are formed such as secure freedom of movement for virtuous deeds; and the one half of his training is incomplete without the other, good health and strength being just as much included among the essential things whether for body or soul. And we would adduce indisputable evidence—to show how easily from gymnastic training we arrive at virtue. For in the manual crafts and other arts it can be seen that the craftsmen develop extraordinary manual skill through practice. Again, take the case of flute-players and of athletes: what surpassing skill they acquire by their own incessant toil; and, if they had transferred their efforts to the training of the mind how certainly their labours would not have been unprofitable or ineffective.¹⁷

We can hold onto old terms even as they evolve, but we cannot attribute evolved meanings to the past. Historically, we have also taken ancient words and conferred our own meanings on them. Our problem is an example of that. Take the word "virtue" used in the above passage. The Greek word translated as virtue is *arête*. *Arete* means excellence. The word "virtue" comes from the Latin word "*virtus*" which also means excellence. That is not a meaning a person would normally confer on the word today. So simply the use of the word "virtue" in the translation confers a bias toward a certain interpretation of the original word used that is an unintended consequence of a lack of care concerning how the translated word might be understood.

¹⁷ DL VI 70

For example, a better translation for “gymnastic training to virtue” would be “gymnastic training to excellence”. If we change the wording, we absolve ourselves of any hint of an uplifted, spiritual life, which the term “virtue” carries with it today, and Diogenes’ meaning would be clear. So properly we can train to any excellence, for example, wrestling, cooking, pottery making and so on. The term need not be limited to an uplifting kind of excellence as the word “virtue” now implies. Thus, a linguistic analysis can tell us what the use of the words in question are not—asceticism in the contemporary sense of the term.

A second issue relating to Diogenes’ supposed asceticism has to do with the degree of his poverty versus the obvious delight he had in the pleasure of living. He was no Pythagoras, Plotinus, or Francis of Assisi, all of whom lived lives of abstinence. He did not abstain from sexuality, he attended banquets, and he enjoyed the luxury of the baths and oiled himself with expensive unguents. This apparent contradiction has led William Desmond to remark that it is “common” to categorize Cynicism into ascetic and hedonistic strains.¹⁸ He says that some critics offer this as a solution to the evidence that although they “embraced ascetic poverty many anecdotes depict them enjoying honey cakes, symposia, and expensive luxuries.”¹⁹ It’s true that Diogenes was not above doing all of these things, and what’s more he was even known to take and wear a purple cloak—a symbol of the epitome of wealth and success. Lest such a pleasure lead us to think of Diogenes and Cynics generally as hypocritical, Desmond concludes that “askesis was central to the Cynic lifestyle although theirs was a cheerful and hedonistic, not a world-denying asceticism.”²⁰ He explains this statement by suggesting that they enjoyed what was available; they were opportunists who enjoyed the moment.²¹

Desmond makes his case by emphasizing the degree of training Cynics were willing to endure. He says, “The Cynic becomes an ascetic of sorts, training through pain” for a hard simple life “according to nature”,²² adding “one must rain through *ponos* (pain) to recover one’s natural self, but when one does return to nature, one returns to an elemental goodness.”²³ It’s possible that Diogenes had such an experience as part of his lifestyle, but such an event is not mentioned in DL’s anecdotes nor is there any

¹⁸ William Desmond. *Cynics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 5.

¹⁹ Ibid. 101

²⁰ Ibid. 101

²¹ Ibid. 101

²² Ibid. 154

²³ Ibid. 156

suggestion that achieving goodness was Diogenes' intent. He does say he valued people "who were good and true,"²⁴ but he also says that his training was to allow him to be self-sufficient and self-sufficiency allowed him to be free.²⁵ He does not say his training was to become good. It could be that disagreement over this is really confusion over what the Athenians meant by saying someone was good, and fortunately A. W. Adkins' studies on this subject can enlighten us.

Adkins' View of the Ancient Ideal

If we broaden our perspective to think beyond just the word *askesis*, and associate it within the traditional Greek tradition of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, we clarify the situation considerably. This is precisely what A.W. Adkins did in his study of the classic Greek mindset. In essence, he argues that the words used in the Homeric period which described how an individual was valued in that culture, carried over into the Classic Age and beyond. That valuation, which was based purely on barbaric, self-interested practicality became the basis of what the Greeks were to value as a good (*agathos*) man and the attributes or qualities that allowed him to achieve that goal were *aretai* or excellent skills he needed to master.

In addition Adkins reveals a subtle origin of²⁶ language in the use of the word *physis* or nature. The first point he makes is that in the time of Homer, the Greeks thought of man not in terms of some essential nature, but in terms of being the best that a man can be.²⁷ If a man achieved the goal of being the best, then he was considered to be *agathos* or good. The skills or dispositions he possessed to become *agathos* were called *aretai*. According to Adkins, this initial ideal of manhood colours the later debates concerning

²⁴ Ibid. 27

²⁵ Ibid. 71

²⁶ Although the reception to Adkins' work brought a high degree of praise (A.A.Long comments "his indebtedness to *Merit and Responsibility* is considerable"), Long had reservations about some of Adkins' claims about *agathos* and *arête*. See A.A.Long. "Moral Values in Homer." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. Vol. 90. 1970. 121-139. For other more positive reactions see Frederick Will. Review of *Merit and Responsibility*. *The Journal of Philology*. Vol. 83, No. 2. April 1962. 209-211, and R. S. Buck. Review of *Merit and Responsibility*. *Classical Review*. Vol. 11. No 2, June 1961. 127-128.

²⁷ A. W. H. Adkins. *From the Many to the One: A Study of personality and views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values, and Beliefs*. London: Constable & Company Limited, 1970. 12. This work, written 10 years later than *Merit and Responsibility*, is the product of his mature thinking and his emphasis on human nature coincides with the aim of this thesis. Perhaps in answering Long and his criticism, Adkins remarks that an author attempting a book on a subject as broad as human nature, must establish criteria of relevance based on a particular viewpoint. To attempt a study of this kind by saying everything, would end up saying nothing. (x). Adkins' approach in this book is primarily linguistic with a strong emphasis on historical context. His conclusions coincide very much with the works of Guthrie and those comparisons will be noted as the discussion moves along.

human nature and aristocratic birth plays a prominent part of the ideal life. Adkins says, “In Homer, *arête*, *agathos* and other similar words commended competitive striving for success, prosperity and stability as the highest goal of human nature in this life.”²⁸ The reason for this view is simple. Homeric man lived in small communities or tribes led by an *agathos*—a highly skilled individual who was capable of safeguarding the group.²⁹ He alone was responsible for their security. Such a man necessarily had to fulfill certain expectations. Adkins adds,

Agathos is not a title of the head of *oikos* [household], but the most powerful adjective available to commend a man in Homeric society; for the head of *oikos* as a warrior-chieftain, is expected to unite in himself all the qualities which this society needs most and values most highly. He must be strong, brave and successful; for no quality has any value unless it leads to success. He has a great advantage over his followers, for he is wealthy and can purchase full armour and a chariot, and the leisure to become proficient in their use. He is, as they can see, a much more effective fighter than they are; and provided that he actually succeeds in preserving the group in war and in what passes for peace in Homeric society, they have every inducement to commend him as *agathos* and his admired qualities as *arête*.³⁰

Some changes occur over the centuries, nevertheless by the fifth century BCE, still “it is *arête* commending human nature at its best that urges the individual to succeed in his enterprises and maximize his gratifications.”³¹ What has changed is that the *oikos* has given way to the *polis*, wealth from land ownership has given way to wealth through trade, and the aristocratic tradition based on the *agathos* as hereditary has given way to a clamour for the equality of democracy. Another change is the beginning of the use of the term *physis*³² as a label for the newly formed idea of human nature.

Initially, *physis* had many meanings. It could indicate what was real versus what was conventional,³³ to indicate a stage of life,³⁴ and to indicate those characteristics that humans universally share.³⁵ It is at this time that *physis* is distinguished from *nomos* as

²⁸ Ibid. 74

²⁹ Ibid. 28

³⁰ Ibid. 29-30

³¹ Ibid. 271

³² *Physis*, as does *hybris*, have alternative spellings of *phusis* and *hubris*. Adkins prefers the spelling *phusis* as we see here. Both spellings are acceptable, although both in the original Greek are spelled with upsilon (u).

³³ Ibid. 81

³⁴ Ibid. 81

³⁵ Ibid. 81

arête plays a key role in this distinction with *aksexis* playing a supporting role. Adkins explains the situation in this way:

[S]ome individuals have abilities which are innate in the sense that they would reach full development without training, but other people could be trained to have these abilities; and it is the person who does not possess these qualities by *physis* that must learn. *Arete* is still affecting *physis*. The goal of learning is to become *agathos*; and in this society *agathoi* are traditionally *agathoi* by birth, by *puysis*; *physis*, though frequently rendered 'nature,' does not in these writers denote natural qualities by whose exercise one might rise in a socially stratified *polis*, but the qualities as a whole of those who are by birth *agathoi* (or *kakoi* (bad)). Nor is there any other Greek word for human 'nature;' *physis* with all its overtones and associations, was the only word available to the society.³⁶

Thus, even into the fifth century BCE, and as Adkins shows into the fourth century as well with Plato and Aristotle, the ancient connotations of *physis* continue to apply. What changes is that *physis* and *nomos* have become adversaries—a situation as we have already noted in the last chapter Aristophanes found shocking.³⁷ For most of ancient Greek history *physis* and *nomos* worked together to create man at his best.

We find also that even in the fifth century BCE, *aretai* denote qualities necessary to succeed in a society based on ancient ideas of status. In Adkins words, it does not “distinguish natural from conventional.” It was the only word available to express what is given to a man by birth. He adds that “*physis* in denoting birth, denotes also the additional qualities which a status-ridden society ascribes to an individual’s being born in a particular stratus of that society”.³⁸ Man and his environment worked together. Still in a society of self-sufficient farmers, their survival depended upon their success. Prosperity was used as a sign of success and success had to be sought “by whatever means”.³⁹

The antagonism between nature and convention began innocently enough with the Pre-Socratic distinction between appearance and reality—the reality of the cosmos and the forces that governed it versus what the world is as it appears to us. These ideas broadened as physicians applied scientific ideas to man and to the way humans differ. It is Adkin’ view that the Sophists brought home the debate between the two and it shows that the debate was not really about human nature versus convention; it was a debate

³⁶ Ibid. 269

³⁷ Ibid. 124

³⁸ Ibid. 83

³⁹ Ibid. 83

about human nature itself and whether the *aretai* of innate skills plus a suitable environment were enough to create an *agathos* or whether more was needed.

The tradition from the ancient heroic culture, which became the aristocratic culture of the fifth and fourth centuries, asserted that the old view of *aretai* were sufficient. This view favoured the entrenched aristocratic class, but with burgeoning trade and wealth accumulated from trade, non-aristocratic citizens clamoring for recognition and power within the polis and assisted by the Sophists, suggested that *aretai* could be enhanced by *askesis* or training. Such a move would allow the wealthy class to become successful within the statue-ridden culture of the fifth and fourth century Athens. It also meant competition for the aristocratic class so that they too embraced training as a means to retain power. So in the late fifth century Adkins finds that the old *aretai* are still in place. He argues,

It must suffice to say that the traditional values in which the goal is prosperity and stability, *eudaimonia*, and the *agathos*, the man whose characteristics are commended by *arête* is the prosperous, brave and successful man, are still dominant. . . There are also desires for advancement, security political power; and these are commended by *arête* as *Agatha* goods to be pursued at all times with all the sources at one's commend: the successful pursuit of these is commended as the mark of the human being at his best.⁴⁰

So what is objected to within the ancient mindset in the debate over *physis* and *nomos* is the change given to *physis* of training which would allow the aristocratic class to be politically usurped by the rising wealthy class. That is why Aristophanes, an aristocrat, is shocked by the changes initiated by the Sophists with their educational training. In either case however whether for the aristocrats or the Sophists, like Socrates, the subject of Aristophanes' ire in the play the *Clouds*, *physis* retains the fundamental principle of a man at his best whether man is at his best in the ancient *oikos* or the later polis.

As we see, then, the idea of *askesis* has a role very different from that pictured by Goulet-Caze. What persuades her perhaps is the possibility that in Socrates' time the word *arête* underwent a change in meaning. Guthrie makes this claim when he asserts that Socrates added a moral connotation to it such the word could be used to refer to virtue.⁴¹ However, as Dressler explains above, this more formal change more likely occurred 400 years later with Philo. Even if it did occur earlier, one would still need to

⁴⁰ Ibid. 125

⁴¹W. K. C. Guthrie. *Sophists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971. 253. A further discussion of this is found in Chapter Five.

make the case that other philosophers, including Diogenes, did so, and as our investigation shows above, we have no evidence that he ever did.

Guthrie goes over the same ground in his discussion of the Sophists. Essentially agreeing with Adkins, Guthrie argues that after the Peloponnesian War, Athens was destabilized and powerful forces were at work to take control. This plus the rise of democracy allowed the Sophists to gain influence providing the training young men needed to become successful.⁴² He adds that people like Protagoras advertised the fact that they could teach young men “the proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his own household, and aslo of the State’s affairs, so as to become a real power in the city, both as speaker and man of action.”⁴³

Guthrie also ties together the ideas of *agathos*, *arête*, and *physis* in a fashion similar to that of Adkins. In an important passage, he sees the relationship in this way:

Arete when used without qualification denoted those qualities of human excellence which made a man a natural leader in his community, and hitherto it had been believed to depend on certain natural or even divine gifts which were the mark of good birth and breeding. They were definitely a matter of *physis*, cultivated, as a boy grew up, by the experience of living with and following the example of his father and elder relations. Thus they were handed on naturally and scarcely consciously, a prerogative of the class that was born to rule, and the thought that they could be implanted by an outsider [a wandering Sophist] offering schematic instruction in return for payment, was anathema to fathers of the old school.⁴⁴

This is a very succinct summary of Adkins’ point of view, and it ties in well with our discussion in Chapter Three concerning Socrates and what was said at his trial. It also enhances our understanding of Diogenes and his position concerning the on-going debate over all of this. Guthrie also offers an explanation as to why Diogenes has little to say about this. Guthrie claims that “Any upper-class Athenian should understand the proper conduct of affairs by a sort of instinct inherited from his ancestors, and be prepared to pass it on to his sons”.⁴⁵ He continues that even Protagoras agreed to this, but added that education could supplement familial instruction.⁴⁶ That supplemental instruction helped a young man through the long process of developing his natural gifts (*aretai*), and that instruction included rhetoric, cleverness, and bodily fitness.⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid. 20

⁴³ Ibid. 20

⁴⁴ Ibid. 25

⁴⁵ Ibid. 39

⁴⁶ Ibid. 39

⁴⁷ Ibid. 71

In our discussions of Adkins and Guthrie here, there is nothing that would contradict the information found in Diogenes' anecdotes. In fact, the various aspects of the traditional view explained here fit him to a tee. If we relate all of this information to the claim of Cynic asceticism, there may be an alternative way to consider it. Independently of the ascetic debate, A. A. Long explored a train of thought which focuses on mastery of "self" and we may be able to apply that idea to Diogenes. Using Long's idea, it may be possible to say that Diogenes was really practicing the art of self-mastery as did Socrates.

The Idea of Self-Mastery

A.A. Long suggests that we might conceptualize the activities of philosophers after Socrates in a different way from what we see portrayed above. He remarks that there is a noted change in debates about ways of Life in Diogenes' time because of the way Socrates portrayed himself. Long cites a conversation Socrates had with Callicles as the beginning of this new view. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles says he does not understand what Socrates means when he speaks of "ruling oneself". Socrates replies, it means "ruling the pleasures and passions within himself."⁴⁸ Socrates uses the expression *enkrates heautou* which at the time was an unusual juxtaposition of words. Long then cites its further use by Xenophon to describe Socrates himself as "the most *enkrates* of all men over sex and bodily appetite, most hardy in relation to winter and summer and all exertions, and so trained for needing moderate amounts that he was easily satisfied when he had only little."⁵⁰ While for Xenophon this description calls to mind Socrates, it may even more so call to mind Diogenes. In one of the anecdotes DL explains that Diogenes used to take his tub and "in the summer he used to roll in it over hot sand, while in winter he used to embrace statues covered with snow, using every means of inuring himself to hardship".⁵¹

The bold new ideas about ethics and nature, says Hadot, come into being much like the dramatically new ideas about the cosmos came out of the Milesian philosophers. He suggests that new truths were "waiting to be discovered" and the goal of ethics in particular was to "make individual happiness an accessible objective" and the various schools learned from and vied with each other during this period creating "interschool

⁴⁸ Plato. *Gorgias translated by W. D. Woodhead 491D.*

⁵⁰ Long. *The Socratic Tradition* 145

⁵¹ DL VI 23

controversy and contact.”⁵² Those schools were Stoicism, Cynicism, Epicureanism and the Cyrenaics.

Long notes that the choice of a philosophical path is the choice of the role one is to play in life, and this idea of role is exemplified in Zeno and Epicurus. Zeno, says Long, as well as other philosophers of the time, “were theatrical in the sense that they intended their lives to be seen as a highly self-conscious choice of a determinate role.”⁵³ One had to live the way one preached and so one must be highly conscious of the fact that one’s actions demonstrated that commitment. He cites Zeno’s student, Aristo, described as a wise man who ‘like a good actor who, whether he puts on the mask of Thersites or Agamemnon, plays with the part in the proper way.’⁵⁴ Theatricality is certainly a major aspect of Diogenes’ life as well. His outrageous behaviour, acknowledged by all his commentators was geared to attract attention to himself, and he was very good at it. He was simply behaving like a Cynic, not an imperfect representation of something else.

Writing at the same time as Adkins, Guthrie’s works on Socrates and the Sophists gives us essentially the same explanation of Homeric tradition as Adkins. What Guthrie adds that is important to this study is information about the relationship between *askesis* and *arête* and their interaction within the thought of Socrates. What we discover in Guthrie’s work is that the term *arête* suffers from some of the same problems that plague the translation of *askesis*. The word *arête* is most often translated as “virtue”, and we see in DL’s life of Diogenes as translated by Hicks that he has done exactly this.

What we learn from Adkins and Guthrie is that *arete* should be translated as an excellence of some kind. How then did it come to mean virtue? It is Guthrie’s view that the change occurred because of Socrates’⁵⁵ use of it. Guthrie claims:

It might thereby be said that it was Socrates who enlarged the meaning of *arête* from talent or proficiency in a particular art or function to something like virtue in our sense, the prerequisite of a good human life.

He adds that the term was long used to indicate “human excellence in general.”⁵⁶ One could say that such an excellence could be valour for Homer, or self-control for

⁵² Hadot *Philosophy As a Way of Life*. 180.

⁵³ Long. *The Socratic Tradition*. 153.

⁵⁴ DL VII 160

⁵⁵ Guthrie. *The Sophists*. 253.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 253

Heraclitus, or manliness for Democritus.⁵⁷ These individual qualities would be what was given at birth and could thereby be enhanced through training and education.

Guthrie argues that Socrates sought to emphasize moral qualities as those that led to a good life and not necessarily a successful life. It is because the Sophists disagreed with Socrates on this, as did the traditionalists, that we see in Diogenes' lifetime, the constant discussion of the various aspects of Greek tradition including *askesis*, *arête*, and *nomos* versus *physis*. Individual philosophers and philosophical schools took positions on the topic as a whole and on the various aspects of it.

Socrates, according to Guthrie was attempting to uncover the essence of *arête*—a universal definition—whereas the Sophists resisted this.⁵⁸ They did so because to do so would undermine the fundamental idea of tradition itself. On this question, Aristotle agreed with the Sophists, says Guthrie. In his *Politics*, Aristotle says, “the well being of the soul or ‘right action’ or the like are wrong. To enumerate the virtues, as Gorgias did, is much nearer the mark than to make this kind of definition.”⁵⁹ Aristotle argues that this is so because of the individual nature of excellences. Those of a child, differ from that of an adult, those of a free man differ from those of a slave, and those of a woman differ from those of a male.

This is not to debate the soundness of Aristotle's argument, but it is to say that the argument itself has consequences for our study of Diogenes. One consequence is that if *arête* is an essence—a universal quality—it hardly needs education and training to enhance it. Since Diogenes and other philosophers advocated training, then they did not consider *arête* as a universal quality. Guthrie quotes a few who reject Socrates' idea on this basis. Pindar believed that natural gifts can be enhanced by “another's instruction,” and Hesiod remarked that the gods put “sweat on the path of achievement.”⁶⁰ So Diogenes was not alone in holding to the original understanding of *arête* and he should not be thought of as someone who thought of virtue in the modern sense.

A second consequence has to do with *askesis*. Citing Democritus, Guthrie explains that he believed human nature is not necessarily fixed at birth and therefore *askesis* has a transformative quality about it. This is important because we see in DL's account that he advocated training and yet as we see above, his viewpoint seems to be a traditional one. Traditionalists of the early 5th century BCE would have insisted on birth alone to provide

⁵⁷ Ibid. 253

⁵⁸ Ibid. 254

⁵⁹ Aristotle. *Politics*. 1260 a 25

⁶⁰ Ibid. 254

arête—thereby assuring the prominence of the aristocratic class. Diogenes claimed that birth was not necessary, but training was.⁶¹

A third consequence is that it is inevitable in any discussion about education or training, a teacher will encounter those students who are weak-willed, who, says Protagoras “recognize the best, but are unwilling to act on it.”⁶² One answer to this problem, says Guthrie, is to “offer the old Greek adage that the doer shall suffer. ‘Whoever thinks he can injure his neighbors without suffering himself is not a temperate man. Such hopes have brought many to irreversible disaster when they have turned out to suffer exactly what they thought to inflict on others.’”⁶³ The reason this is an old Greek adage is because within the old tradition, dos and don’ts are determined by experience. Long experience indicated what practices produced success in the long run or not, and the experience could extend past an individual’s lifetime where the consequences of actions can still linger and cause harm.

To this point, Hadot mentions the Stoic and Epicurean models of knowledge that thrive on “lengthy experience acquired over centuries, and lengthy discussions about such experience, which give ancient models their value.”⁶⁴ It is not just that rational knowledge can evolve through debate over centuries, so also can sensory experience and observation provide information as it proves itself to be valid or not. This aspect of ancient thought will recur as an idea in modernity, and so we emphasize it here now so as to better recognize it when it reappears.

Overall, what Guthrie’s works tell us, and Adkins’ too, is that there were many points of view about life and how to live it – but all grounded in the ancient tradition. More than any other thinkers, it was Socrates and Plato who challenged some aspects of ancient thought most severely, and it was Diogenes who criticized it the least. One last quote on this issue from Diogenes is very telling. He remarks that “men strive in digging and kicking to outdo one another, but no one strives to become a good man and true (καλοοκαγαθος).”⁶⁵ The Greek word Diogenes used here refers to those “noble and good”, used in earlier times of the nobles and gentlemen.⁶⁶ This is one of the best

⁶¹ DL VI

⁶² Guthrie. *The History of Philosophy*. 258.

⁶³ Ibid. 258.

⁶⁴ Pierre Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2002. 277.

⁶⁵ DL 27.

⁶⁶ Liddel & Scott. 397.

arguments to see him as a member of the old school, and he would have understood both *askesis* and *arête* from that point of view.

A good illustration of how important tradition was to the ancient Athenians, is the trial and condemnation of Socrates. His trial is much debated and usually critics like Guthrie side with Socrates that the charge was unjust. But from a traditionalist stance, the answer is not so easy. Imagine Socrates' jury of 400 of his countrymen, already aware of his reputation because of Aristophanes, deciding his fate. Socrates calls on his accuser, Meletus, to debate with him. The debate goes like this and Socrates begins:

Come now, Meletus, tell me this. You regard it as supremely important do you not, that our young people should be exposed to the best possible influence?

I do.

Very well then, tell these gentlemen who it is that influences the young for the better. . .

The laws.

That is not what I mean, my dear sir. I am asking you to name the *person* whose first business it is to know the laws.

The gentlemen here, Socrates, the members of the jury.

Do you mean, Meletus, that they have the ability to educate the young, and to make them better?

Certainly.

Does this apply to all jurymen, or only to some.

To all of them.

Excellent! A generous supply of benefactors. Well, then do these spectators who are present in court have an improving influence, or not?

Yes, they do.

And what about the members of the Council?

Yes, the councilors too.

But surely, Meletus, the members of the Assembly do not corrupt the young? Or do all of them too exert an improving influence?

Yes, they do.

Then it would seem that the whole population of Athens has a refining effect upon the young, except myself, and I alone demoralize them. Is that your meaning?

Most emphatically, yes.⁶⁷

Our first thought would be to side with Socrates in this since surely not all of the people mentioned could be a good influence; there must be at least a few bad apples in the mix. But to take this attitude is to not understand ancient Greek tradition. As we saw in the previous chapter with Plato who trusted the stories that came down to him about the divinities, so too, the members of the jury listening to this debate believed absolutely

⁶⁷ Plato. *Apology*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961. 24d-25b.

in the heroic ideal. That tradition valued the nature of each man to recognize his excellences and develop them to achieve a good life. Socrates questioned not only the ability of each person to understand himself, but the authority of the laws and society which stated this was the way to live one's life. Socrates reliance on reason over tradition, so natural a way of thinking to us was anathema to the Greeks. From that point of view, Socrates should at least have been exiled.

For whatever reasons he chose to, Diogenes upheld tradition. He doesn't state why, but taking the traditionalists' side for a moment, we cannot destroy centuries worth of human experience as to how to live successfully simply on the word of one man. It may be that tradition or culture, if you will, promotes many unwise ideas, but it also is the seat of much wisdom. Caution should be the watchword of those who suggest otherwise, and caution seems to be the way Diogenes handled himself in his time in Athens.

Diogenes' Alternative View

Diogenes' self-mastery characterized the discipline and training (askesis) he needed to follow the path he chose. That path, as he himself says, was the path of Heracles—a path of freedom and self-sufficiency. As such it was a far cry from the ascetic life posited for him by Dudley. Unfortunately, Dudley's point of view on the matter was influential and many subsequent authors have used the term "ascetic" to characterize Diogenes. This is one of the reasons, I think, that with Diogenes' real motivation in plain view (since he stated it himself) yet out of focus for some, Diogenes became a stereotypical character—a place keeper—who was seen as nothing more than a key piece in the line of succession from Socrates to what many have assumed was the superior philosophy of Stoicism. Once Stoicism was adopted by many important Roman writers like Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, the stage was set for its influence on the early Christians and their subsequent influence on modernity. Sadly, as we will discover, some of the ideas promoted by Stoicism and developed in late antiquity as adopted by the Middle Ages and beyond to modernity began to collapse around the heads of Enlightenment thinkers, and the likes of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel could not prevent their fall.

So at this point in our investigation, it is important to pause and reflect on just how important Diogenes' alternative voice is to the history of thought. With Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno, the focus was on man's ability to reason and with this superior quality about us, all manner of problems could be solved and we could construct a world

to suit our natures. These ancient thinkers staked everything on this attribute and education was the tool to impart it to the young. Reason could also tell us what was morally better or best, and it could solve practical problems as well, such as identifying the best form of government and economic problems of trade and agriculture.

In contrast, Diogenes focused on our need to be free; to speak our minds and to live lives unfettered by factors that could constrain us—the most egregious factor being, in his mind, wealth. He was very clear about this. DL explains,

He used also to condemn those who praised honest men for being superior to money, while themselves envying the very rich. He was moved to anger that men should sacrifice to the gods to ensure health and in the midst of the sacrifice should feast to the detriment of health. He was astonished that when slaves saw their masters were gluttons, they did not steal some of the viands. He would praise those who were about to marry and refrained, those who intending to go on a voyage never set sail, those who thinking to engage in politics do no such thing, those also who purposing to rear a family do not do so and those who make ready to live with potentates, yet never come near them after all.⁶⁸ (DL VI 28-29)

If a person is self-sufficient, one is not constrained by circumstances to live a life other than one's own. One can live according to one's own nature and what it prescribes for us. On the contrary, a life lived according to reason on the contrary can allow all manner of rationalizations to accept and put up with situations that do not suit our natures. For example, we can rationalize the idea that wealth will make us happy. In Diogenes' mind that idea led to the opposite and, if anything, his poverty (which needs further investigation and will be discussed in Chapter Five) was meant to show that wealth was not necessary to a long and satisfactory life.

As Dressler shows, we can also think of the issue of asceticism as a linguistic problem. It is so in two ways: first, revealing the sometimes inadequacy of a particular language to express a thought; and secondly, as a problem of ambiguity where many meanings can be implied and confusion can result over which one is meant.

In the case of Diogenes both problems arise. From Dressler we see that the use of the word *askesis* in Diogenes' time was straightforward. It meant training of one kind or another. So the problem does not lie in antiquity. The difficulty arises with the further development of the idea to imply more than physical and mental training to deal with

⁶⁸ DL VI 28-29

some aspect of life. With Christianity, for example, the evolved word “asceticism” implies the decision to suffer in some way to gain God’s favour.

In the modern definition, asceticism is connected to suffering for a higher purpose. The ancients were not immune from suffering, but their attitude toward it was different. As an example, there is a dialogue in DL’s life of Antisthenes between Antisthenes and Diogenes that is helpful. One day Diogenes came for a visit and Antisthenes cried out, “Who will release me from these pains?” Diogenes replied by saying “this” and showed him a dagger. Antisthenes replied, “From my pains, not from life.” DL comments, “It was thought that he showed some wellness in bearing his malady through love of life”.⁶⁹

There is no suggestion of asceticism here. There is simply bearing one’s pains nobly or griping about them. It takes training to be ready for an eventuality such as the one Antisthenes faced, and that is precisely the phrase that Diogenes used when he talked about training—to be ready for any eventuality. Even the idea of suffering in preparation for the afterlife is shown to be inconsistent with ancient thought because Antisthenes was initiated into the Orphic mysteries, which did promise a better afterlife than those relegated to Hades. However, as he was being initiated, the priest said, “those admitted into these rites would be partakers of many good things in Hades.” Antisthenes replied, “Why then don’t you die?”⁷⁰ He sounds dubious about his prospects in Hades. He certainly wasn’t about to deal with suffering to gain anything from it.

Our second consideration concerning language and term *askesis* has to do with language and the ability of a particular language to express a thought. As Dressler noted, the word *askesis* was asked to carry many meanings throughout its development. The burden of carrying them created the ambiguity of meaning it holds today. It needn’t have been that way. Languages can create different words to illustrate nuances of meaning. As an example, ancient Greek has many words to express the idea of love because love takes many forms and confusing the type of love meant can have bad consequences. In Greek, romantic love is called *eros*. It has a sexual connotation. Friendship love is something else and is called *philos*; acquaintance love is called *storge*; and love for humanity is called *agape*. English could benefit from an expanded vocabulary in this

⁶⁹ DL VI 18-19

⁷⁰ Ibid. 4

regard, saving many wounded hearts from a relationship in which one party means *storge* and the other means *eros*.⁷¹

The word “*askesis*” should also be allowed a distinction of different meanings. We simply are not speaking about the same thing with these words and so they are not interchangeable which is really what so many people have failed to recognize. The word “asceticism” has added baggage associated with it, which gets in the way creating assumptions that simply do not hold in an ancient context.

The Problem of Linguistic Accuracy

We would be remiss if we failed to note that any discussion like this one verges on deeper questions concerning language and meaning that have been the subjects of much of philosophy generally for the past three centuries. The questions posed here are just the sort of thing that provoked movements like deconstructionism, historicism, and methods of genealogy. These modern approaches to sources in ancient literature can help us understand what the ancients meant or could not have meant. Using these techniques it is our view that some issues concerning Diogenes can be clarified to the degree that some claims can be dispensed with and others accepted. In other words, we accept that ultimately there are facts as to what Diogenes said.

Asserting that there are facts has important consequences. In the first place, by believing that we may never know exactly what Diogenes said or meant on a given issue, we can in effect give up the quest for a rigorous assessment of what it is possible for us to know. It can encourage the temptation to interpret the material we do have to coincide with our own beliefs about them reverting to the methods of ancient compilers. This leads to the second consequence. Ideas evolve, as Hegel reminds us, but not necessarily for the better. If past ideas have been misrepresented, we have potentially deprived ourselves of the benefit of a true idea—a benefit that might be a significant one. Julia Annas makes just this case in her discussion of the nature of virtue in the ancient world. Rejecting what she calls “drearily familiar criticisms of ancient ethics,”⁷² Annas gives restored life to them by establishing what the ancient views really entail. Her book is an examination of what people like Aristotle and Epicurus really meant in their moral perspectives. By recognizing our own biases, she says, we can filter them out of our

⁷¹ The phrasing here was suggested by Stewart E. Kelly. *Thinking Well*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2001. 40.

⁷² Julia Annas. *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 440.

understanding of ancient perspectives. “It is the only way which is comparatively free of distortions produced by not noticing our own perspective.”⁷³ Using her methods, Annas’ conclusions about the basis for differing, ancient, moral principles are interesting and informative, and are, as she says, a welcome relief from familiar rhetoric about the past. Her conclusion is well worth considering with Diogenes. An examination of Diogenean literature has a sameness about it with various scholars going over the same ground repeatedly.

Writing in the early and mid-1900s, scholars following the lead of Dudley accepted information from DL only when he provided sources for that material. They accepted other material only if it was consistent with Diogenes’ character established by documented sources. Some scholars effectively gave up on Diogenes, as did Dudley, and described what one could briefly and then moved on to discuss the Cynic movement. As we have discovered, Cynicism of late antiquity is a far cry from the philosophy of Diogenes himself.

The discussion of Diogenes’ asceticism is a case in point. Dudley’s poorly formed argument for asceticism poisoned the well for future commentators that they could not get beyond Dudley’s view. He prevented others from looking closely at the nature of *askesis* as training for life, a significant omission on his part because it creates, at least, ambiguity and confusion in subsequent literature concerning Diogenes and Cynicism generally. Dudley was not the only person to do so; we find more examples even in ancient times.

Cynic Literature

A nephew and successor to Constantine, Julian’s greatest wish was to restore Hellenism to Rome. He spoke for the “depressed gentry of the ancient Greek towns of Asia Minor—‘honest men’ who had watched with growing anger the blasphemies, indecent affluence, the deep intellectual confusion of the court society of Constantine and Constantius II.”⁷⁴ He set about re-establishing the ancient *paideia* or culture and education which Diogenes also attempted to do 600 years earlier. Julian died young, at 31, and the inroads made by Marcus Aurelius and Constantine reasserted themselves at Julian’s death.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid. 400

⁷⁴ Peter Brown. *The World of Late Antiquity*. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989. 91

⁷⁵ Ibid. 93

Julian wrote two speeches concerning Cynicism; in one he condemned the vagabond street cynics who gave Cynicism a bad reputation and in the other outlined his view of what true Cynicism should be. Julian himself was not a scholar and that shows in his works. His understanding of Cynicism is his own fabrication and appends elements of Stoicism and paganism to the Cynic message which are foreign to the very nature of Diogenes' life and work.

In spite of his spirited defence of ancient Cynicism against the degraded form demonstrated by the ragged street beggars of his time, Julian creates an interpretation of Cynicism which is the epitome of misinformation. It's hard to find another author who does more harm to authentic Cynicism than does Julian. His initial query concerning Cynicism, however, is very promising. Stating first that Cynicism is a philosophy whose end was a life in harmony with nature, " he rightly adds that such a life is impossible for any man to attain who does not know who and of what nature is."⁷⁶

Julian's next step is elucidate human nature, which is a good start, but the information he uses to describe the Cynic view touches only modestly on factual information from sources as collected in DL's account. Instead, he uses his own knowledge based perhaps on the instruction of his tutor⁷⁷ of Cynicism to come to the conclusions that he does. Somehow in his own mind, ancient Greek thought, all the way back to Homer, plus Stoic doctrine and even the ancient Mystery Religions as in the cults of Bacchus and Dionysus, fit into Diogenes' way of thinking.

A good example of Julian's view is his construal of the phrase Cynicism is "a short cut to philosophy."⁷⁸ Whether he really meant the usual saying, a "shortcut to virtue," is probably irrelevant given his answer. Julian first claims that we must come to understand that we are "divine", and because of this our obligation to "be steadfastly fixed on divine and pure thoughts."⁷⁹ When we do this, we should come to "utterly despise" our bodies and come to think of them "in the words of Heraclitus, 'more worthless than dirt.'"⁸⁰ Given any rudimentary knowledge of even a few of Diogenes' anecdotes, it's difficult to fathom how Julian could have believed that this point of view even remotely expressed Cynic thought, not only for Diogenes, but also for any subsequent Cynic thinker.

⁷⁶ Julian. *Oration*s Vol. II VI 186a. Translated by Wilmer C Wright. Boston: Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library), 1913.

⁷⁷ Julian was tutored by Mardonius, who Julian claims "of all men most responsible" and praises him for his literary taste and "austere morals." *Oration* 8, 241c

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* VI 226b

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* VI 226c

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* VI 226c

More damning, however, is Julian's attempt to explain human nature based on the aforementioned ideas. He begins by mentioning Delphi and the words etched into the entrance gate, "Know thyself". Julian ties this idea to Diogenes' supposed visit to Delphi during which the oracle instructed him to "Strike the currency". Julian argues that since Diogenes visited Delphi, Diogenes recognized the divine source within us, which can lead to virtue.

Julian goes on to claim that man is nothing but a soul that is embodied.⁸¹ That is our nature. So by knowing oneself, one can probe to our depths to discover the soul there and see that it is the "nobler" aspect of ourselves because it is "divine". From here Julian digresses to explain a view of perception (which is heavily indebted to Stoicism) and how the soul enters the body through "channels",⁸² linking our various sensory perceptions through memory. In this we differ from animals, he concludes, because "god has implanted in us a soul that provides us with our intelligence".⁸³ Julian believed that myths are divine allegories, and since "nature hides her secrets", myths are necessary to discover truths—especially those revealed in the Dionysian mysteries.⁸⁴

Finally, Julian says that we know "these facts to be true and professed by Diogenes because he allowed himself to act only as the light of reason shows us we ought to act", and thus "in an intelligent life a person is able to discover and estimate right reasons to decide what is good and bad conduct".⁸⁵ In the end we find that Julian's understanding of Cynicism is really a picture of his own philosophy and of what he had in mind in his attempt to restore ancient religion to Rome.

Julian does accept some better documented Cynic ideas. He was critical of those who held false views of Cynicism because they failed to see the noble side that the Cynic lifestyle entails. For example, Julian understood the importance given to freedom. He says:

You think, do you not, that for mankind freedom is the beginning of all good things. I mean of course what people are always calling good. How can you deny it? For property, money, birth, physical strength, beauty, and in a word everything of this sort when divorced from freedom are surely blessings that belong, not to him who merely seems to enjoy them, but to him who is that man's master. Whom then are we to regard as a slave?⁸⁶

⁸¹ Ibid .VI 183a

⁸² Ibid. VI 189c

⁸³ Ibid. VI 194b

⁸⁴ Julian. Oration VII. In fact Diogenes condemned the mysteries. DL VI 39.

⁸⁵ Julian VI 195a, 197a.

⁸⁶ Julian VII 195.

On a personal note, Julian relates a story about his classmate, Iphicles, which reveals his sensitivity to the Cynic way of life. Julian tells us that Iphicles decided to live as a Cynic “with his hair unkempt” wearing a “wretched cloak in severe winter weather”.⁸⁷ Julian’s tutor commented that:

What evil genius can have plunged him into this sad state which makes him not only pitiable but even more so his parents who reared him with care and gave him the best education they could! And now he goes about in this condition, neglecting everything and no better than a beggar!⁸⁸

Julian continues his story by saying he replied with some “pleasantry” but he realized that to denigrate men like Diogenes and Crates was harmful. Do you see, he says:

That in taking this stand, they persuade them to love wealth, to hate poverty, to minister to the belly, and to endure toil for the body’s sake to fatten the prison of the soul, to keep up an expensive table, never to sleep alone at night.⁸⁹

Here Julian has it right, but what it also illustrates is that he is not clear enough about the differences between the various schools of ancient thought. Had he succeeded in replacing Christianity with a return to pagan beliefs we can only wonder how well those old beliefs would have been interpreted or reinterpreted in his mind. In any case, Julian’s efforts came to nothing after his death and Rome returned to the Christian path—a significant event not only for Cynicism but for ancient Greek philosophy generally.

Before we consider the importance of this it’s helpful to look at one other author of late antiquity who has much to say about Cynicism. His name is Dio Chrysostom.

Dio Chrysostom

Dio Chrysostom was a favourite in the court of Trajan (98-117 CE) until his outspokenness got him into trouble. Exiled for his actions, he was said to travel about living the life of a Cynic. When he was welcomed back to Rome again at the death of Hadrian, Dio composed many speeches on Cynic themes such as on freedom of speech and self-sufficiency. However, like Julian, Dio’s Cynicism is a home grown variety of his own making, the only difference being Dio acknowledges that his stories are fabrications.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid. 198

⁸⁸ Ibid. 198

⁸⁹ Ibid 198

⁹⁰ Ibid. 249

That being said, Dio's life story is more compelling than his philosophy because he actually lived the life of the wandering, begging philosopher for 14 years. A well-educated man from a prominent family, Dio's rhetorical skills propelled him to the highest circles in Roman society circa 80 CE. His downfall came as the result of befriending Flavius Sabinus.⁹¹ When Emperor Domitian had Flavius executed, Dio also came under suspicion and was exiled. His exile was severe in that he was banished from Rome, from Italy, and from his family estate in Bithynia which was the source of his income.

With no income, family, or home, Dio took to wandering and begging with occasional work as a manual labourer. As time passed, he gained a reputation among common people as a person of wisdom. He says of this:

The people who met me judged from my appearance that I was a vagrant or a beggar while some took me for a philosopher. So it happened by degrees, without any deliberate intention on my part—for I did not rate myself so highly—that I came to bear the name philosopher.⁹²

When Domitian was assassinated in 96 CE, Dio was recalled to Rome and served under Trajan. In his writings he alluded to his adventure in exile.

Dio's works contain the ideas of a man, worldly wise, who offers practical advice for a well-lived life. In this he is like Diogenes. In other ways, he was not. His Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Discourses contain information about Diogenes, and as Cohoon remarks, Dio uses Diogenes as a "mouthpiece" for his own ideas. The thoughts and actions of Diogenes in Dio's writings are fabrications and actually "veiled allusions" to Dio's own experiences wandering in exile and to his relationship with Domitian.⁹³ Thus, there is no intention by Dio to be a definitive source of information about Diogenes, and so Dio's *Discourses* should not be used as such. Unfortunately and far too frequently they are used as sources in spite of the fact that Dio warns against doing so.⁹⁴

Dio doesn't help matters in regard to his reliability when on the one hand he cautions the reader that we can "imagine" a meeting between Diogenes and Alexander, and on the other hand, he writes factual information about the places he visits and his encounters there. The "Sixth Discourse" on "Tyranny" is a good example of this. Dio

⁹¹ In introduction to *Dio's Orations*, J. W. Cohoon states only that Dio befriended a 'Roman in a high position', but Dudley accepts von Armin's argument that it was Flavius. Dudley 149. Dio Chrysostom. *Orations*. Translated by J. W. Cohoon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932. x.

⁹² Dudley 150-151.

⁹³ Dio 249.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 249

begins with an interesting description of Athens and Corinth, their topology and climate, and the buildings found there. His account is authentic and smacks of his own personal experience, as may have been the case in his travels taking various routes between those two cities.

After the factual information, Dio incorporates a series of *chreia* and expands on them in a discussion about Diogenes. Here are a few of the *chreia*: “He [Diogenes] scorned those who would pass by a spring when thirsty and move heaven and earth to find where they could buy Chian or Lesbian wine;” “He used to say that such persons were far sillier than cattle, since these creatures never pass by a spring or a clear brook when thirsty, or when hungry disdain the tenderest leaves or grass enough to nourish them;” “He also said that the most beautiful and healthful houses were open to him in every city: to wit, the temples and the gymnasia;” “He used to say too that rich men were like new born babies: both were in constant need of swaddling clothes”.⁹⁵ Dio sometimes omits the initial anecdote altogether and the expanded *chreia* is put in its place. Here is an example, also from the *Sixth Discourse*:

Diogenes was not neglectful of his body as certain foolish people thought: but when they saw him often shivering and living in the open and going thirsty, they imagine that he was careless of his health and life, whereas this rigorous regime gave him better health than fell to the lot of those who were ever goring themselves, better than fell to the lot of those who stayed indoors and never experienced with cold or heat. And he got more pleasure, too out of sunning himself and more pleasure in eating his food than they did.⁹⁶

The original anecdote was perhaps this one: And then he would say, pointing to the portico of Zeus and the Hall of Processions that the Athenians had provided him with places to live in.”⁹⁷ As we see, there is much more information in Dio’s account than in the account of DL. This is the point in many discussions of Diogenes where commentators will demure and suggest in order to account for the difference that perhaps Dio was privy to sources not available to DL and no longer available to us so it is acceptable to accept Dio as a reliable source. This approach flies in the face of the evidence stated above that Dio admits he embellishes his stories, and given the nature of the use of *chreia* in late antiquity as *progymnasmata* there was nothing unacceptable in doing so. Dio was trained in rhetoric and the stories he tells in his *Discourses* confirm the fact that he was

⁹⁵ Dio. *Sixth Discourse*. 13-15.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 8-9

⁹⁷ DL VI 22

trained very well. The evidence does not confirm that he had access to more information, and after all, DL himself was recognized as an eminent source.

The more one reads Dio attuned to his appreciation for and reliance on *chreiai*, the more obvious it is that he uses them as inspiration for his writing, so he is, as Cohoon says, not an “original author”.⁹⁸ We notice too that Dio tends to be long-winded, using not at all the type of rhetoric we find in DL’s anecdotes when Diogenes is supposedly speaking. As an example, Dio, using Diogenes as a mouthpiece, offers pages of solutions to a fellow traveller who is dealing with an escaped slave. After pages of hollow sounding wisdom, the traveller asks for mercy claiming, “You are letting the sun go down with your interminable questions”.⁹⁹

As a well educated person, Dio was exactly the kind of person to have been schooled in the writing of *Progymnasmata*,¹⁰⁰ and that expertise is evident in his writing. In fact, he uses two methods of rhetoric in his works and speeches. Both techniques allow him to fabricate his own version of the material he recounts. *Mirrors for princes* is another case in point.

Mirrors for princes is a type of speech used to educate kings to their responsibilities in governance. Dio’s works contain four such speeches, and he admits they are stories of what might have occurred. They include a speech by Socrates to Xerxes, Alexander’s conversations with his father, King Philip’s speeches to Trajan, and Diogenes’ speech to Alexander the Great. They are speeches of collective wisdom imparted from one individual to another. As works of his own, they are a credit to Dio as an important figure looked up to and honoured in Roman society, and they offer Dio’s interpretations of the philosophical ideas known at that time. What they are not, is credible source material for any of the people he mentions. Because of his method of free interpretation, we cannot distinguish fact from fiction within any acceptable degree of accuracy.

In spite of the difficulties with Dio’s writings, he does address some Cynic themes. He speaks of the value of poverty, and the destructiveness of wealth in relation to freedom. He promotes the idea of reason as an attribute of the psyche or soul and its relation to human nature. However, his interpretation of them is Stoic and Roman. For example, in Dio’s discussion of poverty, he saw nature and poverty combined together as a prescription for solving the problem of poverty in Rome itself. He recommended that the

⁹⁸ Cohoon viii.

⁹⁹ Dio *Tenth Discourse*. 21.

¹⁰⁰ A school boy’s instruction in rhetoric to prepare him for politics or laws. See the complete discussion of this in Chapter Two.

‘respectable poor’ be banished to rural areas to allow them to become self-sufficient and provide for themselves.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In summary, just these few examples from Dio and Julian give us good reason to think whoever might use them as a source could find fodder for almost any belief about Diogenes. If, instead, we see them as thinkers in their own right, with contributions to Cynic literature, we find in them windows to the past showing us how Cynicism is faring as it progresses through time. We see that the fundamentals of Diogenes’ Cynicism are present in late antiquity, but their order of priority is not the same, nor is their interpretation. Nature is tied to simplicity of life with emphasis on rural simplicity as opposed to the complexities of city life. Nature is still associated with self-sufficiency, and hence freer, not limited by laws or custom. Nature is also connected to the idea of *psyche* or soul and becomes the source of internal essence, although associated with divinity. These evolved points of view are the ones that propel themselves into the Medieval world and beyond. It is from this mix of old and new, that contemporary critics and the philosophers of the Enlightenment period that Cynicism is looked to as a source of inspiration and wisdom.

Adding to Bayle’s critical perspective, there is something positive to be accomplished by a consistent and thorough going over of ancient material. We do discover errors, yes, but that information is helpful—we can learn what was not the case. Modern scholars with more information can then take up the case. We find this to be true as Dressler, Adkins, Guthrie, and Long open up new worlds of investigation with their linguistic assessments of antiquity. Writing at approximately the same time, their rigorous studies are impressive and provide us with much needed information. Dressler’s views of *askesis* cohere with Adkins’ views and with Guthrie’s overall ideal of the classical Greek tradition. Thus, eliminating misunderstandings about *askesis*, and about what was really going on in the debate between traditional values and proposed new norms, gives us a solid foundation by which we move on to look at some of the contentious themes surrounding Cynicism which have caused so much trouble for commentators and critics alike. This is not to say all issues can and will be resolved, but it does say we can do better in our assessment of Cynicism than some have done before.

¹⁰¹ Dio Discourse Seven. 107.

Chapter Five

Cynic Themes and Their Interpretation

One issue that permeates all ancient Greek philosophy, both early and late, is the question of nature—what it is and what it means for us. The Greek word for nature (*physis*) can refer to the nature of the universe, the nature of man, and the nature of reality. How the word is used by Diogenes has much to do with understanding Cynicism, and so we will strive here to understand the word as Diogenes might have used it. There have been allusions to what he might have meant in our discussions within the previous chapters, especially with the argument concerning Aristophanes and the aristocratic tradition in Chapter Three and with the explanation of Greek tradition by Adkins and Guthrie in Chapter Four. In this chapter we will examine how the ideas within Greek tradition concerning nature and its relationship to convention (*nomos*) are explained in DL's account of Diogenes, in DL's account of the Stoics, and in Aristotle. We will then be in a position to evaluate modern interpretations of the Greek understanding of nature. In the end, we find that the concept of nature has affinities to other concepts, as e.g., to freedom and autonomy, to self-sufficiency, and to cosmopolitanism. These affinities make any discussion of nature very broad and complex. In an effort to keep a sharp focus on Diogenes and his view of nature, we will concentrate here on how Diogenes' ideas fit into the scheme of fourth century BCE Greek dialogues concerning nature and its related issues. Eduard Zeller and Georg Hegel provide the context for seeing the whole picture.

To begin our look at this, it is helpful to provide a short overview of the term, *physis*, and explain how it originated and how it evolved into the concepts used in Diogenes' lifetime. The idea behind the word *physis*, not the word itself, is very old. Guthrie claims that Homer expresses the idea in the *Odyssey* when he refers to "the bodily form of a plant."¹ With Heraclitus we see the word in use, and it came to mean "the real constitution or character of things, including the way they behave, though it could also mean 'birth' or 'growth'", and additionally giving the sense of "coming-to-be".² In this Guthrie agrees with Pohlenz that

¹ W. K. C. Guthrie. *The History of Greek Philosophy: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 82. Guthrie translates this passage from the *Odyssey* x 303.

² *Ibid.* 82-3.

with the Ionian Pre-Socratics, the use of *physis* is the “way they summed up their new understanding of the world.”³ It is something not other-worldly; it indicates something within the world and intrinsic to it, something material.⁴

From our point of view we might consider these ideas a great advance in human understanding. Actually, they began to tear the Greek understanding of the world apart. With the Ionian naturalists, part of the ancient religious tradition was challenged. On the one hand, it was challenged on the grounds of decency and common sense. It became increasingly apparent that the pantheon of Greek gods and their activities were becoming an embarrassment. The Greek people came to be more and more “scandalized by Zeus’ castration of his father or his many amours, the thefts and deceit of Hermes”.⁵ In other words, “the malicious and vengeful character of the immortals became too much”.⁶

On the other hand, as the views of the naturalists were ascending and the number of those following the old myths were declining, the idea of *physis* or the idea of what is naturally right began to change too. As we remember from the discussion in Chapter Four, the Greek aristocratic tradition was founded on the belief in a natural birthright for some who had a divine ancestor. The *agathos* man was privileged by nature because of his birth to the proper lineage and was educated to enhance the arêtai he was born with. The Sophists offered their services to instruct young men to develop their natural talents, which they had from birth. Rejection of the gods meant at the same time, rejection of one’s claim to aristocratic lineage, so one’s nature was altered in the process.

This is one of the ways the naturalists’ idea of *physis*, as the nature of how the universe came to be and was ordered, evolved into the conflict within the time of Diogenes between *physis* (what a person is by nature) versus *nomos* (what a person comes to be through training (*askesis*)). One phrase frequently mentioned in connection with Diogenes is that he sought to “strike the currency (nomisma)”. The phrase is used as a catch phrase to encapsulate that debate from the Cynic’s point of view. What it means is that as Diogenes altered the currency of Sinope, so later did he attempt to alter the destructive culture in Athens. By doing so, he believed people would return to a more natural way of life. The

³ Ibid. 83

⁴ Ibid. 83

⁵ Ibid. 228

⁶ Ibid. 228

words themselves are not only associated with Diogenes; it's a useful statement because the term *nomisma* carries with it allusions to *nomos* (custom or law) and *nomisma* means not only currency but also what is customary.⁷ The ambiguity allows for a nice play on words.

Focusing now on *physis*, as Adkins demonstrated in Chapter Four, the word *physis* (nature and/or human nature) was not used to express a concept of human nature until the fifth century BCE. Before that time, beginning with Homer, the Ancient Greeks thought differently about human existence and their activities in the world.⁸ Exactly how they thought about themselves is revealed in Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is important to note this, says Adkins, because the Homeric view in many ways shaped the idea of human nature that was to appear in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE with the debate itself carrying over even into our own time.⁹

With this caveat in mind concerning the question of human nature, in this chapter we are reminded of the importance of source material in the same way Ernst Cassirer mentions sources concerning Rousseau.¹⁰ In instances where information on any subject is overwhelming as is the case with information about human nature, we can often chance on reliable information that focuses on essentials and that results in an assessment that is truer over all. Such an assurance is needed here as we investigate Diogenes' understanding of human nature, explore how he applies it, and then judge subsequent claims about all of this from critics in late antiquity to today. I argue that as he begins his life in Athens he literally did not know how to live naturally, and that it was the circumstances of his exile and no home in Athens that set him on his course to experiment with life, with what it took to survive, and as he says himself, with philosophizing. In contrast, because many modern critics rely on sources like Julian who ascribes many motives to Diogenes' behaviour that ultimately are inconsistent and unfounded, we have various interpretations of what Diogenes was up to and the importance of Cynicism generally. Our aim here is to come up with a plausible explanation for Diogenes' form of Cynicism, one that accounts successfully

⁷ Liddell & Scott.535.

⁸ Ibid. 13

⁹ Ibid. 79

¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer. *Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963) 58-59. Cassirer's claim is that Kant had a deeper understanding of Rousseau—better than those who were close associates for many years.

with all of the evidence we have. And since one of the major themes promoted by Diogenes, that of nature as opposed to convention, his view of nature seems a good place to start.

How Diogenes Viewed Nature

Our task would not be difficult if Diogenes himself stated what he meant by living naturally, but he does not. He simply tells us living naturally is to be preferred to living a conventional life.¹¹ We should consider this a very telling omission. The debate as to whether nature or convention provided the best prescription for a good life was not unique to Diogenes. His contribution to later debate about this is that he is one of the few thinkers to advocate for a minimal lifestyle over convention with his relentless criticism of the damaging effects of wealth to the individual and to society itself.

Diogenes' view is in contrast to that of Aristotle who, while admitting that wealth can damage character, nevertheless argues that some prosperity is need for the leisure required to live a good life, i.e., skilled in the art of living well. Aristotle's idea of the magnificent man would be a good example of this.¹² In time this dichotomy of views was reconciled with the perspective that Diogenes' Cynicism was, as Apollodorus says in his *Ethics*, "a shortcut to virtue".¹³ The phrase Apollodorus uses means a shortcut to living well. So whether an individual chose to take the path indicated by Plato and Aristotle or that of Diogenes, the choice was up to the individual person.

This debate did, however, also include basic assumptions about our nature and how one could live an excellent life and this is essentially the heart of the ancient debate and I believe the heart of the debate concerning Cynicism generally both in antiquity and even into contemporary times. Our focus on Diogenes can provide a way to see the various pieces of this puzzle and a way to put them together into a coherent view. Using this focus we see that commentary about the uniqueness of Diogenes' life and his view of what is natural revolves around the aphorism "strike the currency" and around specific references to plainness of living which we find in DL's anecdotes. We have no specific arguments or explanations from Diogenes that can help us understand what he considered a natural life.

¹¹ DL VI 38

¹² See his discussion in his *Nicomachean Ethics* especially Book IV, Ch. 2, 1-19.

¹³ DL VI 121 The Greek word used here is *arête*. As noted in Chapter Four, this word has a long history and is generally defined as meaning what is good or excellent.

All we have are the stories of what he did. Still the life lived as he did and the sayings tell us something.

While we have no commentary on these stories from Diogenes himself, we do have commentary from DL's account of Diogenes' life. Of the four instances where the term nature is mentioned in his book on Diogenes, it is never used by Diogenes, it is used by DL himself in his comments. While allusions to simplicity abound in DL's *Life of Diogenes*, as for example, he says, "A child has beaten me in plainness of living",¹⁴ statements about nature are few. The first statement occurs early in the book where Diogenes says that "to fortune he opposes courage, to convention nature, to passion reason".¹⁵ There is no further explanation here as DL moves on to explain Diogenes' meeting with Alexander in the Craneum.

The remaining statements about nature are of a different kind. A transition statement occurs in the middle of the book. Diogenes is quoted as saying to an effeminate young man,

Are you not ashamed, he said that your own intention about yourself should be worse than nature's: for nature made you a man, but you are forcing yourself to play the woman.¹⁶

This statement is within a series of admonishments of shameful behaviour. It's easy in this case to see on what basis he judges what is natural and what is not. But in the other cases where nature is mentioned and in many of his anecdotes in which nature is implied as a basis, there is no clear way to determine how he arrives at conclusions as to what is natural and what is not.

The remaining comments by DL about nature occur in a much debated section of the whole work, paragraphs 70-73, which, as most critics agree, is an insertion into what was a collection of biographical data. In his translation, Hicks states they are Cynic maxims which at least in part may come from Diocles.¹⁷ If they are from the Cynics, the maxims are an odd sort heavily laden with Stoicism. Here is a portion of the passage in question:

¹⁴ DL VI 37

¹⁵ Ibid. 38

¹⁶ DL VI 65

¹⁷ Hicks 70-71.

Nothing in life, however, he maintained, has any chance of succeeding without strenuous practice; and this is capable of overcoming anything. Accordingly, instead of useless toils men should choose such as nature recommends, whereby they might live happily. Yet such is their madness that they choose to be miserable. . . . This was the gist of his conversation; and it was plain that he acted accordingly, adulterating currency in every truth, allowing convention no such authority as he allowed to natural right. . . ¹⁸

Zeno on Nature

What nature recommends and what is given to us by natural right are left unsupported in this passage. We're left wanting more explanation, but it is never given in DL's book on Diogenes. However, just a few pages later in Book VII on Zeno, there is a wealth of information on this subject including the amazing statement by DL that Zeno was first to use the phrase living a life "in agreement with nature".¹⁹ DL explains that this information is to be found in Zeno's book, *On the Nature of Man*. We are left wondering, did DL mean just this specific phrase or did he mean the entire concept of living in agreement with nature? And when he himself uses the term "nature" in his book on Diogenes, is this a slip on his part allowing a Stoic idea to intrude in a discussion of Cynicism?

Since there are so few statements of nature in the book on Diogenes, it might be helpful to assume that DL is right about Zeno's authorship of the phrase. What, then, can we make of the passages on nature used in Diogenes? First, we know that the passage where nature is mentioned twice²⁰ is generally considered to be an intrusion into the original text. If DL is right about Zeno, and if they are Cynic maxims, DL's account of Diogenes is heavily contaminated by later Stoic influence. That is certainly a possibility. That also means, secondly, that any other mention of nature within the book of Diogenes may also be a Stoic influence and is therefore an ideological slip on DL's part.

This is not to suggest that Diogenes did not use nature as a basis for his judgements about how a person should live, but it is to suggest that how he arrived at his judgements did not come from a studied position on what is natural for us. Diogenes just claims what is good and he does so from an inner understanding of what that is. What we might wonder here is whether that understanding is just an assumed conventional Greek view of human nature as

¹⁸ DL VI 71

¹⁹ DL VII 87

²⁰ DL VI 70-73

Adkins tells us. As we shall see, this is a likely explanation. There may be another answer and it, too, is found in Book VII on Zeno.

In his discussion of Stoicism's view of perception, DL says that for the Stoics "the notions of justice and goodness come by nature".²¹ He categorizes these ideas as from the realm of the imperceptible. No further information is given here as to what an imperceptible notion is, but later in his expanded discussion of nature, we get a better understanding of this.

The Stoics and Nature

DL doesn't begin his discussion of nature in the book on Zeno by discussing nature. He begins, as the Stoics did, by looking at what understanding comes to all creatures naturally. The word Stoics use is "impulse," saying, "Nature's rule is to follow the direction of impulse".²³ The first impulse is for self-preservation. They argue that all living things strive to find a way suitable to thrive. Humans have this but also have bestowed upon them and differ from other species in that reason "supervenes to shape impulse scientifically".²⁴ It is because of this they claim that a natural life for a human being is a life lived according to reason.²⁵ All of this is standard Stoic ideology. However, in the context of Diogenes' basis for understanding nature, it offers a possibility of understanding him. That is, Diogenes' impulses are unerring guides to justice and goodness and therefore the most suitable way for a man to live his life.

What the Stoics suggest, notably Chrysippus, is that Diogenes' view about moral decision making is not as sophisticated as the Stoic view—the Stoics having moved beyond impulse to a reasoned criteria to judge moral action. In order to prove impulse is not enough, DL says that Hecato distinguished between theoretical principles and non-intellectual principles. Attending to one's health and strength are categorized as non-intellectual because "they do not require the mind's assent." The implication, then, is that when it comes to bodily needs, impulse is acceptable, but moral needs demand more. DL then adds that Posidonius claims the proof of this distinction lies in the fact that Socrates, Diogenes and Antisthenes made "moral progress." It is because virtue can be taught we have proof

²¹ Ibid. 53

²³ Ibid. 86

²⁴ Ibid. 86.

²⁵ Ibid. 86

of such progress that “even bad men can learn to become good, says DL.²⁶ This is ambiguous, but the intent perhaps is that all men, even bad ones, can make moral progress. Unfortunately, we’re still left wondering whether Socrates moved from impulse to reason, as did Anthisthenes and Diogenes. Also, if Stoicism is superior to Cynicism, how can that be if Diogenes did make progress, or didn’t he make enough progress to satisfy a Stoic? Whether the Stoics are confused about this or DL is confused in the telling of it, what we can glean from it is that the Stoics believed more is needed than impulse to make moral decisions.

From what is stated here, there is the impression that impulse and non-intellectual principles ruled Cynic doctrine and that the Stoic use of reason marks the difference between them. Impulse and non-intellectual virtues are common to us all and yet work on an imperceptible level. If this was at work in the mind of Diogenes, we can see why he would believe he need not explain the why of his actions. Obviously Zeno felt differently and sought to understand impulse, and I believe most of us would agree with him. But what of Diogenes?

We learn a little more about Diogenes from the etymology of the word “impulse.” Impulse, says Liddell and Scott, is an old word and the basic meaning is to act hastily as in battle.²⁷ It also has a related meaning in the passive voice, which is to be “incited” as by the gods (ὠρμημῆ).²⁸ DL says, “He [Diogenes] would often insist loudly that the gods had given to men the means of living easily, but this had been put out of sight, because we require honeyed cakes, unguents, and the like”.²⁹

Later, Chrysippus will take this ancient idea and its expression in Socrates and Diogenes and modernize it, but the older meaning of the source of an inner voice or understanding remains. Chrysippus theorizes that nature is the whole of the entire universe of which we are a part. As the universe follows the laws prescribed by Zeus, so too, humans must follow the same laws. Those laws for Chrysippus are the laws of reason. In contrast, I believe Diogenes would say they are natural to us.

Chrysippus has another idea. In the cosmic realm of things, humans are simply parts of the whole universe, which defines how we are to live in “accordance with our own human

²⁶ DI VI 91

²⁷ Liddell & Scott. *An Intermediate Greek English Lexicon*. 569.

²⁸ Ibid. 569.

²⁹ DL VI 44

nature as well as that of the universe”.³⁰ He explains that we are to “refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical to Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is”.³¹ This is Stoicism, but it is clearly not Diogenes’ version of Cynicism. If this is what is meant by life in accord with nature, then surely DL is correct in reporting that it was Zeno who first used the phrase. One solution that can make sense of conflicting accounts of nature used by Cynics and Stoics alike is to recognize the underlying contradiction inherent in Stoic thought in its relation to Cynicism. The rogue Stoic, Ariston, whose account of things with moral value concerning “indifferents” forced Zeno, Chrysippus and Cleanthes to change some of their doctrine, first addressed the problem. It is important in our discussion here because Ariston himself ties his thinking to Cynicism and Diogenes in particular.

Ariston’s Objection

Ariston (sometimes called Aristo) of Chios, a renegade Stoic and student of Zeno, claimed “the end of action to be a life of perfect indifference to everything which is neither virtue nor vice; recognizing no distinction whatever in things indifferent, but treating them all alike.”³² What Ariston is objecting to here is Zeno’s position that contrary to Ariston’s view that what we do is either virtue or vice, there are activities that have nothing to do with moral behaviour generally, and some activities while neutral in terms of virtue or vice enhance or hinder our ability to be good. The debate is an important one for several reasons. First, it demonstrates a higher level of reasoning concerning the concept of virtue than is seen in Diogenes’ view, compared with say, Socrates. And second, the debate focuses on ways that human nature arrives at virtue and includes worries over inclination and impulse, concerns relevant to this topic in modernity. And third, if we are ruled by inclination and impulse, we can be said on occasion to be ruled by desires, which in many cases can be base and hardly a path to virtue.

On DL’s account, Ariston is said to say that the goal of human life is to live a life of virtue, and that the wise person is indifferent to “everything which is not virtue or vice”.³³ This

³⁰ DL VII 88.

³¹ Ibid. 87

³² DL VII 160.

³³ Ibid. 160

raises the questions, “What is virtue for Ariston?” and “How can one be indifferent to everything else?” These issues are taken up in DL’s previous discussion of Zeno who provides some help with this, so the lack of support for Ariston’s claims lie with DL who simply fails to remind or inform the reader of the context of Ariston’s remarks. We will discuss the Stoic argument below, but before we do, we need to introduce the Cynic element in Ariston’s argument.

The Cynic element appears in Book VI after an explanation of the views of Menedemus, a Cynic disciple. DL has some surprising things to say as he summarizes Cynic doctrine. DL says that Cynics believed: 1. “Life according to virtue is the end to be sought”; “We should live frugally, eating food for nourishment only and wearing a single garment”; 3. “Wealth and fame should be despised”; 4. Virtue can be taught; 5. The wise man is “worthy to be loved” and “a friend to his alike”; 6. We should entrust nothing to fortune; and 7. “Whatever is indeterminate between virtue and vice, they, in agreement with Ariston of Chios, account indifferent”.³⁴ In this case, too, DL fails to provide the context in Book 6 to substantiate points 1 and 7. In a related instance, DL has Antisthenes credit Diogenes with “indifference”.³⁵

Moving to Book VII and Stoicism can help us clear up some confusion as to what virtue, indifference and Cynicism have to do with each other, why they matter, and how they are connected to living a natural life. As noted above, Zeno ties nature and virtue together. He says that “life in agreement with nature” is the same as “a virtuous life, virtue being the goal toward which nature guides us.”³⁶

Ariston claimed as a principle of Stoicism that only virtue and vice have value and that the virtuous person is indifferent to everything else.³⁷ Ariston does not claim that we come to acquire a blind eye to those things that can harm us. Rather he makes the stronger claim that *nothing other than virtue* has any value.³⁸ Chrysippus is said to define virtue “as a harmonious disposition choice worthy for its own sake and not from hope or fear or any external motive.” Happiness, then, is to be found not in the perverse “deceptiveness of

³⁴ DL VI 104-5

³⁵ DL VI 15

³⁶ Ibid. 87

³⁷ Ibid. 104

³⁸ Ibid. 87

external pursuits” or from “the influence of associates”.³⁹ Since nature is not perverse, virtue relates to what is good for us since it benefits us and it creates good acts and good people. He adds a definition of good as “the natural perfection of a rational being *qua* rational”.⁴⁰

It is natural, then, for us to seek those things that are good or beneficial; for example he cites justice, courage and temperance.⁴¹ However, there are things which are neutral, which are neither good nor bad including: “life, health, pleasure beauty, strength” and wealth.⁴² Apollorodorus and Chrysippus called these neutral things “morally indifferent”.⁴³

DL explains that the term “indifferent” has two meanings. The first definition is that it “denotes the things which do not contribute either to happiness or to misery, as wealth, fame, health, strength, and the like; for it is possible to be happy without having these,” although he adds if used in certain ways, “tends to happiness or misery”.⁴⁴ The second definition concerns our emotions, “such that things are said to be indifferent which are without the power of stirring inclination or aversion”.⁴⁵

The Stoics find themselves in deep water when they attempt to elucidate indifferents further. They find the need to categorize them into those that are preferred and those that are rejected. Those that are preferred have positive value, and those that are rejected have negative value. In this context, value is defined first as “any contribution to harmonious living, such as attached to every good.” Secondly, something can have value if it is “a faculty or use which indirectly contributes to the life according to nature.” And thirdly, value can come from an “appraiser, as fixed by an expert acquainted with the facts”.⁴⁶

Ariston argues against this entire scheme. As he saw it, if something is neutral or indifferent, how can it be said to have any value at all? And if it is said to have value, what criteria gives it value? Ariston himself was a Stoic, who when Zeno became ill and could not teach, moved on to create a school of his own, and in dismissal was claimed by DL to be a “plausible speaker and suited the taste of the general public”.⁴⁷

³⁹ Ibid. 89

⁴⁰ Ibid. 94

⁴¹ Ibid. 94

⁴² Ibid. 102

⁴³ Ibid. 103

⁴⁴ Ibid. 106

⁴⁵ Ibid. 104

⁴⁶ Ibid. 105

⁴⁷ Ibid. 161

In Chapter Two of Book VII, DL explains Ariston's point of view. Contrary to Zeno, Ariston claimed that the goal of life is, as mentioned above, "perfect indifference to everything which is neither virtue nor vice; recognizing no distinction whatever in things indifferent but treating them all alike".⁴⁸ The idea of preferences, then, has no place in Ariston's picture of virtue. We have no further explanation of this other than the short addition that "the wise man he compared to a good actor, who, if called upon to take the part of a Thersites or an Agamemnon, will impersonate them both becomingly."⁴⁹ If all actions are neutral other than virtue or vice, then any actions not in those categories is for display only, and have no meaning other than how well they are performed. This did not sit well with many people including Cicero who was outraged at the concept.⁵¹

On the face of it, Ariston is right that if something is said to be morally neutral, then there can be no preferences and no positive and negative value. Thus, in his mind, in the world of things and actions there must be only good and bad. In addition, how can one know in terms of preferences that benefit us and a life harmoniously in accord with the nature of things whether our preferences are not simply affected by convention?

Stoicism's trouble is with its insistence on virtue as the goal of life with all other aspects of life as indifferent. The question is, "Is Ariston correct to implicate Cynicism and especially Diogenes as well?" This is a good place to begin to question what Ariston and the ancients meant by virtue. Contemporary meanings seem ill suited to Diogenes and to the ancients generally. We will explore this aspect of the discussion below, but for now we can state that Diogenes was focused on the concept of freedom. He says unequivocally, that the goal of life is freedom and never made claims about the ultimate aim of life as such.⁵² He does not define freedom, nor does he define virtue; he lives it. He does not logically try to determine preferences; he experiments with what in the end is deemed preferential based upon his own life and his own needs. So as much as some Stoics like Ariston tried to defend a strong connection between themselves and Cynicism, that is a difficult position to defend unless one alters one's Stoic beliefs, and that is precisely what Ariston does.

⁴⁸ DL VII 160

⁴⁹ Ibid. VII 160

⁵¹ Cicero. *De Finibus* 4. 68-70.

⁵² DL VI 71

The tipping point for Ariston was the question of indifferents, but his solution was not so far removed from Stoic doctrine. If we follow the line of argument for virtue in Stoicism, we see it has a familiar Cynic ring to it. In Book 7 Posidonius says, “The proof that virtue really exists is the fact that Socrates, Diogenes, and Antisthenes and their followers made moral progress.”⁵³ Elsewhere DL makes a distinction between Stoics who believe there is nothing intermediate between vice and virtue, and the Peripetetics who say there is something intermediate and that is the “state of moral improvement”.⁵⁴

When Posidonius stated that some individuals become virtuous, he acknowledged at the same time that there is some other way to become good besides the Stoic emphasis on reason and will. Cleanthes provides the line of reasoning as to how it is possible. He begins by claiming that “if a man is possessed of virtue, he is at once able to discover and to put into practice what he ought to do.” Thus, he says, “virtue cannot be lost”.⁵⁶

Why not? Because, as Chrysippus says, it is naturally given to some. He claims, “At all events we are ashamed of bad conduct as if we knew nothing is really good but the morally beautiful and that the wise man will feel affection for those youths who by their countenance show natural endowment for virtue”.⁵⁷ So some are by nature good. From these claims, it’s reasonable to conclude that in spite of Zeno’s attempt to provide a logical foundation for Stoic ideas, Cynic elements of naturalism are still evident and those elements can be applied to Ariston and the problem of indifferents.

Ariston’s line of reasoning might have gone something like this. For rational animals, a life of reason becomes the natural life. Befitting acts are those which reason prevails with us to do. Natural reason especially within a person endowed with virtue will choose virtue over vice and will adopt an indifferent attitude to actions that do not concern virtue. Socrates, Diogenes, and Antisthenes were endowed with virtue and natural reason and so they made moral progress.

This is a plausible scenario based upon Stoic logic, but if we were to ask Diogenes about it, he would have little patience with the attempt to logically sort it out, and more importantly because he was not indifferent to moral lapses and shamed those who faltered in this way,

⁵³ Ibid. 91

⁵⁴ DL VII 127.

⁵⁶ Chrysippus says it can in the case of “drunkenness and melancholy.” DL VII 127

⁵⁷ Ibid.129

he might say there are indifferents and then there is indifference. He would take issue with Zeno's limited definitions as to what one should be indifferent about. In fact, nowhere in Book VI is the term ever mentioned. Diogenes was not dissuaded from his daily routine of chastising his fellows whether in Athens or Corinth. However, he was not indifferent to what they were doing either. He shamed them, praised them, and exhorted them to do better. That is one nuance of meaning of indifference, but there is also another.

Diogenes trained himself in order to be prepared for any eventuality. DL relates that "in summer he used to roll in it [his tub] over hot sand, while in winter he used to embrace statues covered with snow, using every means of inuring himself to hardship".⁵⁸ He could not have been physically indifferent to the extreme heat and cold he experienced in that training, but the training undoubtedly made it bearable for him if and when he experienced those things. So it is a mistake to claim a Stoic form of indifference for Diogenes. As it is, it is also a mistake to assume that Ariston applied Stoic doctrine to Diogenes. It is more reasonable to conclude that Ariston signalled his debt to Cynic doctrine by revealing the flaws in Stoicism, and what we really learn from this entire discussion is how far Stoicism deviated from its origination in Cynicism and how very different a perspective it really was. So any attempt to import Stoic ideas into Diogenes' Cynicism is grossly unfair to both philosophies.

Contribution from Philology

The troubling section in DL's account of nature is part of a much bigger debate concerning Stoic influence on Cynicism generally. Much of the debate is beyond the scope of this investigation and yet some aspects of that larger picture are germane and need to be explored since we see some confusion in DL himself with his account of nature in relation to Diogenes and Zeno.

The solution to the apparent inconsistencies between Books VI and VII can be found in DL's account of nature. In his essay, "Diogenes Laertius and Stoic Philosophy," Japp Mansfield gets to the heart of the problem using linguistic analysis. He persuasively shows that in sections 4—43 in Book VI and in sections 40-48 in Book VII, we are witnessing DL's attempt to wend his way between different interpretations of Cynic/Stoic doctrine. Our

⁵⁸ DL VI 23

concern with the Cynic view of nature plays a central role in this debate, but it is the Stoic attempt to assert the authority of Stoic doctrine that precipitates the inconsistent view of nature we have just discussed.⁵⁹

Mansfield sees DL as a person who “speaks in his own right”⁶⁰ and competently sorts out competing ideologies between the various schools of philosophy. He uses the conflict between Stoics and Epicureans and Stoics and Cynics as examples. DL’s challenge, he says, was to ferret out false information either deliberately so or by mistake concerning each school. Discrepancies were easily noticed because DL had at his disposal collections of anecdotes from rival positions on all sorts of issues. The conflicting claims would have been obvious. To his credit, DL does note problematic information and sources which is readily discernible in all of his books. Even so simple a fact that Diogenes was the first to double his cloak was disputed and DL notes that.⁶¹

Given this information, Mansfield claims that the traditions used by DL reflect the feuding between the philosophical schools as well as the “various ways of teaching philosophy or addressing the general public, that evolved in the Hellenistic period and later.” “The way Diogenes Laertius handles his materials may reveal certain preferences, but it would be jejune to hold him responsible for the information at his disposal,”⁶² says Mansfield.

Mansfield further argues that we can credit DL as a competent author, stating that he knew what he was doing and should be “taken at face-value whenever he appears to speak in his own right.”⁶³ Even though, says Mansfield, DL’s work is a compilation, we need to credit this “style and vocabulary,”⁶⁴ and the overall structure of the work itself. Mansfield takes issue with those who criticize the *Lives* for missing one component or another of a

⁵⁹ F. H. Sanbach in his *Stoics*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1994 goes even further. He cites Arius Didymus who claimed that it was Chrysippus who invented the phrase “to live consistently with nature.” While the argument is compelling, Sandbach sides with Posidonius who claimed that the Stoic claim of both Zeno and Chrysippus is to live consistently with reason which would accord with man’s nature, but also with the natural plan of the universe. (53-54.) This explanation would seem to get us even further away from the generally accepted view today of both Cynicism and Stoicism and that they advocate living in accord with nature.

⁶⁰ Japp Mansfield. “Diogenes Laertius on Stoic Philosophy.” *Elenchos*. 346-351.

⁶¹ When sources differ concerning an event like the doubling of Diogenes’ cloak, DL will use the phrase “some say”. He does so at VI 22. We have taken his hint and have not used such information in our investigation here.

⁶² *Ibid.* 299

⁶³ *Ibid.* 303

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 303

book (for example, a table of contents), but Mansfield counters that the book has a plan and that plan can be “pieced together from various passages at nodal points.”⁶⁵

Assuming that Mansfield is right and that DL was a skilled author, we need now to focus on what Mansfield has to say about the conflict over the origin of the phrase “life according to nature.” If DL knew what he was doing, why would he include Stoic doctrine from Diocles in his book on Cynicism? Mansfield argues that DL routinely used Diocles, and he used other authors as well. Diocles of Magnesia was a reliable source of information for DL. Not much is known about him other than that he, too, wrote a book on the lives of philosophers, and that he probably lived at the same time as Aristotle, and may even have been a peripatetic himself. So the quality of the information is not at issue. It’s why DL put it in Book VI?

Mansfield noticed certain patterns of phrasing and sentence structure in ancient writings. He noticed a pattern in Zeno’s discussion of nature that is similar to the same pattern in Plato and Aristotle as well. In Hicks’ translation, DL actually says, “Zeno was the first (in his Treatise *On the Nature of Man*) to designate as the end ‘life in agreement with nature’ (or living agreeably to nature), which is the same as a virtuous life, virtue being the goal toward which nature guides us”.⁶⁶

Mansfield argues that the phrase “to live according to virtue” “is a formal formula which in order to become operational needs further elucidation.”⁶⁷ Chrysippus, for example, tied it to the nature of man in relation to the universe, while Cleanthes tied it to the universe alone.⁶⁸ If we shift to DL’s Book VI on Cynicism and to the quote in question, we can test this hypothesis to see if it clears up the issue of Diogenes’ view of nature.

Interestingly enough the passage begins with all of the requirements in Mansfield’s thesis. It says,

And he[Diogenes] would adduce indisputable evidence—to show how easily from gymnastic training we arrive at virtue. For in the manual crafts and other arts it can be seen that the craftsmen develop extraordinary manual skill through practice . . . Nothing in life, however, he maintained has a chance of succeeding without strenuous practice; and this is capable of overcoming anything. Accordingly, instead of useless toils men should choose such as nature recommend. Whereby they might have lived happily. But such is their madness that they choose to be miserable. For even the despising of pleasure is itself most pleasurable. When we are habituated to

⁶⁵ Ibid.304

⁶⁶ DL VII 87

⁶⁷ Ibid. 333

⁶⁸ Ibid. 89

it; and just as those accustomed to a life of pleasure feel disgust when they pass over to the opposite experience so those whose training has been of the apposite derive more pleasure from despising pleasure than from the pleasures themselves.⁶⁹

If the seeking of virtue and nature are equivalent to a fine end of our lives, then in the above passage the added element required by Mansfield is *askesis* or training. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of *askesis* has been a thorny problem in Diogenean criticism.

Mansfield's suggestion at least gives us another way to consider this element of Diogenes' thinking. However, the idea of equating virtue and nature is even more promising. While the term "nature" is infrequently mentioned, the term "virtue" is often mentioned.

The need for training seems a natural aspect of virtue. Long makes the claim that if it weren't for the references to Diogenes' physicality, one might be tempted to think of him as a moralizer. Given Diogenes' constant reference to virtue, his claim is understandable. If, however, we think of virtue/nature as Mansfield suggests then we could think of the moralizing passages in a different way. The Greek word for virtue is *arête* or excellence. So what Diogenes is saying is that if you wish to have an excellent life then train what you are. From the anecdotes we see that Diogenes offers some sound advice as to how to achieve those goals and he does it in a negative way. He doesn't tell people what to do, rather he achieves the goal by telling people what not to do. For example, if one wishes to be physically strong one shouldn't sit around all day and let the slaves do all of the work. If one wants to be manly, then one should not dress in an effeminate way.⁷⁰

Commenting on his approach, Mansfield says, "Questions of historical truth can only be solved (insofar as they can be solved) when the historical context provided by the tradition at issue has been understood."⁷¹ From this he argues one needs "to take the author and his public into account", and when we do so "one may at least take account of the fact they the tradition used by him reflects the feuding among the discussion internal to the philosophical schools."⁷² I believe with Mansfield that the material on nature within DL's books on Cynicism and Stoicism reflects the feuding between the two schools. Lack of an understanding of this has led to much subsequent misunderstanding in commentary about

⁶⁹ Ibid. 71

⁷⁰ DL VI 4

⁷¹ Mansfield. *Sources* 298.

⁷² Ibid. 299

all aspects of Cynicism and especially about Diogenes. Our task now is to incorporate this understanding into commentaries on Cynicism be they in late antiquity or in the modern and contemporary eras.

Peripatetic View of Nature

These views that we have been discussing and their history and importance to Diogenes are missing an important component. Don't we have some understanding of what we are? Is our view of our nature fabricated as the psychologists suggest given that we seem to know something about ourselves? We experience life as humans do and have needs of food, shelter and safety. We have emotions noting how members of the opposite sex differ in ours. Julia Annas says, yes, in our thinking about human nature we have to begin someplace and that place is an understanding of our limitations as humans and an understanding of our physical needs. From this base, we "develop" perspectives as to what we should do and not do through experience.¹⁰⁴ That is why she says, in the 4th century BCE philosophers studied infants to judge what they did naturally and instinctively before cultural practices were imposed on them.

The difference with Diogenes is that he looked for examples that could by-pass this cultural problem. He found the solution with his mouse —primitive by Greek standards and supposedly not affected by culture. This basic form of nature is what Annas calls "mere nature". She uses the term to clarify Aristotle's view that "nature on its own can be developed either for the better or for the worse, so that it is up to humans to make use of their reason to control their nature by means of habit." So "something is up to us or at least depends on us, and this is distinguished from our nature."¹⁰⁵ Annas quotes Aristotle who explains that "even children and wild animals have their natural states." In other words it is simply what we start out with. We can start out unequally, and because we do, some individuals are "fit only to labour for others while others are capable of providing the intelligence needed to make appropriate use of that labour."¹⁰⁶

Annas takes Aristotle to task for this, stating that his works contain two different senses of the word "nature" and unfortunately, in the sense that Guthrie and Adkins claim, he

¹⁰⁴ Julia Annas. *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 143.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 143

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 143

confuses them. First, she says, is “mere nature” or what we start out with—raw material. This claim allows Aristotle to recognize differences in ability and unfortunately justifies slavery and lower status for women as well. In addition to mere nature is “nature as the source of a thing’s inner development, guiding it, if not frustrated, to its final end. “ Nature can be an inner source of change. He says, “a thing is due to nature if it starts from some principle internal to itself and by a continuous process of change arrives at some end. This too concurs with Guthrie and Adkins From each principle there comes about, not the same thing in all cases, nor any chance thing, but always something going towards the same thing, if nothing interferes.”¹⁰⁷ Hence, Aristotle’s basis for justifying a natural state is “what always happens unless there is interference; external conditions can intervene to prevent natural development, but what happens normally is natural.”¹⁰⁸ He justifies the naturalness of the city-state for this reason because they are near universal, and exist stably by their own momentum, and not by external forces.

The view that the culture of Athens was corrupted in the fourth century was commonplace. Scholars put the blame on the disintegration of the Greek polis after the Peloponnesian War, the effect of science on acceptance of the gods, and rise of the wealthy class. Diogenes is distinctive in his assessment of the Athenian problem of the consequences of wealth and how he ties it to human nature. It was Diogenes’ predicament upon his arrival in Athens that encouraged him to assess what he really needed and his philosophy developed from that experience. So his distinctive view of human nature derived from that.

According to Annas, however, one can also say that as opposed to modern thinking, all founders of the various ancient Greek schools and their disciples made the same mistake. They never questioned their basic assumptions about what constituted human nature. She says it would not have occurred to them to do so, and thus they developed ways of life and altered those perspectives as time went on never questioning whether it was legitimate to think that way . If the prescribed ways of doing things did indeed promote virtue and pleasure in life, that was sufficient evidence to show we should do those things. In particular, Annas details Aristotle’s view of nature and the fact that it condoned slavery and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 150

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 150

the lesser status of women. However, as the peripatetics engaged in conversation with Epicureans, Aristotle's view was softened.¹⁰⁹

Annas sees the view of Alexander of Aphrodisias as a direct melding of his views with Epicurus and that subsequent Peripatetic thinking followed Alexander and not Aristotle in this. In the same way, Crates varies the harshness of Diogenes' interaction with others, and Chrysippus focuses on in ways that Zeno did not. So even though the originators of the various schools in Athens began with their own view of nature, even those views did not remain stable over time.

The gap then between original understandings of nature upon which all schools depend becomes more and more diverse as time and place changes. Experience gives us a better handle as to what we are and what we can do. Given all of this, A. A. Long suggests that we should not fault the ancients for not pinning down some basic human characteristics. Rather we need to fault our modern scientific propensity to have answers to questions like nature be amenable to classification and categorization. What we are really witnessing here in relation to the discussion of tradition in Chapter Four, is the further deterioration of the classic Greek view. As we see with Aristotle, portions of the old way of thought remain, but geared to a eudemonic perspective. With Zeno and Stoicism we see the move away from the value of authority and human experience, to a reliance on reason in line with the thinking of Socrates and Plato. Now it's time to see how these points of view fare in Modernity.

Contemporary Criticism of Cynicism

Looking at this historically, Dudley sets the stage for the contemporary debate about Diogenes' view of nature by claiming that it was such an old question, no one thought to define one's terms. Instead, Dudley claims that the life of Herakles is an example of what the Cynics meant by the term. He claims that it meant to live on a "subsistence level" or "the minimum of what a man can live on." He even cites Kaerst who claims nature is "a universal, invariable, rational norm."¹¹⁰ Dudley sees nature as a "stripping away" of "all the accretion of convention, tradition, and social science and what is left is *kata physis*. Finally, he likens

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 150.

¹¹⁰ Dudley. *A History of Cynicism* 31.

the life of Diogenes “to the primitive habits of man and animals”—which is really our “natural” standards.

In contrast, Farrand Sayre, writing not much later than Dudley, denied that the Cynics were primitivists on the question of nature. It’s true, Sayre says, that “the Cynics believed what was natural for men could be learned from observation and imitation of brutes.”¹¹¹ But that did not mean they had any intention of acting like brutes. They benefitted from the trappings of civilized life especially from the largesse of a polis that allowed them access to public baths and market places. They wore a common cloak, not animal skins, and lived in temples not “rudely constructed huts.”¹¹² They were not self-supporting, so in spite of Diogenes’ claim to self-sufficiency, they were hardly so. Sayre does not go beyond this discussion to engage in a debate about human nature.

Bracht Branham in his analysis of human nature integrates Diogenes’ use of rhetoric and the ideal of Herakles to explain Diogenes’ use of the term *nature*. Branham’s claim that “the ideology of Cynicism originates as the set of rhetorical strategies Diogenes invented to make persuasive sense of such “minimal living,” so at odds not only with the traditional aristocratic notions of a desirable life, but with the existing models of the philosophic life as well.”¹¹³ For Branham, Diogenes’ life is an improvisation—an adapting to the various problems he confronts. As he adapts to various situations, Diogenes puts on public displays of the philosopher at work as his ideas evolve. So nature for him is not a set idea or ideal; it is a slippery concept that is open to change as circumstances demand. He adds that Herakles is a good model for Diogenes, not for all of his heroic qualities, but only because they both “deemed nothing more important than freedom.”¹¹⁴ Thus, Branham claims that nature for Diogenes is no *Liebenswelt*, and given what we see displayed in the anecdotes, for Diogenes living according to nature “means living in the middle of a large city and begging for a living.” He adds, “no one is more dependent than a beggar,”¹¹⁵ which is why he concludes with Long that once Diogenes had established for himself his physical limits, he no longer continued to live in extremity.

¹¹¹ Sayre 3.

¹¹² Ibid. 6

¹¹³ Branham, R. Bracht. “Defacing the Currency: Diogenes’ Rhetoric and the Invention of Cynicism” in Branham 90.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 97.

¹¹⁵ Branham. *Diogenes’ Rhetoric*. 96.

As we attempted to show in the previous chapter, this claim is sound and Branham provides the following examples as explanation. “When asked if wise men eat cakes, he replies cheerily: ‘Yes, all kinds [panta], just like everyone else.’ [D. L. 6.56] when reproached for drinking in a tavern he responds punningly: ‘Of course—and I get barbered at the barber shop!’” And “when reproached for eating in the agora he retorts pointedly: ‘I get hungry in the agora!’ (D.L. 6.58)” “So much for Diogenes’ ‘asceticism,’ “says Branham. He concludes with the claim that nature for Diogenes is “simply human nature as he embodies it.”¹¹⁶

Tying Diogenes’ views to his public displays of himself is important, says Branham, because “it is precisely his willingness to make himself an object of ridicule, to engage in unseemly, shameful and ridiculous acts, that empowers Diogenes as a Cynic moral authority, as one obedient to another set of rules—those of ‘nature.’”¹¹⁷ He then adds this important observation that if Diogenes did not do this, “he would simply be another philosopher haranguing crowds.”¹¹⁸

What we have sought, however, with each new investigation of the various components of Diogenes’ life is to understand him. As Foucault would put it, we want to know why he or anyone would do *that!* When we ask such a question, we move beyond the methods mentioned above to something he calls the “archaeology” of the thing. He claims we need also to know the underlying structures of thought that allow us to think one way and not another. I think we can think of it as the parameters at any one time by which we build our thoughts fitting into an overall framework or structure. The question in archaeology becomes what wouldn’t they allow themselves to think as a possibility. And what is worse, what could they not even conceive as a possibility? These questions are not easily seen from either the inside or the outside of the framework. Foucault himself treads into the ideology of Cynicism and its view of nature and comes up with an interesting perspective.

In his last Lectures at the College de France, Foucault’s main interest was with Cynicism. The issue of nature was part of a much bigger investigation into the theme of *parrhesia* and how it was understood in ancient times and how that understanding influenced ancient philosophical schools. In addition, he illustrated how changes in perception of truth telling

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 103

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 103

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 103

changed within late antiquity, the medieval period, and the modern period. Of interest to our investigation of Cynicism, he has much to say about Diogenes, normative behaviour, and the natural life. Here we will look at his view of convention and his overall evaluation of Cynicism generally.

Foucault places his discussion of nature within one of the universal themes that one finds in philosophy in late antiquity. No matter the school, he says that all schools accept four basic principles and Cynicism adds a fifth.¹¹⁹ Those themes are 1). A preparation for life; 2). Taking care or attending to oneself; 3). To study what is useful; and 4). Principles one formulates need to be authenticated by how one lives. The fifth principle added by Cynicism is to “alter the currency.”¹²⁰

The main focus of Foucault’s lectures concerns parrhesia with Cynicism as an example of a school devoted to freedom of speech and *alethia* (truth). He sorts out the idea of *alethia* by providing its various definitions. He says it means something “not hidden or concealed,” something “not added to, not supplemented or mixed with something other than itself; something that is straight and in accordance with rectitude; and that which exists and remains beyond any change.”¹²¹ The issue of nature arises in the second definition, “something not hidden or concealed” and the third definition, “something that is straight and in accordance with rectitude.”

The case Foucault makes for *alethia* as unconcealed is easily seen in relation to Cynicism. The life of the Cynic as truth-teller is unconcealed “a life that does not harbour any shadowy part.”¹²² What one says as true is readily apparent by how one lives, and if one truly lives a public life, there can be no pretence. There should be no issue living publicly if one has nothing to hide. If one agrees and does everything publicly, however, one’s behaviour can become scandalous. And if one were to protest that some things out of propriety should be done discretely, then the Cynic would respond, “Can there be anything bad in what nature wills and in what she has placed in us?”¹²³ Does not the sense of hiding some behaviour out of propriety come from what man has added to our sense of nature, i.e., their habits,

¹¹⁹ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*. 238.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 238

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 218

¹²² *Ibid.* 221

¹²³ *Ibid.* 254

opinions and conventions?”¹²⁴ The very idea of living a true transparent life, says Foucault, requires that “non-concealment, far from being the resumption and acceptance of those traditional rules of propriety which mean that one would blush to commit evil before others, must be the blaze of the human being’s naturalness in full view of all.”¹²⁵

As Foucault sees Cynicism, the scandal that arises from dismantling even sensitive proprieties is a test as to whether one has something to hide or not. Propriety can be a vehicle to hide all sorts of things, which are not natural. Since nature is implanted in our very being, say the Cynics, it cannot be evil. Thinking of behaviour as crude, then, can only be labelled an artificial norm.¹²⁶ Thus, concludes Foucault, Cynicism has turned the idea of non-concealment within the idea of truth on its head. Nothing can be concealed, absolutely nothing, and that is precisely what Cynics, like Diogenes, are doing.

Foucault continues his exploration of this Cynic theme of nature in a later lecture where he focuses on one of the themes of late antiquity, i.e., the life of rectitude or the straight life as a means to live a true life. While philosophers agreed that the true life was to be one lived according to nature, it was at the same time “a life lived in conformity with the laws, or at least some laws, rules, and customs agreed between men.”¹²⁷ This leads to a fuzziness or ambiguity, of course, he says, because “depending on the schools and philosophers, varied in relation to the human, social and civic laws which were recognized as having to serve as the framework, grid, and organizing principle of the true life.”¹²⁸

In contrast to this the Cynic will allow nothing but natural law to be the principle of the true life. Foucault says, “No convention, no human prescription may be accepted in the Cynic life if it does not conform exactly to what is found in nature alone.”¹²⁹ He concludes that what Cynicism does is to give a positive value to our animal nature, but this is a scandalous thought not only to the ancients, but also throughout Western thought. Philosophers have focused on what marks the difference between ourselves and other animal species. It can also play a different role, as he sees it. We can also see it as a guide in

¹²⁴ Ibid. 254

¹²⁵ Ibid. 254

¹²⁶ Ibid. 255

¹²⁷ Ibid. 263

¹²⁸ Ibid. 262-3

¹²⁹ Ibid. 263

that “the human being must not have as a need what an animal can do without.”¹³⁰ We can use Diogenes and the story of the mouse as an example. Using animal nature in this way, can be a test as to how to determine what is natural since human nature as natural is too clouded with a long history of customs of what is straight or proper. If an animal can do without it, can I?, might be the watchword of Cynicism. That is exactly, as Foucault says, how Diogenes is presented in the anecdotes.

An Archaeological View of Diogenes

To take the view of archaeology in respect of Diogenes is to have no place for any definition of human nature or to devise any experiments to ferret out what it might be. As some critics have mentioned, that approach would be a modern one, which emerged from the invention of science and would involve as we see here another archaeological framework to understand it. According to archaeology, to successfully understand Diogenes at all we need to understand we are comparing frameworks ours and his, and we should not attempt to understand his actions within our own. If Foucault is correct about this, all of the ideas about Diogenes should fit into his own coherent archaeological framework in the same way we saw that Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* make sense only as a daily journal in the fashion of Epicurus. Can it be done? I think it can, and with Diogenes' own words about this and a little help from the rich information from Annas and others concerning human nature, we can try to put it together in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Diogenes' starting point for fashioning his life is dramatic, tragic and well known, so there is no debate that his arrival in Athens as an exile from Sinope is the beginning. Yet that information is not all. It is the fact that right away his first attempt at normalcy is stymied by the fact that his house was not ready. It's hard to imagine what he faced. There was literally no place to go since Athens provided no accommodations for travellers or transients. He would have noticed the wine jars scattered about. He would have noticed, too, that they were homes for the poor. The wine jar he chose was his only option. So whatever thoughts

¹³⁰ Ibid. 265

he may have entertained about how to live when he arrived in Athens were quickly dashed. While he is considering what to do, Theophrastus tells us about his observation of a mouse. It lives freely in the open and has plenty to eat. He notices the great number of beggars in Athens. He would have had a view of the life of the beggar fashioned by his understanding of Homer, who he quotes often, and his understanding of Herakles. Since he chooses to beg, his view of the beggar's life is positive.

Diogenes is clear about what he wants from life. He differs from others in that he does not focus on *eudaimonia*—happiness. He seeks a life of freedom and self-sufficiency and he begins to fashion a life based on that ideal.¹³¹ If there is one thing that he is emphatic about, it is that and in this respect alone he sets a course different from others of his time. His insistence on freedom of action and speech, I suggest, is the framework upon which everything about his life must be fashioned. How he understood freedom and how that idea evolved, is what we see investigated by his various critics, but never his desire for freedom. Thus far I believe the claims are not controversial. So critics who use later sources like Dio Chrysostom tread dangerously because they introduce a different archaeology and genealogy into the picture. Different times see the world from different archaeological frameworks. Foucault makes this mistake himself relying on Dio who liberally adds his own views into Diogenes' dialogues—views liberally laced with Stoicism and later Cynicism.¹³²

Given his starting point of freedom, all of the statements Diogenes makes fall into this framework. He feels free to act on his physical nature and desires. He declares one should be free of home, family, and civic responsibilities. He chooses to admonish and care for the youth of Athens. He chooses to truly care for Xenias' sons. So he changes, which is what one would expect as one developed a way of life for oneself over time. Once he had established his understanding of what it meant to be free, the anecdotes take on a different tone. He seems to relish life and his engagement with it. We see no agonizing over what to do, only actions coming from his newly refined inner nature.

We might have many images of what type of life one devoted to freedom might be, but what we see Diogenes doing with it is something akin to an old nanny nagging his charges to moral rectitude. He is seemingly everywhere chastising Athenian youth for effeminacy,

¹³¹ DL VI 70

¹³² Foucault. *Fearless Speech* 124.

women for baring too much lest they be attacked, admonishing stupidity and praising scholarship, shaming prostitution by males and females, and even drinking too much—just to name a few. At the same time, as we see above, he sees no problem practicing “Aphrodite and Demeter” in public view; he visited taverns; and he was known to steal a cloak and food given the opportunity. All of this information is anecdotal; however, and so thus far what Diogenes was up to still eludes us.

It’s easier to see now too that the idea of human nature would vary because of the assumptions about life that an individual or culture makes, as we see with Plato, or Aristotle or Zeno, etc. So Annas’ claim that we must know how our culture has influenced our conception of what it means to be a human being before we can begin to grasp what we are is valid. How exactly did the ancients view human nature?

Another important insight from the investigation in this chapter comes from Julian. His question is vital. If we can’t base our decisions on human nature, what can we base them on? This question haunts philosophy to this day and troubles modern scholars, as we will see in the following chapter.

In the end, given the valuable information concerning nature he provides, Adkins gives the best explanation of the ancient view of human nature because it not only accounts for the information provided by other scholars, but it goes beyond that information deepening the scope of how nature was considered throughout ancient Greek history, and it also provides a basis for critique of later writings on nature and convention based on ancient thought. Adkins’ insight into the relationship between a man who is *agathos* and the *aretai* he needs to be the best man he can be are the foundation for understanding the ancient Greek world and it’s status-based culture focused on success. It is the key to unlocking many perplexing issues within Diogenes’ lifetime.

Diogenes used the phrase, “backward the streams flow to their founts,”¹³³ whenever he thought that people had gotten things backwards. Perhaps that is what is going on here. If Diogenes was not preoccupied with nature as such and all of the problems related to that point of view, maybe it is convention that he is preoccupied with. And indeed, when we look to the anecdotes we see a wealth of material about convention and its damaging effect on

¹³³ DL VI 36

individuals and on the polis as well. So a detailed look at this aspect of his thinking is necessary and will be covered in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Cynic Issues of Convention, Cosmopolitanism, and Freedom

Diogenes took aim at specific targets in his criticism of Athenian society—those conventional norms that he believed were harmful not only to the individuals themselves, but also to the polis. He was not alone in this. In the dispute as to whether human nature or convention was the source of our woes, the ancient world decidedly favoured convention against today's modern views, which claim human nature is the culprit. Why the two eras favour opposing views is the subject of the following chapters. In this chapter, I argue that Diogenes' view of nature was a product of ancient Greek culture, which Diogenes and others promoted over the conventional view promoted by the Sophists. Diogenes held onto those traditional values otherwise lost to us by showing how anyone can live in any culture on one's own terms. I argue also that modern writers who rely heavily on information from writers like Dio Chrysostom, miss the mark of Diogenes' value, and only find in Dio, for example, Stoic elements that prescribe how one can cope, not how one can overcome economic and political power over our lives. It is Diogenes himself who is of value in solving this problem, not the Cynicism which follows him, and it is Diogenes' view that was so valued in the modern period that it attracted the attention of thinkers like Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Foucault.

Diogenes was not a lone voice in his rejection of many aspects of Athenian culture, and while many might have objected to how he displayed his opposition to the norms of his time, few would have objected to the views he espoused. Modern philosophers who side with the ancient world in this debate have not been so fortunate. Rousseau and Nietzsche, for example, did not have public support and hence lived the life of lonely thinkers underappreciated in their time. In contrast, the Athenians, as we have noted in previous chapters, loved Diogenes.

There are subtle changes in meaning and definition as we enter the ancient world and its perspective on convention—changes which have been in the making for hundreds of years and which have seriously influenced our ability to appreciate the ancient approach. Taking the time to wade through the subtleties is worth it, though, since the prize for doing so will,

as I hope to show, reveal ideas that can help with modern problems concerning the same behaviour Diogenes criticized.

In the same way that Aristotle's views of human nature prescribe for him the nature of government to deal with that nature, so, too, does Diogenes' claim to live what he believed to be a natural life prescribe his criticism of Athenian culture in all of its various forms. It is this connection that has and continues to resonate with modern and contemporary thinkers. Following this trail from Diogenes to our own time will complete our view of the importance of Cynicism generally and of Diogenes in particular.

As noted in the previous chapter, Diogenes makes no claims himself as to what human nature is, but as he whittles away at his own conventional behaviour that is destructive, he comes to the conclusion that behaviour tied to the acquisition of wealth and the habit of conspicuous consumption are unhealthy both to individuals and to the culture that encourages it. Such behaviour creates artificial norms one is expected to mimic and applaud, and hence restricts one's very ability to live a life natural to the individual— an *agathos* of his own making. Diogenes claims his utmost goal in life is freedom from the constraints of conventional norms. He mentions two aspects of freedom and the first is *parrhesia* or *freedom of speech*. The second type of freedom is liberty or *eleutheria*. *Eleutheria* encompasses the meaning of *parrhesia* in that it means "speaking or acting like a free man free-spirited, frank".¹ *Parrhesia* is limited to "freespokenness" and frankness".²

Diogenes' emphasis on freedom resonates not only in the centuries following his death, but after a lull picks up again in the modern Enlightenment period with Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot leading the way. I will argue here that in times of crushing political power like the period beginning in the 1700s to today, Diogenes' view of freedom cannot help but catch our notice. Diogenes' importance, however, is not that he recognized the connection between wealth and power and the greed and self-serving character it can create in a culture's citizens, he also demonstrated how ordinary citizens can deal successfully with dominating power structures that favour the few and harm the many. I argue further that while political thinkers in the past hundreds of years gained understanding of the nature of the problem from Cynicism and expressed loyalty to that philosophy, they failed to note the

¹ Liddell and Scott. *Intermediate Greek –English Lexicon*. 611.

² *Ibid.* 249

possibility of solution that comes only from the Cynicism of Diogenes himself. Living in the world and yet not being a part of it, was not Diogenes' answer as it was for the Stoics. Diogenes remained part of Greek culture, but he was part of it on his own terms. How he does so is his philosophy of life.

Certain key ideas argued for in previous chapters are aspects of the argument presented here. So a review of those elements is necessary. In Chapter Two, we argued that given the unreliable nature of many of the sources concerning Diogenes, the best solution was to limit our information to the most reliable source, i.e., Diogenes Laertius. The limitation is a serious one giving us only approximately 62 pages of information about Diogenes himself and in addition an equal amount if we include DL's anecdotes about Antisthenes, Crates and Zeno. This is in stark contrast to the greater volume of stories from writers like Dio Chrysostom and Julian. Is this enough information for our investigation? Yes, because this limitation to what is more trust worthy ultimately pays big dividends. As we will see, dubious source material causes perplexing problems for modern writers who stumble over ancient inconsistencies and paradoxes and blame all of that on Cynicism itself, which if read properly, is more consistent than they recognize.

In Chapter Three, I argued that the facts presented by DL in his *Lives* portray Diogenes' life in some ways as radical but in others as very traditional. I argued that the focus of his criticism and ire was pointed specifically at the character and norms of the new elite in Athenian society—the new wealthy class who gained their riches not in traditional ways through agriculture, but through trade. In this way, Diogenes is very akin to Aristophanes in his ridicule of the new elite depicted in his plays, both favouring Greek traditional norms over, the fourth century emphasis on status and wealth, although neither one is contemptuous of all of Greek society.

In Chapter Four we argued that the term “asceticism” as a translation for *askesis* is misapplied in the case of Diogenes. Linguistically, both Dressler and Adkins demonstrate the term had not evolved to that point by the fourth century BCE. Even more so Guthrie, Adkins and Aristophanes show that only specialized training for a specific goal adequately explains its use with the term playing a key role in understanding the central concepts of *agathos* and *arête* within ancient Greek culture. We took time, too, to elaborate the scope of Athenian

tradition, pointing out its emphasis on the good man who strives to develop his in-born talents to become successful and of benefit to the community as a whole.

In Chapter Five, we argued that, the concept of nature and human nature can best be untangled from its many explanations through the use of etymology, since so much misinformation has confused the issue with later commentaries. In the Heroic age, worry over human nature was non-existent. Early Greeks thought in terms of the best man, the *agathos*, who cared for himself and others and was seen to be the best that a man could be. The view was self-interested and success driven with material goods to be gained not for their use, but for their display of prosperity. The idea of *agathos* prevailed into later centuries, and one could argue also influenced the work of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as they probed further into what is meant by “good”. As we saw in the previous chapter the *physis/nomos* debate arose with the Sophist challenge to what would be considered *physis* or natural which led to the effect of that on society—how societal norms be altered.

Convention

The concern over what was considered natural or by birth led the Athenians to consider how the change in what is natural would change their society— in other words what would be considered conventional. There is much that history and etymology can bring to bear on this issue. We’ll use both sources of information, but we’ll begin by finishing the discussion in Chapter Five with the Sophist challenge to what comes to a man by “birth” from an etymological point of view.

By birth includes not only the innate talents an individual has, but also the advantages or disadvantages coming from birth into favoured circumstances or poor ones. Favoured would include birth lineage and an illustrious family, family holdings in property and status within the polis. This would be the older understanding of nature. It follows then that the traditional aristocratic class would possess all of the trappings of a good birth. With the challenge of the wealthy class, the Sophists encouraged a different view, which would allow new wealth to begin to have the influence within the polis as did the aristocracy. The different view was that *physis* could be enhanced by education or training. This was actually an attempt to change the definition of *physis*. The change became more and more accepted as the influence of the Sophists and those they taught increased. This need not necessarily

change the conceptual view of convention, however, but other concepts closely associated with the Sophist challenge did.

Diogenes' Attack on Convention

There is a distinct taste of melancholy in Ancient Cynic writings and that sadness carries over into modern acceptance of Cynicism as well. The vulgar and haughty antics of ancient Cynics who ridicule and provoke the average citizen sometimes did provoke the average person to rethink the norms of their behaviour, but probably, as in our own time, it could also provoke one to think "What could have led a person to think and act like that?"³

What comes to mind after posing a question like this one is the thought that there might have been a rupture within his life between the course that he chose and the ordinary course of life at that time. Such a rupture can be a good thing, as in the case of Diogenes where it afforded him the opportunity to consider his own life and how it might be lived after his exile. It can also be a bad thing, in that it can lead to a life that disintegrates into poverty and despair. Modern philosophers take stock, too, after a traumatic event. Philosophers who show sympathy to Cynicism like Rousseau, Sloterdijk, and Foucault fit this pattern. Kierkegaard and the French existentialists do as well, and so in some respects there is an affinity between Cynicism and Existentialism in contemporary times such that some philosophers become separated from the mainstream of thought and spend their lives in one way or another contemplating alternatives to cultural norms.

Diogenes first expresses the kind of melancholy meant here when he is condemned because of his exile status. Diogenes' response was "A homeless exile, to his country dead. A wanderer who begs his daily bread",⁴ if his aim as to invoke pity, it certainly does. But on another occasion when he is criticized for having to seek exile, he says about those he left behind, "And I condemn them to home staying."⁵ There is bravado here, but it would ring hollow with his audience who valued home and polis as supreme. On another occasion, when asked where he was from, he said, "I am a citizen of the world (κοσμοπολιτης)."⁶ This is

³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*. Xv.

⁴ DL VI 38

⁵ Ibid. 49

⁶ DL VI 63

the first use of the term “cosmopolitanism” in the Western world. And yet as you can see, it does not have the connotation of “worldly wise” as it came to be used with Alexander the Great and as it is used today. In fact, what Diogenes meant by it is that he had no home, no protection due to the laws of a polis, and no legitimate rights to any community. That is the real loss which Diogenes suffered, and we might suppose the feeling of that loss never left him.

Edward Said, a contemporary philosopher, captures the emotions of this better when he says:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.⁷

No wonder Diogenes cared little whether he lived in a wine jar or a temple porch. No place could ever replace his home and family. A breach or rift of this kind occurs with contemporary Cynics as well, which is a theme we will consider since it colours their view of culture and politics.

Melancholy affects Diogenes’ take on the Athenian world he is forced to make his home, and it gives poignancy and added depth to his understanding of the value of our social lives. For this reason, he is not a simple moralizer—his insight is more penetrating than that. For example, look at the kinds of things he criticizes. All of the anecdotes in DL deal with at least one of the following issues: dishonesty, hypocrisy, licentiousness, effeminacy, ignorance, superstition, and love of wealth with the weakness it creates. Why he chose these issues in particular may have had as much to do with his trouble in Sinope, with what he experienced there, and with the kind of man he was. I think what he said about each one reveals much about him. Let’s look at each one in turn.

When we think of Diogenes’ criticism of convention, evidence suggests that while he was critical of Athenian norms, he was not, as some suggest,⁸ critical of all of its societal norms.

⁷ Edward Said. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. 1.

He praised and approved of many things. For example, he never criticized the Athenian political system itself, only officials who abused their power within it. Demosthenes was a frequent target for Diogenes. And Diogenes must have recognized that he benefited handsomely from the largess of the Athenian polis. As Pericles said,

When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability, which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, thought they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.⁹

As we have witnessed thus far, Diogenes' antics could be extreme and yet Athenians tolerated his behaviour, and Diogenes in turn respected the sentiment and ideals expressed in Pericles' speech. So from the evidence presented by DL, it is not correct to say with Dudley that Diogenes "directed on the ideas and conventions of the Greek *polis* the most uncompromising criticism it had ever known."¹⁰ DL's anecdotes reveal instead that Diogenes' ire was directed at individual behaviour, for example, an individual's greed, like that of the ignorant rich man who he called "the sheep with the golden fleece".¹¹

Religion was also discussed by Diogenes, but he never criticized the gods or religion as such, only certain practices within religion which he considered to be mere superstition and he criticized the religious integrity of certain individuals. In particular, Diogenes treated the various mystery religions as superstitious hocus pocus. In an effective retort to those who urged him to become initiated and join those privileged who did so, Diogenes responded,

It would be ludicrous if Agesilarus and Epaminordas are to dwell in the mire, while certain folk of no account will live in the Isles of the Blest because they have been initiated.¹²

⁸ For example, Dudley 25.

⁹ Thucydides. *History of The Peloponnesian War*. II. Translated by Rex Warner. New York: Penguin Books 1972. 37.

¹⁰ Ibid. 25

¹¹ DL VI 47

¹² DL VL 39

Epaminondas and Agesilarus were Theban generals who defeated the Spartans. Epaminondas was noted for his generosity and benevolence.

Even the fact that Athenians gave the title of Dionysus (the god of wine) to Alexander, prompted a retort from Diogenes that they then should make him Sarapis (a favoured god in Sinope). Equally critical, Diogenes confronted a man performing a religious purification with the statement “Unhappy man, don’t you know that you can no more get rid of errors of conduct by sprinklings than you can of mistakes in grammar”.¹⁵ From what can be ascertained in DL, Diogenes was certainly against religious foolishness and hypocrisy; however, since each Greek polis required devotion to the god of the city, we can only conclude that Diogenes did fulfil that obligation because he was allowed to continue to live there.

Diogenes did not spare Athenian youth from criticism and much of the anecdotes in DL have to do with this subject. Yet, while he castigated some young people, he also praised others. It’s interesting what he praised. When he came upon a young man studying philosophy, he said, “Well done, Philosophy, that thou divertest admirers of bodily charms to the real beauty of the soul”.¹⁶ When he criticized young men, the focus was on their manhood. Anything in his mind that diminished the virility of a young man was to be soundly denounced. There are many examples of this. In one example, “Seeing a youth dressing with elaborate care, he said, ‘If it’s for men, you’re a fool; if for women, a knave,’”¹⁷ Diogenes manages to denounce both kinds of sexual excess.

Diogenes also delighted in seeing young people who were studious and even displayed the innocence of youth. We can cite so many anecdotes here in which Diogenes encounters groups of people and talks with them about many things and castigates more than he praises, but that lopsided view may be due to what interested Laertius rather than what is truly representative of Diogenes. So when we read an anecdote of a young man blushing or another hurrying off to a party and Diogenes cautioning them in a fatherly way, we realize there is another side of Diogenes and another way to understand why the Athenian people loved him. Diogenes is not always the grumpy old cynic.

¹⁵ Ibid. 42

¹⁶ Ibid. 58

¹⁷ Ibid. 54

Often in Diogenean literature commentators will discuss his supposed hatred of women, whereby he is said to have accepted the norm so notorious and prevalent in the ancient world. It's possible, but any such claim is a hasty conclusion without more evidence to that effect than what we have now. Just in DL, I think we have no justification for such a claim. Three examples come to mind. In the first example, Diogenes (in almost chivalrous fashion) comes to the protection of an older woman who unknowingly exposes herself indecently. He said to her, "Are you not afraid, my good woman that a god may be standing behind you?—for all things are full of his presence—and you may be put to shame?"¹⁸

The incident most often cited to support Diogenes supposed misogyny is his remark after seeing a number of women hung from a tree. His judgement was that "Would that every tree bore similar fruit".¹⁹ The comment is harsh and has seemed to many to be good evidence for his dislike of women.

What occurred to this author was something different. Instead, a story in the *Odyssey* came to mind. At the end of the book, Odysseus has returned home, he rid his palace of the suitors courting his wife, and he turned his attention to those who collaborated with those who treacherously tried to undermine his son, Telemachus', rightful inheritance. Some of those collaborators were women, and Odysseus had them hung from trees.²⁰

Hanging was the usual punishment for adultery and often prostitution. Given these examples, it's difficult to say conclusively that Diogenes had any prejudice against women. It seems to me to show his consistency in disparaging any form of immoral behaviour.

Two anecdotes within DL's life apply to what we have learned thus far—one idea has to do with askesis and the other has to do with law. Both illuminate the influence of the debate concerning *physis v. nomos* on his thinking. We are cautioned, however, when we see that they are within the controversial section of probably Cynic maxims written by Diocles as mentioned in Chapter Four. The first anecdote has to do with askesis. Here is what we find:

Nothing in life, however, he maintained, has any chance of succeeding without strenuous practice [askesis]; and this is capable of overcoming anything. Accordingly, instead of useless toils men should choose such as nature recommends, whereby they might have lived happily. . . . This was the gist of his conversation; and it was plain

¹⁸ Ibid. 37

¹⁹ Ibid. 52

²⁰ Homer. *Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fagles. XXII 490

that he acted accordingly, adulterating currency in very truth, allowing convention no such authority as he allowed to natural right, and asserting the manner of life he lived was the same as that of Heracles, when he preferred liberty to everything.²¹

This passage is important. On the one hand it credits Diogenes with accepting the idea of training and on the other it accepts the traditional condemnation of convention. This puts Diogenes firmly on the side of tradition. This is the stance of the late fifth century traditionalists who began to acknowledge that what comes naturally at birth can be enhanced. Adkins explains,

For *agathos* too, at the end of the century, in commending, as it always had done, the successful soldier and politician was beginning to commend the pupils of the Sophists who, having learned from them rhetoric and such statecraft as there was, might expect to be the most successful politicians. Whoever proved capable of profiting from such instruction clearly possess the *phusis* to do so, and in a usage also current at the period, could be said to be acquiring new, improved *phusis* as a result of his instruction.²²

Given all of the above information, it's reasonable to conclude that underlying the seemingly straightforward anecdotes in DL's account of Diogenes, there is an underlying framework of assumptions that we need to understand if we are to get to the bottom of what Diogenes meant about anything. So as we turn now to modern critics, having Greek traditional values in mind steadies our thinking as we begin to see how Cynicism fares in Modernity.

Society and Convention in Modernity

According to Niehues-Probsting one of the reasons for the loss of Cynic influence in the modern period was the acceptance of Hegel's philosophy of history, which criticized earlier "historiography of philosophy as unphilosophical."²³ Niehues-Probsting makes the case that because of Hegel's influence, philosophers focused on theoretical knowledge, which precluded any attempt to include biographical information into the mix.

Niehues-Probsting notes, as did Hadot in our Chapter One, that earlier views of philosophy allowed us to think of philosophy as a way of life using the lives of exceptional people as

²¹ DL VI 71

²² Adkins 118.

²³ Niehues-Probsting. "Diogenes in the Enlightenment". 330.

examples.”²⁴ From the time of Hegel, however, only the written word mattered and so in the case of those like Diogenes who left no works behind “that meant exclusion from the history of philosophy and “pushed them into the curiosities as the margin of history.”²⁵

It’s true that thinkers in the modern period accepted Hegel’s perspective, which rejected Cynicism. However, as an historian, Hegel also greatly valued ancient Greek society and values. So while Hegel did devalue unsystematic thinking, he did value the lives, conversations, thoughts and feelings of ancient Greek society.

Hegel’s View of Nature and Freedom

Hegel was an astute historian who left behind extraordinary insights into the various societies he investigated, and he was particularly interested in ancient Athens in the time both before and after Diogenes’ life there. Hegel explains the issue of nature versus convention with its pros and cons. He does the same thing with the issue of freedom—both ideas key to unlocking Diogenes’ philosophy. As a post-Enlightenment figure, Hegel’s view of Greece sheds light on the Enlightenment reawakening of Cynicism and makes our understanding of Enlightenment’s failure and Cynicism’s resurrection more understandable. So spending some time in the world of Hegel will be well spent, as it will leave us better able to understand modern and contemporary Cynicism.

Given the marvellous historian that he was, Hegel opens up new ways of seeing the past right before our eyes eliminating confusions as he goes. He speaks of many themes and issues within history, but in *Philosophy of History* how the Homeric ideal previously discussed by Adkins and Guthrie caught hold in Greece—an issue these philosophers did not address. Much of Greek thought comes from the Greek enjoyment of basking in his own natural state. Hegel begins his discussion by considering a more primitive human who lives freely using objects around him to sustain his life. In addition to using objects, humans also invented them, so they become more than objects, they become things in which humans invest something of themselves in their construction. Hegel gives the example of Agamemnon’s sceptre its origin and description, furniture and even doors all described in Homer.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.330

²⁵ Ibid. 331

²⁶ Ibid. 241

More importantly mankind begins to use objects as ornament—something a man has made himself—and which is not intended to be accumulated as wealth, but as “the boundless impulse of individuals to display themselves and to find enjoyment in doing so.”²⁷ Hegel argues that once the predatory world around them had been tamed, mankind turned itself within to newfound peace and serenity to assert and dignify themselves.²⁸ This is not vanity, he says. It is rather “The exhilarating sense of personality, in contrast with sensuous subjection to nature” not for the mere pleasure of it, but for the sense of power it can provide. This, says Hegel, is the “chief characteristic and principal occupation of the Greeks.”²⁹

Taking some time to think of this and attempt to adjust one’s one mind to living in this way is necessary to begin to understand the Greek mind-set, and by extension, Diogenes’ way of thinking.

Imagine trying to live in the Greek way, as Hegel says, “Free as the bird singing in the sky, the individual only expresses what lies in his untrammelled human nature—[to give the world “assurance of a man”]—to have his importance recognized”.³⁰ Much of the confusion over Diogenes’ behaviour is understandable if we put him in the context Hegel has presented. Hegel gives this explanation not only to help us understand the beginning of Greek thought, but also to explain the beginning of Greek art—why it was so marvellous—and Greek political thinking.

As to art, it too is an expression of human physicality—“free, beautiful movement and agile vigor.”³¹ He explains that before they painted or sculpted human figures, they sculpted themselves first by training their bodies for fitness and health. Later they would use the famous games to develop their bodies further in wrestling, boxing, running, and throwing.³² But on top of all that they danced and sang at the same time expressing “the joy of social exhilaration” and from this “arts blossomed into beauty”.³³ All of this is possible when a culture values its nature and more so celebrates it.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 242

²⁸ *Ibid.* 242

²⁹ *Ibid.* 242

³⁰ *Ibid.* 242

³¹ *Ibid.* 242

³² *Ibid.* 242

³³ *Ibid.* 242

Hegel goes on to explain the fact that the Greeks were not a reflective people. He mentions how the gods were derived from nature and the awe of it that the Greeks found in its presence. They wondered at the “Natural in Nature” thinking it is “friendly to the human spirit”, and to which they may have a “positive relation”.³⁴ From this stance of wonder says Hegel, the Greek people move on to look for “hidden meanings in nature.”³⁵ From this he derives an individual’s place within nature—a place where a variety of temperaments and passions exist accompanied by the freedom to express them. So morality appears as a nature peculiar to the individual—the “result of disposition in an individual character.”³⁶ In other words, the beginning of the expression of the *agathos* man, as Adkins would say.

When we turn our attention to politics, Hegel’s thinking is equally revealing. He begins by recounting the jockeying for power between various interest groups at the time of Solon. He says that at this time the acceptance of constitutional law had not yet been affected. Under Cleisthenes the constitution was revised to be more favourable to democracy and that situation was then enhanced by Pericles.

Hegel extols much praise upon Pericles—the one who prevailed over “light-minded but highly refined and cultivated people.”³⁷ He did so by virtue of his character. He “devoted himself to public life”³⁸, withdrew from all feasts and banquets”, and put his mind to “being useful to the state”.³⁹ When we wonder what does it take to win over “light-minded” people, Hegel gives his highest praise to Pericles:

[T]he only means by which he could obtain influence and authority over them, was his personal character and the impression he produced of his being a thoroughly noble man, exclusively intent upon the weal of the State, and of superiority to his fellow-citizens in native genius and acquired knowledge. In force of individual character no statesman can be compared with him.⁴⁰

By any measure Pericles conforms to the Greek ideal. He used his inborn talents, developed them, and then used them to benefit his society. As we turn to Hegel’s other works, we find he has many more insights to offer us.

³⁴ Ibid. 234

³⁵ Ibid. 237

³⁶ Ibid. 238

³⁷ Ibid. 220

³⁸ Ibid. 260

³⁹ Ibid. 260

⁴⁰ Ibid. 260

In *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel makes an interesting claim concerning the ancient Greek world. He believed that Athens in the classic period achieved what no other civilization had achieved or even would achieve in the future, i.e., a cohesive society in which the goals and ideals of the society and of its citizens were the same. This caused the people of Athens to be deeply secure in the appreciation of their own worth with a firm belief that their ideas were true. Hegel says,

as a member of civil society he finds in fulfilling his duties to it protection of his person and property, regard for his private welfare, the satisfaction of the depths of his being, the consciousness and feeling of himself as a member of the whole; and, in so far as he completely fulfils his duties by performing tasks and services of the state, he is upheld and preserved.⁴⁷

Today it's very sobering to even think of the possibility of finding depth of meaning in life within one's culture, let alone one's polis. Yet, that is how the Athenians lived, Diogenes among them. Hegel further claims that in such a society one's identity is tied to the identity of the state, and he explains that is the reason for patriotism. It's a matter of trust; one trusts the state as one trusts oneself because they are identical. He explains,

The consciousness that my interest, both substantive and particular is contained and preserved in a (i.e., the state's) interest and end, i.e., in the other's relation to me as an individual . . . [Patriotism] is the sentiment which, in the relationships of our daily life and under ordinary conditions, habitually recognize that the community is one's substantive groundwork and end.⁴⁸

What Hegel's assessment of Athens provides is a much deeper evaluation of Athenian life and ideology than is generally pursued, and shows that the debate concerning nature and convention was much more complicated than most people assume. So when we try to envision Diogenes in this ideologically secure situation, which was coming under attack by the tides of trade and change, we can understand why he felt self-assured as to the traditions of the past (nature) and wary over the new practices entering society (convention). His very identity and world were the world of the traditional past.

⁴⁷ Georg Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942. 261A.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 268A

In his reading of this section of Hegel's book, Neuhouser characterizes this relationship as creating an ideological "home".⁴⁹ This is an effective way to frame what Hegel is getting at. It is reasonable that people living in an environment such as this would be absolutely sure of their beliefs because there would be no dissenting views to challenge them.

Hegel did not detail the nature of the Greek mind-set or "home"—but a contemporary Hegelian, Eduard Zellar, did, painting a detailed picture of man and nature in the Classic period. Zellar showed that freedom and nature are essential components of the Greek view. He claims

The Greeks were the first who gained sufficient freedom of thought to seek for the truth respecting the nature of things themselves; among them first a strictly scientific method, a knowledge that follows as laws except its own.⁵⁰

He also explains that the gods set the tone for what was naturally acceptable. Unlike Christianity, Zellar says "the Greek[s] seek the Divine primarily in nature," "the Greek, relying on his reason, seeks to know the laws of the universe," "the Greek endeavours to attain in human life the first harmony of spirit and nature which is the distinctive characteristic of Hellenic morality," and the Greek gods are "full of sensual desires, sexless angels; and a Zeus who authorises and indulges in all earthly delights."⁵¹

The Greek gods are more than super-human beings; they are at the same time, and originally, as Zellar sees it, "powers of nature."⁵² As powers of nature they are also constrained for they have "the universal force of nature or eternal chaos before them and pitiless fate above them."⁵³ The consequences of having a pantheon of deities like these who suffer and delight in life is that as a guide, Zellar concludes, "it was impossible that man should consider his nature corrupt, and himself, as originally constituted sinful."⁵⁴ More importantly, he continues, there would be "no demand that he should renounce his natural

⁴⁹Frederick Neuhouser, Frederick. "Hegel's Social Philosophy". In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*. Edited by Frederick C. Beiser . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 218.

⁵⁰ Eduard Zellar. *A History of Greek Philosophy*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881. 133.

⁵¹ Ibid. 134-5

⁵² Ibid. 140

⁵³ Ibid. 140.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 140

inclinations, repress his sensuality and be radically changed by a moral new birth” as would be the case, for example, with Christianity.⁵⁵

It is at this point that Zellar adds to Hegel’s view about Athenian society. Given the Greeks’ close association with the gods and nature, there was no need for individuals to reflect on these moral issues. Zellar says that to the Greeks it appears “as natural and necessary that he should allow sensuality its rights or that he should control it by the exercise of will and reflection. He can regard the matter in no other light, and he therefore pursue his course with full security, honestly feeling that he is justified in doing so.”⁵⁶

Since natural powers are assumed to be good and natural inclinations to be legitimate, Zellar claims, too, that morality is conceived as

guiding these powers to the right end, and maintaining these inclinations in right measure and balance; virtue is nothing more than the intelligent and energetic development of natural endowments and the highest law of morals is to follow the course of nature freely and rationally.⁵⁷

For the Greeks there was no need to think about all of this; it was simply natural and it became Greek tradition.⁵⁸

Negatively, it is also true that slavery and subjugation of women was also considered to be natural even by so great a mind as Aristotle, but to engage in discussions over such things would be complicate the Greek mental framework and dislodge the cohesion between Athenian life and thought which Hegel mentions. Zellar mentions this too. He says,

In one respect, however, things were easier for the Greek than for us. His range of vision, it is true was more limited, his relations were narrower, his moral principles were less pure and strict and universal than ours; but, perhaps on that very account his life was the more fitted to form complete, harmoniously cultured men and classical characters.⁵⁹

Turning now to Hegel, what guides his thought on the idea of freedom and society is his knowledge that personal will and social will can coincide. What Hegel attempts to achieve is

⁵⁵ Ibid. 141

⁵⁶ Ibid. 141

⁵⁷ Ibid. 141

⁵⁸ Ibid. 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid 142. Zellar cites Hegel for this idea. *Phil der Gesch*, 291.

an ancient social coherence in modern times. This is difficult to do in a modern industrial state. However, he suggests it can be done if people

[W]ork freely for the collective good of a group to which they belong, insofar as doing so is also a way of giving expression to a particular identity they take to be central to who they are.⁶⁰

To see oneself as barrister, nurse, or office worker is to create value of one's life and work in terms of the social good. Then in that sense it is to act on "the basis of one's identity as a family member, as the member of a profession, or as a citizen for the good of the whole."⁶²

The Athenian debate concerning nature and convention, very like our conflicts today, focused on the problem of newly introduced norms of the wealthy class which undermined traditional values—values deemed natural to them. The new norms of the wealthy class caused harm and social disruption especially to the traditional Greek value of social equality for greater wealth gained access to power, which caused economic inequality and class distinctions. With greater wealth, individuals within the lower class succumbed to poverty, requiring them to work for another, rendering them subservient and less free. Thus, the changes within Athens in the fourth century BCE did more than disrupt the city's financial stability; they began to disrupt their ideological home—destroying the peoples' understanding of themselves and their place in the cosmic order of things.

Diogenes' solution was to be tireless in his efforts to turn the tide against obsession with wealth and to minimize one's needs with the goal of self-sufficiency and begging. Granted, he would be dependent on the largesse of others, but would not be in anyone's service or be dependent. As we saw in the previous chapter, the usual nature versus convention debate was not framed in the way Diogenes perceived it. The Stoics, for example, viewed the debate as a moral question as to how to guide one's action, framing it as a relativistic norm as did Hesiod as a simple cultural choice. For the Stoics, making that choice using reason was preferable to using instinct, impulse, or whim.

If Diogenes had lived long enough to argue the idea of nature and convention with the Stoics, or if Diogenes was more properly understood at the time, the world might have been spared considerable hardship. In upholding the ancient Greek view of equality and the

⁶⁰ Hegel 217.

⁶² *Ibid.* 217

freedom associated with it, we see what Hegel would come to view as the outstanding nature of ancient Athens.

Hegel also understood the historical consequences of following the Stoic view. According to Charles Taylor, the consequences are visible in the 18th century with the Romantics' reaction against modern industrial society. Displayed in Germany in the *Sturm und Drang* movement, it was

A protest against the mainstream Enlightenment view of man—as both subject and object of an objectifying scientific analysis. The focus of rejection was against a view of man as the subject of egoistic desires, for which nature and society provided merely the means to fulfilment. It was a philosophy which looked to scientific social engineering to reorganize man and society and bring men happiness through perfect mutual adjustment.⁶³

Arguing against this, Herder offered an alternative in which man was not used and in which nature had intrinsic rather than instrumental value. Herder, says Taylor, believed that

Human life was seen as having a unity rather analogous to that of a work of art, where every part of every aspect only found its proper meaning in relation to all the others. Human life unfolded from some central core—a guiding theme or inspiration—or should do so, if it were not so often blocked and distorted.⁶⁴

In other words, what the German and French Romantic movements were pointing out is that both individuals and nature had become tools to be used by the modern industrial economy and state. Not only did individuals become subservient to economic goals, but so too did nature.

The enlightenment ideal and Romantic vision in time merged in an attempt to overcome problems with both. Charles Taylor uses the Hegelian idea of home and explains,

In a smoothly running modern society, in which the exploitation of nature and the organization of society seem designed for the utility of individuals, it is quite natural for men to feel at home in a vision of themselves as autonomous subjects engaged in effecting their freely-chosen desires and purposes. In a scientific perspective they may indeed see themselves as moved by drives, and their behaviour as part of a deterministic causal system. But although these two perspectives are probably incompatible, neither of them gives rise to serious questions about freedom or about

⁶³ Charles Taylor. *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 2

its relation to nature. The first is that of the subject which objectifies nature, who takes his own freedom for granted, while his goals are determined by the requirement that he play his part in the large productive enterprise in the search for individual happiness. On the second perspective, the problem of relating freedom and nature is suppressed from the outset.... freedom is following the course of desire, itself determined by nature within us and without. And although these desires are not autonomous in the Kantian sense, they are clear and unambiguous and quite clearly mine as long as I identify with my own nature.⁶⁵

This accommodation and part self-deception can unravel as we see following with the philosophes. Taylor explains the consequences of this too:

But when this society is challenged and its equilibrium lost, when the more radical expressivist aspirations to total freedom gain a wide hearing, then social and individual life seem to be the prey of irrational forces—either because the social mechanisms fail to function according to ‘rational’ prescriptions (for instance, in the Depression), or because desires and aspirations come to the fore which threaten the very framework of instrumentally rational collaborative action (e.g., chauvinism, racism, war fevers)—then the notion of the autonomous self cannot but come into question. The demand for absolute freedom raises the dilemma of self-dependence in its acutest form. And the renewed saliency of irrational and destructive cravings make us question the very idea of autonomy, and undermines the idea of an unambiguous attribution of desire, or alternatively of our unambiguous identification with the nature in us which desires.⁶⁶

In the Enlightenment period and today, the accommodation between an individual’s desire for freedom and the strictures of mechanistic, industrial economies forces a consideration of freedom in all of its aspects. Taylor shows that Hegel found the ideal of absolute freedom untenable, for on the one hand it would lead to the unleashing of human desire, or on the other hand lead to vacuity or emptiness and nihilism.

In Taylor’s reading, Hegel argues that if we see “freedom as self-dependence”⁶⁷ in which “our goals are supposedly given by nature”,⁶⁸ then, freedom becomes nonsensical. He explains,

Freedom would then be the unchecked fulfilment of desire, and the shape of desire would be a given. But this is a very inadequate conception of freedom. For if free

⁶⁵ Ibid. 564

⁶⁶ Ibid. 565

⁶⁷ Taylor. *Hegel* 157.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 157

activity cannot be defined in opposition to our nature and situation, on pain of vacuity, it cannot simply be identified with following our strongest, or most persistent, or most all-embracing desire either. For that would make it impossible to say that our freedom was ever thwarted by our own compulsions, fears, obsession, or to say that freedom widens with heightened awareness or awakened aspirations . . . We have to be able to distinguish our compulsions, fears, addictions from those of our aspirations which we endorse with our whole soul, not just by some quantitative criterion, but in a way which shows these latter to be more authentically ours. That is what the radical conceptions of freedom as self-dependence have tried to do in seeing our authentic aspirations as chosen by us, as against simply given. But it is just this radical notion of freedom which runs into the dilemma of vacuity.⁶⁹

In other words when we have removed all impediments to freedom, we no longer have a life at all—such a life is vacuous or empty. In Hegel’s view, unbridled freedom fares no better since “untrammelled freedom of the instinctual self seems worthless if not loathsome,”⁷⁰ Following the same line of thought brought Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to nihilism and a submission to Divine power for Kierkegaard.⁷¹ Diogenes would have none of this.

Diogenes would probably label much of our discussion about convention as idle chatter, but of course he comes to the question from a very enviable position. As member of the ideal Athenian society, as Hegel calls it, Diogenes knew from experience what it was like to live in a homogeneous and harmonious society. He didn’t question his moral or political views. He didn’t overly scrutinize nature. More importantly, early Athenian society was a culture of self-sufficient farmer citizens. They knew they would not starve if they had good land and the weather favoured a good growing season. With that as a basis, citizens could speak their minds without fear of economic reprisal. There was no one overseeing and judging the work they did. They had no impossible stereotypical ideals of lifestyle or fashion to keep up with. Athenians generally accepted a modest lifestyle. This is the kind of freedom Diogenes is referring to. The fourth century introduction of wealth, greed, and acquisitiveness was a threat to the old tradition, but as Diogenes argued, the new norms connected with wealth could be rejected and freedom could be retained. Such a free life was not an impossible dream in Diogenes’ time, nor is it impossible today. It is really just a choice and not a difficult one to make if one knows the viability of such a choice and one decides to live on the terms of minimalism.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 158

⁷⁰ Ibid. 159

⁷¹ Ibid. 159

Hegel's vision of how to overcome the problems we have been describing was something akin to Kierkegaard's divine solution. He believed there was an all-encompassing cosmic reason, which if we attuned ourselves to it, could create a harmonious world order. Hegel called it Geist, or the Absolute, but in any case his vision lost lustre and today is no longer in favour. Even so, as Taylor says, Hegel's ideas are deep and penetrating and illuminated so many other problems that bewitch us. One of those ideas was mentioned by Hegel in relation to his time—that of the French Revolution and Napoleon, but as we read about it, it could come from today's media.

Hegel's attempt to resolve our ideological conflict between what our nature longs for and what society promotes as a solution, was a valiant but failed attempt in the tradition of philosophy from the rationalist perspective dating from Plato to Descartes to thinkers of the modern era. With the criticism of Rousseau and Nietzsche, this approach to philosophy (as we shall see in the next chapter), there is the temptation to be dismissive of Hegel. There are, however, so many rich insights into all aspects of human life within his works, that it would be unwise to dismiss him so easily. Hegel recognized the need for human autonomy and tried valiantly to value it as we see here. As an educator, the expanse of his knowledge was breath-taking and underlying much of Hegel's thinking is attempt to find meaning in human existence independent of direct divine intervention. In the estimation of Yirmiyahu Yovel, the emphasis on meaning was one of Hegel's greatest gifts to us. He says:

Hegel's concerns with the meaning of existence, which, as he suggested, is not lying ready-made somewhere, but involves human input and action, indicates an existential interest that remains relevant independently of the social concerns with which it is lined in part. Of course, Hegel's messianic expectation that the modern world would make this meaning manifest, a redeeming power in people's lives and culture had turned, sour, as all messianism must. But the drive behind it—to reconcile modern individuals not only to their growingly complex and alienated societies, but to the being of the universe, which had become estranged by modernity's disillusion, the price of intellectual emancipation and *desenchantment*—expresses a genuine philosophical problem that does not go away, and cannot be truly submerged in political and social activism.⁷²

⁷² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translation and commentary by Yirmiyahu Yovel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. 61.

In the Enlightenment Period of which Hegel was a part, the rejection of past ideologies due to the Philosophes and influenced by Schopenhauer admitted the prospect of nihilism—the thought that in a mechanized universe, human life has no meaning or value at all. Hegel, as Yovel rightly states, should be acknowledged for attempting to create an intellectual home or meaning to modern life in the way the Greeks had done. He was not successful, not because the attempt was ill conceived, but because his method of attempting to achieve it was flawed. As we shall see in the following chapter, the meaning of the ancients does return, and it does so with the severest critic of Hegel’s philosophical system, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Understanding Diogenes’ View of Freedom in Modern Terms

One work, which to the author’s credit brings structure to the vastly complicated issue of human freedom, is “Two Concepts of Freedom” by Isaiah Berlin.⁷³ In his essay he relates a common view that “nature” freedom would be chaotic in that if freedom were unlimited, “all men could boundlessly interfere with all men” because individual human goals “do not automatically harmonize with one another.”⁷⁴ Berlin suggests that law is the means by which freedom must control itself. Interestingly, some commentary suggests that Diogenes favoured something akin to anarchy,⁷⁵ but actually he seems rather to believe in the rule of law as Berlin suggests. Diogenes says,

Again as to law: that it is impossible for society to exist without law; for without a city no benefit can be derived from that which is civilized. But the city is civilized, and there is no advantage in law without a city; therefore law is something civilized.⁷⁶

Admittedly, this quote is found within the contested section of DL’s account that Hick’s believes is copied from Diocles’ Stoic maxims. We can confront here the question of why DL included this quote and this section at all. As noted in Chapter Four, Barnes believed that he was trying to come to terms with the difference between Cynicism and Stoicism. At least

⁷³ Isaiah Berlin. “Two Concepts of Liberty.” In *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 17

⁷⁵ Navia uses language suggestive of “demolishing” of Athenian civilization (158), and Desmond reiterates Navia’s claims including the claim that Cynics were to “wage war” on the Athenian system (236). Desmond’s remark is rhetorical in its usage, but Navia’s comments are open to interpretation of a war of more than just words.

⁷⁶ DL VI 72

we can say here that with this passage, DL had reason to believe it reflected Diogenes' own view. One reason to believe so is that in spite of his highly critical comments to and about Athenian and Corinthian citizens, there is no evidence to suggest that he was a political agitator. There is no mention of conflict with the authorities, only sarcastic comments about the moral integrity of politicians and administrators. Given this, what does the above passage tell us about freedom?

Within the context of Berlin's analysis, Diogenes' acceptance of law means his idea of freedom is not nature freedom. However, Berlin goes on to say that law does not mean that all life need be subject to some form of control. Citing Locke, Smith, and Mill, Berlin states that cooperation between people is "compatible with reserving a large area for private life over which neither the state nor any other authority must be allowed to trespass."⁷⁷ "To invade that preserve," he adds, "however small, would be despotism."⁷⁸

Berlin goes on to show that this idea of freedom is a modern one going back no further than the Renaissance. He cites Condorcet's claim that "the notion of individual rights was absent from the legal conceptions of the Romans and Greeks."⁷⁹ The reason for the lack in say, Athens, may be that the Greek word *nomos* also meant law—so custom and law were equivalent in Greek thought. In Diogenes' case, Athenian custom gave him, as an exile, certain privileges, but they were not all encompassing. He had no right, for example, to protect himself from any legal accusations or transgressions. Had he transgressed he would simply have been exiled if he was lucky, and killed if he was not. Of course, Diogenes must have been keenly aware of this, so his aim of freedom, does not seem to fit within the context of law.

Diogenes may on the other hand have had something else in mind that coincides with Berlin's view of positive freedom. When captured by pirates and enslaved, Diogenes said to Xeniadēs who purchased him, "You must obey me, although I am a slave; for if a physician or a steersman were in slavery, he would be obeyed."⁸⁰ And DL in a later account of this in his book says,

⁷⁷ Berlin 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid .19

⁷⁹ Ibid. 22.

⁸⁰ DLVI 30

For on a voyage to Aegina he was captured by pirates under the command of Scirpalus conveyed to Crete and exposed for sale. When the auctioneer asked in what he was proficient, he replied, "in ruling men." Thereupon he pointed to a certain Corinthian with a fine purple border to his robe, the man named Xenias above-mentioned, and said, "Sell me to this man; he needs a master." Thus Xenias came to buy him, and took him to Corinth and set him over his own children and entrusted his whole household to him. And he administered it in all respects in such a manner that Xenias used to go about saying, "A good genius has entered my house."

Did Diogenes bluster himself into a degree of freedom unlike that of most slaves? Perhaps. But there is still one last problem with freedom which Berlin addresses, and it is an important one. Berlin explains that we can still be enslaved to our own natural desires and passions or as he says to "irrational impulse, uncontrolled desires, my 'lower' nature, the pursuit of immediate pleasures."⁸¹ This passage is a very good summation of the issues regarding freedom and living according to the dictates of our nature. So Diogenes claim to follow nature could not be depended upon to produce an *agathos* or good life. This is aspect of morality which was to preoccupy so much of Aristotle's ethics. Yet Diogenes seems unconcerned by the ramifications of his own position.

There is every reason to believe, as with Zellar's explanation, that Diogenes' home, or stable traditional world view blinded him to its flaws. Upon reflection over this, we realize that the traditional view of Athenian society was every bit a cultural construction and convention as the new one the Sophists wished to put in its place. Both sides of the nature/convention debate resorted to the role of nature to suit their own arguments. Diogenes and the Cynics used it to vaguely connect it to the past and its association with divine sanction by the pantheon of Greek gods. The tradition-bound aristocrats did the same thing. In contrast, the Sophists used tradition and its allowance for education to hone birth lineage, to construct a democratic society of the common man who could achieve *agathos* via education. Finally, the Stoics used nature to assert the superior human quality of reason to achieve virtue—their ideal of the *agathos* man.

The debate over the theme of freedom as it involves elements of convention, base desires and nature is not one that has gone away. It arose again in earnest in the 18th century CE and is still with us today. Berlin is certainly right that we can be enslaved to our base desires, but

⁸¹ Berlin. 23.

he is also right that we can preserve a place in our own minds free of the constraints of society and others. Both of these aspects of freedom have been the subject of modernity. Why this is so is the subject of the following chapter.

Conclusion

In the end, Diogenes' confidence in a natural and traditional way of life was to cling to an ancient (even for him) view of nature and society that was eroding away. As Hegel and Zellar show, the Greek traditional view gave its citizens a stable view of life that was in their minds unimaginable to question. Where life and thought coincide, there is no basis for contradiction. However, as we know and as the Athenians came to understand, natural inclinations can be base, and thus Diogenes' Cynic view of nature and tradition was his own and was not shared by everyone in his own rapidly changing time. Perhaps it is understandable then that so many people who followed him have not quite grasped the entirety of the ancient debate about nature. There are so many illusive features to it that hopefully we have at least begun to address here, but which indicate areas of further research to fully appreciate their influence on contemporary cultures.

In any case, looking back at that time capsule in which Diogenes lived, we see first, what was lost to us in the sense of that marvellous Athenian society in which individuals had an ideological "home," and second, the realization that such a world is not even a glimmer in the minds of most men. It's more understandable now with this information why in late antiquity Cynicism was not Diogenes' Cynicism as the Athenian ideal was progressively undermined. Hegel is important because he shows how nature (uninhibited nature) can develop into a deep-seated respect for our own natures and the free expression of all aspects of it. As a characteristic of Greek life in general, we can well see the basis for Diogenes' approach to life and the free living of it. We can also understand why he and Aristophanes sought to preserve it.

Certain ancient themes persist, however, and we find them popping up in Hegel's thought and that of Berlin. Hegel struggles with issues related to human nature that can undermine our trust in it. He knows desires and impulses can degrade us and can limit our freedom as they entrap us. Berlin offers the idea that freedom can exist independent of societal constraints. Our minds are free to think as they wish. The issue then is what to do when the

mind is contaminated by constraining impulses and societal norms. Berlin has much to offer us, but we wish for more from this point of view.

Moving forward with the insights revealed in this chapter, we will see how conflicting ideas about nature, conventional norms, and Cynicism played important roles in modernity and contemporary times as older trains of thought from Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, and Christianity ran into problems during the European Enlightenment period. To understand how all of this unfolds is the subject of our concluding chapters, first in Chapter Seven with Modernity, and second, in Chapter Eight with contemporary times.

Chapter Seven

Cynicism in the Eighteenth Century

The modern Enlightenment period ushered in by the Scientific Revolution caused momentous cultural and political conflicts. Challenges to religious authority, to the aristocracy, and to economies provided positive opportunities to re-evaluate cultural and political norms, but it also caused turmoil. It was the uncertainty of the time that allowed some thinkers to reconsider Cynicism. It is here that we attempt to answer the question posed at the beginning of our study. Why did thinkers in the 18th century turn to Cynicism to find answers to their social problems? How that happened and the consequences for Cynicism are the subjects of this chapter.

The French philosophes led the vanguard of thinkers for change, and in one way or another their focus was on liberty for the individual to make his own decisions concerning his relationship with God, to have a say in his political system, and to be free of interference in how he conducted business ventures. It was the Scientific Revolution that began the rift between medieval ways of life and modern ones. How the new order should be shaped fell on the shoulders of political thinkers, and at the same time it created another change in our conception of Cynicism. As Louise Shea notes,

A study of the history of Cynicism reveals that Sloterdijk's philosophical argument about the perversion of Cynicism does in fact have a historical basis: it is in the eighteenth century, more precisely within the circle of the French philosophes and in the context of debates on what it means to enlighten the world, that cynicism emerges from the vestiges of Cynicism and all but eclipse the ancient philosophical meaning of the term.¹

Shea is referring to the contemporary notion of two forms of Cynicism, with "Cynicism" as an example of it in its true ancient form, and "cynicism" as example of its modern form. However, we really need a third form of cynicism and that would be the degraded type vehemently criticized by Julian. Arguably, Cynicism had degraded significantly from the type espoused by Diogenes and Crates, such that even the Cynicism accepted by modern and contemporary philosophers is debauched. This seriously puts into question conclusions reached about modern culture from the stance of Cynicism without specifying the form one is

¹ Louisa Shea, *The Cynic Enlightenment: Diogenes in the Salon*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1974. 195.

using as a basis of any evaluation. What can be stated, is that at least an awareness of the three forms of Cynicism allows us to be more circumspect in whatever claims one might make on behalf of it. We can put this principle to the test by looking at the views of modern and contemporary critics. Shea for her part has a grasp of the problem as she shows² in the quotation above. She adds to that understanding by describing why Cynicism seemed to strike a nerve with philosophers in the Enlightenment period. She claims that

The Diogenes figures we encounter from D'Alembert to Foucault empower an attitude of revolt and rebellion, but they function above all as the object of complex discussions and negotiations. One key argument of this book [Shea's] is that much of the interest generated by Cynicism in the eighteenth century as in the twentieth derives from internal tensions in the search for an appropriate language in which to communicate social criticism (how much of the Cynic's bite could one and should one, make use of?) and from philosophers' deeply felt need for an ethical basis from which to engage in criticism. The cynics' rejection of abstract theory in favour of a lived philosophy premised on harsh self-discipline held the promise of an intransigent critical attitude, freed, by its orientation toward actions and the everyday, from a disheartening and paralyzing scepticism.³

The full realization that something had gone terribly wrong with philosophy and even with the trust one has with human reason itself was made clear in Diderot's novel *Rameau's Nephew*. Foucault called Rameau a turning point in the history of reflection on Cynicism in the West.⁴ We'll begin with a careful examination of that book and then continue on to Rousseau to flesh out the claims of both Shea and Foucault about the importance of Cynicism.

Rameau's Nephew

It is in Diderot's novel *Rameau's Nephew* where Cynicism is depicted and critiqued as a modern response to societal upheaval in the Enlightenment period. Diderot portrays the character of the Nephew as a person committed to Cynicism, not unlike the ancient, dirty, ragged Cynics who have lost all sense of the purpose of Cynicism and focus instead on ridiculing the populace simply for the sense of power it provides them and the pure pleasure of ridicule.

³ Ibid. xii

⁴ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*. 192

Rameau's Nephew is a story in dialogue form between Diderot (Moi) and the nephew of the famous pianist Jean Philippe Rameau, who was also a pianist and composer. Diderot meets the nephew Rameau in a chance encounter at the Regency Café, a meeting place for accomplished and upcoming chess players. Rameau confides to Diderot that he has just been booted out of the home of his patron who was supporting him. Painting a sad picture of the French aristocracy, Rameau explains the role he played within the family and in the process reveals the plight of the not so rich young men struggling to survive in a class conscious society and the means they use to do so.

Diderot uses the Nephew's Cynicism to express his worries about Enlightenment itself. Could their reliance on individual reason and freedom lead to a loss of freedom and reason instead? Niehues-Probsting thinks it does. He says, "In Rameau's nephew the Enlightenment perceives the nightmare that undermines its moral optimism. The nightmare makes clear that the totally enlightened person who has been freed of all prejudice is not the embodiment of the true ideal of humanity." He says, it reveals "a disillusioned, callous, and filthy cynic à la Rameau."⁵ It could also, he suggests, signify the failure of the Enlightenment itself as a solution to the oppressing political and cultural conditions of the time.

If we investigate *Rameau's Nephew* carefully, there is much to discover about modern cynicism and what it reveals about Diogenes. Diderot has painted a complex picture for us in his depiction of Rameau. Rameau is reduced to having nothing because of the lifestyle he has adopted. Reduced to living in a barn with dirty clothes and straw in his hair he is a sorry picture as Diderot takes up a discussion with Rameau. Right from the beginning it's clear that Rameau's predicament has taught him nothing. There is no acceptance of his fate as there was with Diogenes and settling down in the tub. So just the comparison itself allows us to witness an alternative to Cynicism while at the same time accepting some Cynic ideas.

Diderot questions Rameau as to how he got to the state he was in. Rameau portrays his life as a sycophant – a flatterer and source of amusement for rich patrons, in short an entertaining and amusing buffoon who amuses those who are willing to support him concluding with the idea that "there are some things one can't stoop to do."⁶ There was a limit to how far one would debase oneself so we see he has at least some scruples.

⁵ Niehues-Probsting."Modern Cynicism." 353

⁶ Diderot, Denis. *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works* translated by Jacques Barzun and Ralph Brown. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001. 21.

Let's consider a comparison with Diogenes. While it is clear that Rameau has little to no integrity and moral fibre, just the opposite is true of Diogenes. Diogenes cajoled rich people for money; he took food meant for religious purposes to eat for himself; and he avowed himself of the favours of a courtesan. So how can we think of him more favourably than Rameau?

One of the principles which guided Diogenes and which seems clear in reading the anecdotes is that if one is going to be a buffoon, then one needs a higher purpose for doing so. Diogenes' purpose is first, like Rameau, to survive, and secondly, unlike Rameau, to be a voice of moral conscience. Rameau does have a conscience, but at the end of the book, Diderot shows how nature can be thoroughly debauched by material excess in spite of a good conscience. In assessing what to do next after being sent away, the passage begins with Rameau's conscience speaking:

To go and humiliate myself before the little bitch, to cry mercy at the fact of a second-rate actress who is invariably hissed off stage.⁷

Rameau responds to his own remark,

Rameau, you will do no such thing. A certain dignity attaches to the nature of man that nothing must destroy. It stirs at the most unexpected times, yes, unexpected, for there are days when I could be as vile as required without costing me anything. On those days, for a penny I'd kiss the arse of the little Hus.⁸

Diderot then asks him, why not be poor then if a certain moral sense still stirs within him? Rameau says,

It's very hard to be poor while there are so many wealthy fools to sponge on. And then, contempt for oneself-that's unbearable.⁹

So why resort to it, asks Diderot? Rameau answers with the most Cynical comment of the age;

There's nothing degrading in acting like everybody else.¹⁰

Rameau thus sums up Diderot's assessment of his time. This view is not Diogenes' Cynicism, but it certainly sounds like something he would worry over if the types of behaviour he

⁷ Ibid. 21

⁸ Ibid. 2

⁹ Ibid. 21-2.

¹⁰ Ibid. 31

chastised caught hold and became accepted standards of behaviour. Diderot, as noted above, did conclude that the hopes and dreams of the Enlightenment ideal may have failed, and given that, what then is left for us?

Think of the passages mentioned in Chapter Five of the passages where Diogenes shamed the powerful hypocrites and the wealthy class. In the 18th century CE, these types of people were ubiquitous. We see Diderot's understanding of this too. He purposely depicts Rameau as the worst sort of cynic, but sometimes sympathetically as a way for an individual without means to survive in a world of privilege. He survives through trickery and deceit. He uses the tool of jester and buffoon as a way to be critical of the elite at the same time he preys on them, and Rameau survives, handsomely if he can overcome his scruples, and unless he makes a mistake.

As depicted in the book, Rameau does make a mistake. He made a seemingly innocent comment about the seating of the vicar at the table, which amused the vicar, but did not amuse the Lord of the house. Rameau is ordered to leave. So the mask of buffoon is as good as the good humour of the person one is trying to deceive. This is a very dangerous ploy, and one must be lucky enough to for it to be successful. Rameau was not lucky in this case, neither were the fates kind when he demeaned himself offering an apology. It did no good. He was ordered out simply because of the sour mood of the master of the house.¹¹

Now think of Diogenes. He was not soft; he took care through training to be physically strong and fit. If one has to live in a stable or tub, he might have said so be it, if one has prepared oneself to be able to do so, and Diogenes faced more threats than a simple loss of abode. He was physically attacked on several occasions. In one case, he fought back and won.¹² In another, he rallied on another day to publicly shame the attackers by walking around with a sign stating who did it.¹³

Rameau's conclusion is different. He blames everything on his nature. He claims to be vile,¹⁴ and then reflects on what he is. He says,

It must be that virtue requires a special sense that I lack, a fiber that has not been granted me. My fiber is loose, one can pluck it forever without its yielding a note. Or

¹¹ Ibid. 51

¹² DL VI 42

¹³ Diderot. *Rameau's Nephew*. 33.

¹⁴ Ibid. 31

else I have spent my life with good musicians and bad people, whence my ear has become very sharp and my heart quite deaf. And then there is heredity. My father's blood is the same as my uncle's; my blood is like my father's. The paternal molecule was hard and obtuse, and like a primordial germ it has affected all the rest.¹⁵

Diderot then asks Rameau about his love for his son, and Rameau replies that he loves him very much. He asks Rameau whether he should make an effort to raise his son well. Rameau thinks such an effort would come to nothing. He says,

I'll try it, but I think in vain. If he is fated to become a good man, trying won't do any harm. But if the [paternal] molecule decides that he shall be a ne'er-do-well like his father, the pains I might take to make him an honest man would be very dangerous. Education would work continually at cross-purposes with the natural bent of the molecule, and he would be pulled by two contrary forces that would make him go askew down the path of life—like so many others I see who are equally clumsy in good and evil deeds. They are the ones we call "types" of all descriptions the worst, because it indicates mediocrity and the lowest degree of contempt. A great scoundrel is a great scoundrel; he isn't a "type."¹⁶

This is obviously Diderot's philosophy of human nature depicted here, and as such it is a depressing one—giving no hope for moral development or progress if true.

As an alternative, let's suggest that Diogenes' understanding of human nature and culture is deeper than that of Rameau. Properly developed, a person can take care of himself. Left to idleness and foppery one has not done justice to the human body. Given his depiction of Rameau, Diderot necessarily had to leave Rameau in a state of despair. Diderot's conclusion was to watch Rameau saunter off to the opera.

Diderot himself faced more of a threat to his existence than did Rameau. His novel about Rameau was written at a later stage in his literary life. It is the work of a wary and mature philosopher who after spending three months of his life in prison for writing some perceived heretical works,¹⁷ took the more cautious route after his release and wrote among other things, novels. His reasoning, he said is that "One must often dress wisdom up as foolishness in order to procure it an entrée." Adding also, "I much prefer to have people say, 'All the

¹⁵ Ibid. 71

¹⁶ Ibid. 72

¹⁷ Diderot's work *Philosophical Thoughts* (1746) was seized and burned as was his *La Promenade du Sceptique*, but it was his *Letter on the Blind* (1749) that caused his arrest. See the Introduction by David Adams to Denis Diderot. *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works*. Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999.

same, it isn't so crazy an idea as you might think', than 'Pay attention to these words of wisdom I am about to utter.'"¹⁸

In this way, Diderot tackles two of the main problems for the writer of literature in the Enlightenment period—censorship and readability. He faced the censorship problem in his early years while he evaluated the effects of the Catholic Church and French culture on individual freedom of the individual.

Diderot recognized, as have many thinkers before him, that the type of writing one does, especially if it is liberally punctuated with humour, can allow a degree of safety to the truth teller and a means to allow one's message to hit home. He would have recognized many authors who used this device like Erasmus, Montaigne, and Shakespeare, but one we know he admired was the work of Christoph Martin Wieland and the French translation of his work, *Socrate en delire, ou Dialogues de Diogene de Sinope* (1772).¹⁹ Wieland was a serious thinker, with no taste for humorous literature, so his importance lies in the fact that his works concern Rousseau (a close friend of Diderot) and Rousseau's Cynicism. It is Weiland who initially makes the connection between Rousseau's thinking and that of Diogenes, and with the popularity of Weiland's book, the acceptance of Rousseau as a Cynic spread and was accepted by many philosophers in that period, even by Kant who called Rousseau, "the subtle Diogenes".²⁰ Was this label justified? It seems to be and in the person of Rousseau Cynicism, not cynicism, takes its first real step back to its origin with Diogenes.

Rousseau and Cynicism

Rousseau never called himself a Cynic, nor did he consider himself to be one, nevertheless, the modern turn toward Cynicism comes from the influence of his life and his works, specifically his book *Emile* which profoundly affected philosophers and the general public alike. Famously Kant was so taken with the work that he omitted his usual afternoon walk to continue reading it. It is in his lectures to students on Cynicism that he refers to Rousseau as a "subtle" Diogenes.

¹⁸ Ralph H. Bowen. "Introduction to *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works* by Denis Diderot. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2001. xi.

¹⁹ Christoph Martin Wieland. *Werke*. Berlin 1879.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant. *Lectures on Ethics*. Colin's Notes. Edited by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 45.

The word “subtle” is used by Kant in one of his lectures on ancient thought and the passage is found in a series of notes taken by students in those lectures. The complete passage as recorded by Collins is this:

Rousseau, that subtle Diogenes, also maintained that our will would be good by nature, only we always become corrupted; that nature would have provided us with everything, if we did not create new needs. He also argues that the education of children should be merely negative.²¹

But it is C. Lotz who captures the value of Cynicism to Rousseau. He claims that “Rousseau after his ancient cynic predecessors, is the first modern thinker who shifts the focus back to the distinction between nature and culture.”²² He credits Rousseau with something even more important, saying

Rousseau is the first one (after the ancient Cynical Movement) who diagnosed a deep alienation and estrangement within the process of human civilization, which according to him, is visible in the form of a general alienation of man from his own origin, which is nature.²³

Rousseau’s attitude toward nature is not the complete adoption of all things natural that characterizes Diogenes’ thinking. In his *Emile*, Rousseau provides a measured view, but negative as Kant suggests. In Book I, Rousseau reflects on a baby’s nature and the best practices to help the infant develop. He suggests that what the baby cannot be anything other than instinctual and so to thwart or try to alter his actions is harmful. He complains that babies should not be swaddled, for instance, since they naturally swing their arms and legs about. He says too that babies should not be overprotected since that will only weaken them. He advises parents to “Exercise them, then against the attacks they will one day have to bear. Harden their bodies against the intemperance of season, climates, elements: against hunger, thirst, fatigue.”²⁴

If we begin in a natural state and our bodies react in a natural and appropriate way, things will go right for us. Rousseau concludes that we deviate from the natural way when parents

²¹ Ibid 45

²² C. Lotz. “Nature to Culture? Diogenes and Philosophical Anthropology”. *Human Studies*. Vol. 28. No. 1 (2005). 44.

²³ Ibid. 44

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Emile*. Translated by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979. 60.

introduce societal preferences to their children. It is this striving to conform to societal goals that brings us unhappiness, so the wise parent prevents a child from knowing too much about the outside world. Rousseau claims:

It is thus that nature, which does everything for the best, constituted him in the beginning. It gives him with immediacy only the desires necessary to his preservation and the faculties sufficient to satisfy them. It put all the others, as it were in reserve in the depth of his soul to be developed there when needed. Only in his original state are power and desire in equilibrium and man is not unhappy. As soon as his potential faculties are put in action, imagination, the most active of all is awakened and outstrips them. It is imagination which extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them. But the object which at first appeared to be at hand flees more quickly than it can be pursued. When one believes that one has reached it, it transforms and reveals itself in the distance ahead of us. No longer seeing the country we have already crossed, we count it for nothing; what remains to cross ceaselessly grows, and extends. Thus one exhausts oneself without getting to the end, and the more one gains on enjoyment, the further happiness gets from us.²⁵

For Rousseau the culprit which sends us off in the wrong direction is civilization. Kant believed he was mistaken about that—saying he was “much in error” over this. Instead Kant argues that civilization and especially science has been of tremendous benefit to mankind. He says: “No genuine scholar would make so arrogant a claim . . . The spread of the sciences ennoble man, and the love of knowledge eliminates many a low inclination.”²⁶

In addition, Kant says that scientists have an obligation to be ethical in their work because “He who lacks it treats the products of his understanding as a merchant does his wares; he will hide the weak points and deceive the public.”²⁷

Unfortunately, Rousseau claims scientists have become merchants of sorts, and so have philosophers and historians. In *Emile* Rousseau pretends to be instructing the young man in various stages of his life, beginning with infancy. As he does so, he reveals objections to the way others have been taught especially by philosophers. He claims:

It is not philosophers who know the most about men, they only view them through the preconceived ideas of philosophy, and I know no one so prejudiced as philosophers. A savage would judge us more sanely. The philosopher is aware of his own vices, he is

²⁵ Ibid. 80-81

²⁶ *Kant's Lectures*. Collins' notes 215.

²⁷ Ibid. 215

indignant at ours, and he says to himself, "We are all bad alike," the savage beholds us unmoved and says, "You are mad." He is right, for no one does evil for evil's sake.²⁸

Rousseau worries about history too and the influence philosophy has had on it. He complains that philosophy has taught us to see historical information insofar as it conforms to a pattern or system to which the facts conform or do not conform. He says, "she only portrays the statesman when he is prepared to be seen, she does not follow him to his home, to his study, among his family and his friends, she only shows him in state; it is his clothes rather than himself that she describes."²⁹

Kant, the anthropologist, does not find Rousseau's argument convincing. After an initial explanation of the stages of human civilization, Kant says, "Because the civilized state is contrary to nature, but the state of savagery is not, Rousseau holds that civilization is out of keeping with the ends of nature; but in fact it complies with them."³⁰ Kant argues that since our natural end is procreation, if the state of nature were to be preferred, then in that state we would multiply successfully. But that is not the case, he says. "For many reasons, the human race multiplies very poorly in the savage state."³¹ Given the world population today, it would be difficult to disagree with him.

In one last reference to Rousseau in his lectures, Kant turns to the issue of virtue. He mentions that the Cynic path was a short cut to virtue. His argument begins by explaining that morality can come to us naturally or supernaturally. Since, he says, "Diogenes believed in the simplicity of nature," then morality does not need to be learnt. Kant adds that for Diogenes propriety needs must be rejected because it would be an "obstacle to virtue."³² Insofar as we have pieced together the Cynic message thus far, we are in agreement with Kant on this. He goes further though by stating that "Rousseau has tried to bring it [our innocence] back again, but in vain."³³

In the case of Diogenes, Kant believed he avoided the issue of corruption due to societal pressures and norms. Since Diogenes lived so simply as to avoid unnatural desires, Diogenes was good "without virtue" because he had "no concept of evil." That is the Cynic short cut.

²⁸ Rousseau. *Emile*. 445

²⁹ Ibid 445

³⁰ *Kant's Lectures*. Collins' notes 218.

³¹ Ibid. 218

³² *Kant's Lectures*. Mrongovius' notes. 228.

³³ Ibid. 228

For the average person “a person’s desires keep on growing, and without realizing it he is out of his innocence.”³⁴

Criticism of Rousseau’s approach to education uses much stronger language than Kant’s “vain.” In his introduction to *Emile*, Allan Bloom admits that for some Rousseau’s programme of education might appear to be ridiculous because it proposes a system of education which is “manifestly impossible for most men and virtually impossible for any man.” Bloom attempts to defend the book by arguing that in fact Rousseau was not writing a prescription for the average parent, he was writing a book solely for philosophers to stimulate thought on the subject.³⁵

In writing about a child’s early education, Rousseau believed that knowledge of the outside world should be kept from the child so that it would not influence him unduly. What Bloom does not entertain, nor Rousseau, is that children are curious. They ask lots of questions especially about the world around them. What should a parent do in these cases? Does one pacify children with generalities? Does one hide the truth? Should a parent deceive? To educate the young in the way Rousseau suggests is manipulative and denies the curious nature which Rousseau is at such pains to develop. It seems Kant is, in spite of his admiration for Rousseau, the better assessor of Rousseau’s arguments.

One reason why Kant called Rousseau the subtle Diogenes is perhaps because of the subtle change Rousseau had on his own thinking. He admits his indebtedness to Rousseau in his book, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.³⁶ Kant remarks:

I am myself by inclination an investigator. I feel a complete thirst for knowledge and an eager unrest to go further in it as well as satisfaction of every acquisition. There was a time when I believed that this alone could constitute the honour of mankind, and I had contempt for the rabble who know nothing. Rousseau brought me around. This blinding superiority disappeared. I learned to honour human beings, and I would find myself far more useless than the common labourer if I did not believe that this consideration could import to all others a value in establishing the rights of humanity.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid. 228. For more information concerning the relationship between Kant and Rousseau in connexion with Cynicism, see David Forman. “Kant’s Moderate Cynicism and the Harmony between Virtue and Worldly Happiness.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 54. No. 1. 2016.. 75-109.

³⁵ Allan Bloom. Introduction to *Emile*. 28.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Translated by John. T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant. “Selections from the Notes *On the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*” in *Notes and Fragments*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 7.

If we're looking for an indication of the influence Rousseau had on Kant and on European thought in general in the 18th century, we need look no further. Honouring the human person is, as we have seen with Rameau, what European culture had lost with its stratified society. In contrast it's true that respect for humanity is deeply embedded in Rousseau's philosophy. It shows in his writings, and in his *Confessions* where he admits he did not fit in socially which led to his estrangement from society in Geneva, his birthplace, and from Parisian society, his adopted home. Estrangement or exile was also a key element in the development of Diogenes philosophy and it's clear that exile plays an important role in Rousseau's thinking too.

There is a good deal of commentary on Rousseau's break with the *philosophes* and the *Encyclopaedia* project. In his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, he considers his life and all that demands behind. He recounts:

I carried out my plan without difficulty, and although my fortune at that time seemed to be on the point of changing permanently for the better, it was not only without regret but with real pleasure that I gave up these prospects. In shaking off all these lures and vain hopes, I abandoned myself entirely to the nonchalant tranquillity which has always been my dominant taste and most lasting inclination I quitted the world and its vanities, I gave up all finery—no more sword, no more watch, no more white stockings, gilt trimming and powder, but a simple wig and a good solid coat of broadcloth—and what is more than all the rest, I uprooted from my heart the greed and covetousness which give value to all I was leaving behind. I gave up the position I was then occupying a position for which I was quite unsuited and set myself to copying music at so much a page, an occupation for which I had always had a distinct liking.³⁸

Rousseau doesn't go to the lengths we see in Diogenes' life in his separation from society, nevertheless, Rousseau's was a clear breach. He gives part of the reason here, but in addition to that because of his stance on religion taken in *Emile*, he was exiled by many French cities and was almost killed by a mob in the territories of Berne.³⁹ As a consequence, he was forced into a "cosmopolitan" Cynic life free of political or social connections. He wandered about settling down wherever he and his wife Therese could. Thomas Bentley caught up with him and describes how they were living:

³⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Translated by Peter France. London: Penguin Books, 2004. 51.

³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Confessions*. Rousseau had a life long relationship with Therese Levasseur with whom he had 5 children, all of whom were taken to an orphanage at their birth (17). After the publication of *Emile* Rousseau and Therese were in constant danger. His description of all of the intrigues begins in section "1762."

Two little beds with covers of blue and white striped cotton like the wall hangings, a chest of drawers, a table and a few chairs were all his furniture. On the walls were a plan of the forest and park of Montmorency, where he had lived, and an engraving of the King of England, his former benefactor. His wife was sewing linen, a canary sang in a cage hanging from the ceiling, sparrows came and ate bread-crumbs at his windows which opened on the street, and on the window-sill of the antechamber stood boxes and pots full of the sort of plants that Nature is pleased to sow.⁴⁰

After his estrangement from society, Rousseau's mental health deteriorated, and it was his love of botany that entertained him in his wanderings. He became a notable botanist and it was his preoccupation with nature that helped him restore his health. As he visits one aspect of his life after another, he repeatedly comes back to a central theme in his life and that is his need for independence to accommodate his nature. He says, "As long as I act freely I am good and do nothing but good, but as soon as I feel the yoke of necessity of human society I become rebellious."⁴¹

Rousseau explains that people are too willing to "endure servitude" in "doing what they don't want to do."⁴² He claims it's not that freedom is allowing a person to do what he wants to do; "it is never doing what he does not want to do."⁴³ He adds that people have been scandalized by his attitude about this because he is not ambitious in the way most people are.⁴⁴ But he wonders how could he be wrong about this?

These are the thoughts of the old Rousseau, in his 60's, reflecting on the past. In his prime his ideas about freedom were more rebellious. The first line in his *Social Contract*, says it all: "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains."⁴⁵ He goes on to show that our main goal in life is to be free; to retain what our nature requires. There is much to be said about all of this, but for our study, our interest is in his belief that like Diogenes happiness is not the goal of mankind. Rather, it is our moral responsibility to be free. He claims:

To renounce one's liberty is to renounce one's essence as a human being, the rights and also the duties of humanity. For the person who renounces everything there is no

⁴⁰ Ibid. 10

⁴¹ Ibid. 103

⁴² Ibid. 104

⁴³ Ibid. 104

⁴⁴ Ibid. 104.

⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*. Edited by Susan Dunn. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 156.

possible compensation. Such a renunciation is incompatible with human nature, for to take away all freedom from one's will is to take away all morality from one's actions. In short, a convention which stipulates absolute authority on the one side and unlimited obedience on the other is meaningless and contradictory.⁴⁶

Spoken like a true Cynic.

In his early writings Rousseau displays his Cynic leanings. For example, in his *First Discourse* he discusses 18th century culture. It won first prize in a competition sponsored by the Academe de Dijon, and well it should for no finer critique of modern culture had been written to that time, nor after. He has much to say in the *Discourse*, but one passage stands out:

The mind has its needs, as does the body. The needs of the body constitute the foundation of society, those of the mind its ornamentation. While government and law provide for the security and well-being of people in their collective life, the sciences, letters, and arts—less despotic though perhaps more powerful—wrap garlands of flowers around the chains that weigh people down. They stifle the sense of freedom that people once had and for which they sensed that they were born, making them love their own servitude, and turning them into what is called a civilized people. Need erected thrones: the sciences and arts consolidated them. Let the Powers that rule the earth cherish all talents and protect those who practice them. Civilized peoples, cultivate your talents! Happy slaves, you are indebted to them for the delicate, exquisite tastes you are so proud of, that sweetness of disposition and urbanity of manners that make social relations so easy and pleasant—in short, the appearance of all the virtues without the possession of a single one.⁴⁷

Shortly after this passage, Rousseau relates the problems in France with situations in the ancient world within Greece and Rome. Like Diogenes,⁴⁸ Rousseau valued Sparta over Athens for its collective restraint in the face of the lure of increased trade and the wealth that it brought with it. He explains the situation this way:

Athens became the home of civility and good taste, the land of orators and philosophers. The elegance of her buildings equalled that of her language: wherever one looked one saw marble and canvas brought to life by the hands of the most skilled masters. It is Athens that gave us those astonishing works that will serve as models for every corrupt epoch. The picture of Lacedaemon is less dazzling. *There*, the neighboring nations used to say, *men are born virtuous, the very air they breathe seems to inspire them with virtue*. But nothing remains of them except the memory of

⁴⁶ Ibid. 159

⁴⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The First Discourse* edited by Susan Dunn. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 49.

⁴⁸ Diogenes in answer to a fellow traveller. DL VI 59

their heroic deeds. But should we value such monuments less than the curious statues that Athens passed down to us?⁴⁹

Thus within only a few pages of the *Discourse* we find ourselves face to face with Diogenes themes of freedom, corruption of culture, and a preference for minimal life style. One last passage confirms a comparison with Cynicism, and follows the other passages:

The sacred names of freedom, disinterestedness, and obedience to the law were displaced by those of Epicurus, Zeno, and Arcesilaus. *Since scholars have begun to appear among us, their own philosophers used to say, good people have been eclipsed. Until then, the Romans had been happy to cultivate virtue: all was lost when they began to study it.*⁵⁰

With these three passages we find familiar Cynic themes, and we can well imagine Diogenes saying much the same, not only in his own time, but also if he were to be transported into modern times. It is the final passage with its emphasis on virtue and disdain of overreaching reason that sounds so familiar to the ear of a Cynic. Rousseau, however, was not a classics scholar who studied ancient philosophies. He was an apprenticed engraver who was musically talented and who took on menial jobs in his youth and who after winning a prize for his *First Discourse*, sought to live within elite society, faltering there and acting more like Rameau's nephew than as a free thinking philosopher.⁵¹

The path Rousseau chose was not an easy one. At first a member of the circle of the philosophes, his different view caused a breach, which was bitter and irreparable. The breach occurred because Rousseau found he simply couldn't stand society. His torment seemed to be a social one – an awkwardness in the company of others. At first he reacted by striking out at those within his circle like the philosophes, especially Diderot and Voltaire. Later, he sought relief by escaping to the country and his Hermitage. To Diderot his behaviour mimicked Cynicism. He had good reason to think so. Rousseau at one time showed up in Cynic-like fashion unshaven and dishevelled at an event with the King in attendance.⁵² Rousseau noticed the likeness himself. He said he didn't mimic Cynics to be a Cynic, rather

⁴⁹ Ibid. 53

⁵⁰ Ibid .54

⁵¹ Susan Dunn in her introduction to *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*. 36-37.

⁵² Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *Confessions*. New York: Dover Publications, 2014. 379..

Being unable to overcome my foolish and disagreeable shyness, which proceeded from the fear of offending against the rules of polite society, I resolved, in order to give myself courage, to trample them underfoot. Shame made me cynical and sarcastic.⁵³

Being true to his own nature, as we argued in the previous chapter, would have been Diogenes' prescription for his life as well. In that sense, Rousseau adheres to the Diogenes' Cynicism. There should be no norm, not even for Cynicism. The only rule is to discover one's own nature and follow it.

For all the learned studies about mankind from the time of Diogenes to the time of Kant and Rousseau, it took this long for thinkers to again seriously consider using human nature as a basis for ethical decision-making, and it was Rousseau who did so. Rousseau's solution to the problem of conventional norms is not Diogenes' solution, but at least with these two modern philosophers, we have returned to the solid ground of the ancient past from which to clearly assess the situation anew. From Rousseau we learn that there is no deceiving ourselves that culture can provide the best norms for a society, nor should we be lulled into thinking that our nature is angelic either.

Given the reaction to Rousseau's political views, we find that there are problems with human nature as well. We see Rousseau's philosophy go terribly wrong in his book, *The Social Contract*. In many ways, his political ideal is much like the totalitarian form of government recommended by Plato. Both rely on a supreme figure to guide the citizens to a better life; for Plato it was the philosopher/king, and for Rousseau, it is the Legislator. Both could make laws, but because of their supposed superior character were not obliged to follow them. Plato attempted to implement his political ideal in Syracuse, Sicily, then under the rule of Dionysius I and II. His ideal to restrict citizenship to the upper educated class and his ideal of a kingly philosopher caused rebellion and discord in the Greek colony to such an extent that it faltered and subjected its people to wars of rebellion for generations to come. Only under first Alexander and then, Roman rule, did it gain stability.

Rousseau's political ideal guided by a General Will or imposed consensus of the governed precipitated the French Revolution and the imposition of the governance of Robespierre as the Legislator. In other words, it resulted in the French terrors which ended only with the rule of Napoleon.

⁵³Heinrich Niehues-Probsting, "Modern Cynicism. 342.

The faltering of France on such a grand scale is sobering as was the fall of Syracuse partly because of the interference of Plato. It reminds us of what is at stake in our attempts to live peacefully together and of how hard it seems to be able to do so. In Kant and Rousseau there are insights into the problem of nature versus convention, but there is no overall solution. Nevertheless, it's difficult not to harken back to Diogenes with all of his admonitions and solution with, shall we say, some renewed respect. He appears, impossibly as it may seem, to be holding his own in this debate as we compare him to others. Let's see now whether he can hold his own with a self-proclaimed Cynic of modern times, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche and Cynicism

Nietzsche knew his Diogenes. As a philologist he studied ancient languages and texts, so it is not the case with him that he would have been misled by pseudo-Cynic doctrines. As mentioned in Chapter Two, he wrote a monograph on Diogenes Laertius, so he was also well aware of the problem of source material. Given his credentials and brilliance, we can hope for great things from him, and in my view he does not disappoint. Writing in his own literary manner, stylistically formed from studying ancient methods of writing, we realize we are dealing with a different form of analysis than what we have dealt with above. In a wonderful passage in Nietzsche's journal of 1874, he meditates on that first night Diogenes spent in Athens. Nietzsche says:

I am thinking of the first night of Diogenes: all ancient philosophy was aimed at simplicity. . . In this respect the few philosophical vegetarians have accomplished more for humanity than all the more recent philosophies taken together; and as long as philosophers do not muster the courage to advocate a lifestyle structured in an entirely indifferent way and demonstrate it by their own example, they will come to nothing.⁶⁰

This is Diogenes all over and at least with this the affinity between the two philosophers is affirmed. In fact Nietzsche did live a minimal lifestyle, primarily because his illness prevented him from working and he was forced to seek relief from his constant nausea and headaches,

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. Autumn-Winter 1873-74 31 [1] 34.

which plagued him for all of his adult life. However, in addition to that, he also tried to emulate Diogenes.

Nietzsche's lifestyle was different, but not dramatically so. Like Diogenes he suffered a significant loss. Because of his illness he was forced to give up his teaching post and because his headaches and nausea were eased by certain climates, he wandered from season to season throughout Europe to keep his suffering bearable. Because of a small inheritance Nietzsche was minimally comfortable, and it afforded him the ability to live the life of a scholarly writer critiquing society yet not really a part of it. He made many comments about Cynicism and about living simply. He said, "Indeed, a minimum of life, an unchaining from all coarser desire, and independence in the middle of all kinds of outer nuisance, together with the pride in being able to live in the midst of all this disfavour: a bit of Cynicism perhaps, a bit of 'tub'".⁶¹

There is so much literature devoted to many of the aspects of Diogenes' life, but only Nietzsche takes the time to think about that very pivotal event of settling down in the tub. At that moment, Diogenes is captivated by the antics of a mouse, who also has no home and nothing to call his own. He scrounges for food and shelter, living freely in that way, with no set course or possessions, and yet survives. In the literature much is made of that mouse. Diogenes decided to follow the example of the mouse and live naturally. Maybe only a very desperate or crazed individual would consider such a decision. Certainly Plato thought him mad and no doubt many others as.

Nietzsche didn't think so. He admired him and even modelled his parable of the Madman after him, lamp and all. The Madman descends from the mountain with the news that "God is dead," but the news is met with silence and incomprehension. So he drops the lamp into a thousand pieces and the lamp is extinguished.⁶² In citing this passage, Niehues-Probsting claims that Nietzsche proclaims the search for God is pointless, so the fundamental belief of the time had no substance. Following in the footsteps of the Enlightenment, the attack against religion not only continues, but in Nietzsche's view is declared over.

Initially one underlying idea that structures his thought has to do with nature. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he provides his developed thought on this:

So you want to live "according to nature"? You noble Stoics, how deceitful your

⁶¹ Ibid. 41

⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science* translated by Walter Kaufman. New York: Vintage Books, 1974. 181-82.

words are! Imagine what a creature nature is, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purpose or regard, without mercy or justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; think of indifference itself as a force—how could you live according to this indifference? Living— isn't that precisely wanting something other than this nature? Doesn't life consist of appraising, preferring, being unjust, being delimited, wanting to be different means to "live according to life"—how could you not do that? Why make a principle out of what you yourselves are and must be?⁷⁰

Continuing further, Nietzsche assessed what we are doing when we try to analyse nature. He claims that it isn't the case that we look to nature and find universal truths there. He says it is just the other way around. "You pretend," he says, "to rapturously read the canon of your law in nature, but you really want the opposite, you strange actors and deceivers! Your pride wants to impose your ideals and your morality onto nature and make them natural."⁷¹ Nietzsche's answer is that there is no set human nature. There is no point in trying to pinpoint an essential nature. Our focus should be on what we can work to become. It is for this reason that we need to preoccupy ourselves with culture and what it can and cannot do for us.

Does all of this information entail that Nietzsche is a Cynic? He thought it did. He makes many claims about being not only a Cynic, but one who adopts the Cynic-like pose of the buffoon. His sister Elizabeth reported that "there is no doubt that my brother tried a little bit to imitate Diogenes in the tub."⁷³ In the end Nietzsche came to value the importance of the Cynic. He says this very well,

Cynicism is the only form in which common souls come close to honesty; and the higher man must prick up his ears at every Cynicism—whether coarse or refined—and congratulate himself whenever a buffoon without shame or a scientific satyr speaks out in his presence.⁷⁴

Nietzsche's affinity goes much further than this. He promotes ideas that coincide with the Cynic message, especially as to conventional society and freedom. As is well known when it

⁷⁰ *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* edited by Walter Kaufman. New York: Random House, 2000. 205.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 205.

⁷³ Niehues-Probsting. "Modern Cynicism." 359.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 360

comes to conventional beliefs, he was, as he says, the great “destroyer”.⁷⁵ Nietzsche criticized societal norms for a reason. He believed that, as Kaufmann says,

Men are afraid of social retaliation and do not dare to be their own unique selves. It is for this reason that the State becomes the devil of Nietzsche’s ethics: it intimidates man into conformity and thus tempts and coerces him to betray his proper destiny. . . . Man’s fundamental problem is to achieve true ‘existence’ instead of letting his life be no more than just another accident.⁷⁶

There is more to the worry over conformity than this. The ideas humanity has been forced to conform to, in Nietzsche’s view, are corrupt and they have been corrupt since the time of Socrates and Plato with their disregard for the nobility of Greek tradition and with their assertion of the use of dialectic and reason over empirical sense data. Agreeing with Kant and Rousseau, Nietzsche shows how reason can mislead, and going further than Kant and Rousseau, elevates sensory experience and human nature in the process.

With Socrates, Greek taste changes in favour of dialectics. What really happened there? Above all, a *noble* taste is thus vanquished; with dialectics the plebs come to the top. Before Socrates, dialectic manners were repudiated in good society; They were considered bad manners, they were compromising. The young were warned against them. Furthermore, all such presentations of one’s reasons were distrusted. Honest things, like honest men, do not carry their reason in their hands like that.⁷⁷

Agreeing now with a concern over the trustworthiness of reason as with Kant and Rousseau, Nietzsche explains why it is a problem, zeroing in on Socrates and his use of irony in the process. Nietzsche continues,

Is the irony of Socrates an expression of revolt? Of plebeian *ressentiment*? Does he, as one oppressed, enjoy his own ferocity in the knife-thrusts of his syllogisms? Does he *avenge* himself on the noble people whom he fascinates? As a dialectician, one holds a merciless tool in one’s hand; one can become a tyrant by means of it; one compromises those one conquers. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to prove that he is no idiot; he makes one furious and helpless at the same time. The dialectician renders the intellect of his opponent powerless.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *The Portable Nietzsche. Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann. London: Penguin Books, 1954. 180.

⁷⁶ Kaufmann 158

⁷⁷ Nietzsche. “Twilight of the Idols.” 475-6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 476

This is the famous Socratic irony as mentioned in Chapter Three, so criticized in his own time, brought into modernity with a vengeance. As the ancients claimed, it is unworthy of us to skewer our opponents, to care more about winning the round than respecting the opponent. What is fascinating too in this discussion is Nietzsche's use of satire to draw out the discussion. It's a remarkable replay of the methods of Socrates versus Diogenes brought into our time, a breath-taking performance on Nietzsche's part when one knows how to read it in this way.

Nietzsche continues to show the history of the decadence Socrates and Plato brought into the world. With the old traditions faltering in the face of the Sophistic challenge, Nietzsche agrees that the Athenians faced a tremendous ideological challenge, but in their minds he says they saw the anarchy of a degenerate culture or the salvation of Socrates. In their haste, they chose Socrates and therefore Plato, Aristotle, and then Stoic line of thought.

It would have been better if the Athenians had hesitated, says Nietzsche, because of what the limitations of dialectical thought have wrought on mankind. "When one finds it necessary to turn *reason* into a tyrant, as Socrates did," says Nietzsche, "the danger cannot be slight that something else will play the tyrant."⁷⁹ He continues,

The fanaticism with which all Greek reflections throws itself upon rationality betrays a desperate situation; there was danger, there was but one choice: either to perish or—to be *absurdly* rational. The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato on is pathologically conditioned; so is their esteem of dialectics. Reason-virtue-happiness, that means merely that one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark appetites with a permanent daylight—the daylight of reason. One must be clever, clear bright at any price; any concession to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads downward.⁸⁰

The damage Socrates and Plato did in the end was to deny us the ability to trust our senses, and to deny the inclinations and impulses that derive from our interaction with the sensory world. This is precisely the problem taken up by Rousseau and the Philosophes which led to the anxiety created in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and which caused a renewed interest in Cynicism. With what Nietzsche has told us here, we can more readily see why Cynicism might be seen as an alternative path to philosophy and also to life—if for no other reason than that Diogenes rejected Plato's rationalism and denigration of sensory experience.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 478

⁸⁰ Ibid. 478

Given all of this Nietzsche's first task, then, is to destroy conventional rational views "with a hammer".⁸¹ Plato's idea of a transcendent world, was in Nietzsche's view, the precursor of that view in Christianity and with all of the falsehood of Plato's view transferred then to the Christian acceptance of it. In his mind, Plato's mistake has cost Western culture dearly, and left us bereft of how to proceed now that God is dead—the transcendent world is a Platonic invention.

These ideas were not new to the thinkers of Enlightenment era. The Enlightenment minds thanks to input from ancient sources of information during the Renaissance and to the ideas put forward during the Scientific Revolution, doomed the Christian ideology and culture long before someone like Nietzsche could safely put the facts altogether. What the Stoic/Christian culture did was to buy Western culture some time, after all the Pre-Socratic scientists and the Sophists had already begun to deal with a world without a comforting Divine pantheon. The Athenian solution in time came to mean the rationalism of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics.

Now it's our turn to face this situation. In his usual outrageous fashion (but no doubt a parody), Nietzsche claims he is the solution. In *Ecce Homo* he says "I am a *bringer of good tidings* such as there has never been, I know tasks from such a height that any conception of them has hitherto been lacking."⁸² Why is he so important? He says it is because "only after me is it possible to hope again."⁸³

Nietzsche is certainly right that if conventional wisdom based only on a priori reasoning is unsound, then yes, if we remove all of those falsehoods we are on more solid ground to find a better path to what is true, but sorting out truth from fiction at this stage is a tall order as was noted in Chapter Three with Peter Bayle and his criticism of historical facts. We have dealt with this before when we discussed Diogenes' approach to what was true, by his stripping away at conventional ideas that he discovered were false. We need not be a Descartes and discard all information in one fell swoop and then try to find our way back to reality again. We can follow Diogenes' lead in this.

Eliminating bogus ideas from our minds does more than give us hope, as Nietzsche says, because we free ourselves in the process from the tyranny of culture and the past. He claims,

⁸¹ This is Nietzsche's secondary title to "Twilight of the Idols": "How to Philosophize with a Hammer".

⁸² Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo* Why I am a Destiny. 96.

⁸³ Ibid. 97

Freedom, from all kinds of convictions, to be able to see freely, is part of strength. Great passion, the ground and the power of his existence, even more enlightened, even more despotic than he is himself, employs his whole intellect; it makes him unhesitating; it gives him courage even for unholy means; under certain circumstances it does not begrudge him convictions. Conviction as means; many things are attained only by means of a conviction. Great passion uses and uses up convictions, it does not succumb to them—it knows itself sovereign.⁸⁴

Nietzsche gives us no final path to take as we begin a new. We might despair in the enormity of the task before us, but Giles Deleuze in his commentary on Nietzsche claims that we are indebted to him for many positive things.⁸⁵ One idea we might mention here is that in spite of his unwavering gaze at the foolishness of the human condition created by the generational acceptance of wishful ideas that created herds of thoughtless people who were tied into untenable cultural ideals and practices, Nietzsche found a way past the nihilism that threatened his time because of the past. That way was based on his fundamental belief in human change for the better, and on a new kind of human, an Overman, who would have the power to will to truth, not idle fantasies. The first step is to recognize that culture misleads, and the second is to have the strength to move beyond it to something else. Deleuze says it this way: “No one has analysed the concept of nihilism better than he did, he invented the concept. But it is important to see that he defined it in terms of the triumph of reactive forces or the negative will to power.”⁸⁶

What he means here, I think, is that we find our way by rejecting those ideas and practices that are false about us. We cannot know the future; we cannot know exactly what we will become; we can only know what is false now and that must be disregarded if we are to have any future at all. Diogenes certainly had no idea of the kind of future Deleuze or any of us might envision, but he was concerned about the future in terms that he knew. Idleness, greed, and vanity will destroy a culture, and those things must change for the culture to become healthy again and stay healthy. In this sense, Nietzsche is indeed a Cynic, a true Cynic, one in the mould of Diogenes himself, something very different from how we perceive ourselves—something beyond what we are today, Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*.

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* 638.

⁸⁵ Giles Deleuze. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962. xviii.

⁸⁶ Walter Kaufmann. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. 859.

Nietzsche's Overman

Like Hegel, Nietzsche saw that we must trace our steps back to the classical period in Greece before the damage incurred by Plato and the Sophists. What Nietzsche found in Diogenes and Cynicism was a living example of the classic Athenian—that is why his exuberance in having found him and why he models his Madman after him, and why Nietzsche tried to model his own life after him. In the story, the Madman carries his lamp as Diogenes did searching for a true man—one not corrupted by convention. When the Madman came down from the mountain to proclaim the truth as a Cynic should, no one listened. The truth teller has come too late, man is already lost and there is no more need for the light of truth. When the Madman drops the lamp and the light goes out and signals the loss of the beacon of one who comes.⁸⁷

With the lamp destroyed, Nietzsche must necessarily follow a solitary path—a solitary seeking of freedom and self-sufficiency misunderstood in his own time and even now. Diogenes had the good fortune to be understood and valued by some—certainly Xenocrates and his sons as well as Onesicritus⁸⁸ and his sons. In the end, Diogenes was cared for by his friends in Corinth, as DL tells us,⁸⁹ but Nietzsche for the most part cared for himself.

The revelation of the possibility of Diderot's Rameau is just as disturbing today as it was in the 1700s when it was written. What is surprising is that a hopeful response comes from Nietzsche—the person who flirted seriously with nihilism because of the breakdown of society in the industrial age. But beyond Nietzsche's use of parody, his buffoonery, and even at times his madness, there is a simple idea embedded in his thinking based on human nature that gives true value to our lives today.

According to Nietzsche, we should not disregard our sensory experiences and we must train ourselves to overcome the false beliefs of our time. Like Diogenes, we need to turn our backs on the promises of wealth and prosperity by living in a proverbial "tub" for awhile to begin to

⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Parable of the Madman*. In *The Gay Science* Translated by Walter Kauffman. NY: Vintage, 1974. 181-2.

⁸⁸ DL VI 75-76, 84. Onesicritus sent one of his sons to study with Diogenes and when the son didn't return home, Onesicritus sent a second son to find out why. When the second son also did not return, Onesicritus came to see Diogenes himself, and like his sons remained to study with Diogenes. Onesicritus joined Alexander in his conquests, and wrote of the adventure garnering his own chapter in DL's book in addition to the passages in the section on Diogenes.

glimpse what our nature really needs and yearns for. In Nietzsche's mind we need to discover the power within —the will to power.

There are countless works written to definitively explain what Nietzsche meant by his *Übermensch* or Overman. This is not the arena to attempt to sort out the issue, especially since evidence suggests he changed his mind about it during his lifetime. We can however zero in on two ideas concerning it that relate to our investigation of Nietzsche and Cynicism. Kaufman found that the word "Übermensch" was not unique to Nietzsche or even to the modern era. It is an old word from the Greek, *hyperanthropos*, coined by Lucian in the second century CE.⁹⁰ Its ancient meaning is "overman" as is "Übermensch" is often translated today.⁹¹ In this sense it means going beyond what is mediocre and striving to rise to our higher selves. In this process we create a higher type of human than is the norm. Here is what he says about this:

Mankind does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher in the sense accepted today. " is merely a modern idea, that is a false idea. The European of today is vastly inferior in value to the European of the Renaissance: further development is altogether not according to any necessity in the direction of elevation, enhancement, or strength.

In another sense, success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a *higher type* which is in relation to mankind as a whole, akin to overman. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and will perhaps always be possible. And even whole families, tribes, or peoples may occasionally represent such a *bull's-eye*.⁹²

Conclusion

In the modern era Cynicism is rediscovered, but its importance is greatly enhanced with the realization that Diogenes was right when he suggested that reason needed a halter and licentiousness and greed would get the upper hand unless checked before it caught hold in society. Nietzsche understood this, and it is Nietzsche who inspires contemporary thinkers to accept the reality of this situation, to look to Cynicism for answers, and to set to work to find a solution. It is in the person of Rousseau, an admittedly brilliant but tortured man, that we see Cynicism in a modern setting. Like Diogenes, he sees the world from a different

⁹⁰ Kaufmann 307.

⁹¹ Ibid. 308

⁹² Nietzsche, *Antichrist* 371.

perspective in which culture in the form of its ideological heap of ruins condemns people to servitude and they simply do not recognize it. Even living in a different way, as Rousseau does, brings threats and condemnation. This is the nightmare Diogenes warned about. The adoption of dangerous practices that do not conform to the kinds of beings we are, but cater to a misguided lust for wealth and power. The move away from what will naturally satisfy us is a very slippery slope to Rameau. As we saw with Diderot, reasoning does not work with Rameau, not even setting an example of Diogenes was effective, and as we saw with Rousseau, helping a child discover his own nature and helping him to develop it is the best prescription to cure cultural degradation. That is precisely what we see Diogenes doing in his anecdotes.

There is much about Rousseau and Nietzsche that conforms to Cynicism. Both found fault with conventional norms-- the European culture, which was economically and politically unequal and limited by religious dogmatism. Both argued for the ability to think and speak freely and to live simply. Both were brilliant, but estranged individuals, not understood in their own time. If one were to argue for characteristics, which portray a typical Cynic of the type that follows in Diogenes' footsteps and not the kind chastised by Julian, Rousseau and Nietzsche seem to fit that picture, and in doing so offer Cynicism as a philosophical path one might find valuable.

In the next chapter, we see a continuance of the road back to Diogenes, following his original path anew, in the hope that it will fare better than the path that lead us to Rameau. This is a stunning reversal of fortune for a person called "mad" by Plato and a "dog" by Aristotle. Diogenes' path finds a different reception as Peter Sloterdijk, Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot have their say about Cynicism. We take this up in the following chapter.

Chapter 8

Contemporary Reception of Cynicism

According to Foucault, *Rameau's Nephew* was “a turning point in the history of reflection on Cynicism in the West.”¹ As we saw in Chapter Seven, the modern age created the possibility of a Rameau—a man caught up in all of the excesses mankind is capable of with full knowledge of more reasonable and wise alternatives. The realization of this possibility and the fact that there are deep flaws, therefore, in the grand hope of the Enlightenment, encouraged Foucault, Hadot, and Sloterdijk to think of alternatives to promote human flourishing and to look for possible answers in Cynicism. As we shall see, they do not follow in the footsteps of their august predecessors, Rousseau and Nietzsche, but they do establish an interest in Cynicism bringing it into contemporary times with interesting ideas of their own.

Given the lowly status, even contempt, of the Cynic path then, and even from its inception, the suggestion of Cynicism as a cure for modern ills seems implausible. Yet, starting their investigations from different places and following different paths, both Sloterdijk and Foucault found Cynicism to be of value. Both of their arguments falter on occasion; nevertheless, how they argue for Cynicism is an interesting and much needed alternative, even corrective, to modern philosophical views concerning contemporary problems. Their arguments are complex, so it will be necessary to discuss each man in turn before we use that information to evaluate their eventual common conclusion.

Sloterdijk's Types of Cynicism

Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* published in 1988² depicts two kinds of cynicism—the ancient form that had a “cheeky” quality about it that attempted to reform society versus the modern form that has succumbed to an “ill humoured, mournful detachment” in which there is “no energy left for sarcasm.” In other words, “a self-destructive, nihilistic state.”³

¹ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 192.

² Peter Sloterdijk. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

³ *Ibid.* 5

Sloterdijk's *Critique* is a modern book, a book imitating the pervasive malaise and discontent in contemporary culture.⁴ In short, the contemporary mood is cynical, but a modern type of cynicism unlike its ancient sources. Sloterdijk calls the modern form⁵ "Zynismus" as opposed to the ancient form which he labels "Kynismus."⁶ How they differ, he says, is that the modern cynicism is a more profound malaise, in which moderns wallow in their own misery seeing no way out of it. He defines this modern cynicism as "enlightened false consciousness," and refers to it as

[T]hat modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and unsuccessfully. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it had not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology: its falseness is already reflexively buffered.⁷

While Sloterdijk was principally speaking of the post-World War period, specifically the 1960s and 1970s, there is no question that political cynicism of the second kind permeates many cultures today. The horrors of the World Wars have been replaced by the horrors of genocide and terrorism in our age. Thus, cynicism of today is nihilistic leaving modern man with nowhere to turn for a positive outlook, and as Gottfried Benn says, "To be dumb and have a job, that's happiness."⁸ However, Diogenes' cynicism is a positive philosophy meant to reform. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that a nihilistic form of cynicism is a philosophy at all—rather it might be likened to a mood or emotion that can overcome societies at any one time. All philosophies are paths or ways of life by definition; they are not paths to destruction.

Sloterdijk tackles the question of how all of the false consciousness came to be, and then asks what can we do about it? The short answer to the first question is that the struggle for power which characterized modernity was never resolved by the advancement of Enlightenment views since different power structures were simply substituted for old ones. One slavery following another for the common man, and even the promise of Marxism led in the end to totalitarianism.

⁴Ibid x.

⁶ Ibid Preface, xxix.

⁷ Ibid. 5

⁸ Ibid. 5

Sloterdijk begins with an explanation of the different ways of philosophizing in ancient and modern times. In an ancient path, followers “embodied the doctrine” of their masters.¹⁰ Later, as in our own time, a philosopher’s behaviour was “guided strictly by ideals.”¹¹ Diogenes is an example of the former, and Plato is an example of the later. Thus, Sloterdijk suggests a sea change with Diogenes to begin a rebellion of sorts—a new “uncivil enlightenment.” In colourful language, Sloterdijk claims that Diogenes “smells the swindle of idealistic abstractions and this schizoid staleness of a thinking limited to the head.”¹² Rationalism has failed and we need to take another path.

Ideals, as Sloterdijk reads it, can make lies into “a form of living,” so truth then depends upon “whether people can be found who are aggressive and free (shameless) enough to speak the truth.” He calls such people “cheeky.”¹³ Thus, truth falls into the purview of “fools, clowns, and kynics,”¹⁴ and so it is Diogenes, not Socrates, who “gives a new twist to the question of “how to say the truth.”¹⁵

Well, how can ideals make lies into a form of living? Ariston comes to mind as a good example of this issue. His issues with Stoicism are many, and we dealt with his objection to indifferents in Chapter Five. There is another aspect of that subject that we can raise here. If a Stoic is to be indifferent to everything not valued as virtue or vice, then how does one deal with neutral or indifferent things? Ariston says, like an actor. One can take on the role of Thersites or Agamemnon and play them becomingly. We can act in various ways, even ideal, virtuous ways, believably and convincingly. Rameau was a master of this, using guise and guile. He could deal with the world by putting on a *persona*, and yet had conscience enough to remove it when he wished. Have we all become like that? Is no one genuine and strong enough to be oneself? Sloterdijk thinks not. Only the fools and clowns, or in Diogenes’ case those who appear to be such, can do so. So even here, while Sloterdijk thinks of them as authentic persons, Diogenes uses the philosopher/beggar persona to promote his message.

¹⁰ Ibid. 101

¹¹ Ibid. 101

¹² Ibid. 02.

¹³ Ibid. 102

¹⁴ Ibid. 102

¹⁵ Ibid. 102

Sloterdijk discusses other aspects of Diogenes' life. He mentions his minimalism and he claims that Diogenes was not an ascetic. As we have argued as well in Chapter Four, Sloterdijk explains that the term "ascetic" has a modern connotation that was formed over thousands of years thanks to Christian thought. In the Christian/modern sense, asceticism is not something Diogenes did entertain or could have entertained. Sloterdijk sees Diogenes more as a "self-helper"—one who distances himself from so-called necessities, "whose satisfaction most people pay with their freedom."¹⁶ Summing up the issue, Sloterdijk says that Diogenes "introduced the original connection between happiness, lack of need, and intelligence into philosophy."¹⁷

Sloterdijk is at his best when he discusses "the waning of the Enlightenment"¹⁸ and the degradation of Cynicism into a complicit false consciousness that succumbs to Enlightenment dogma with its factious rationalizations and prejudicial points of view. He explores the use of power groups who impose their points of view whether or not they are true and often they are not.¹⁹ This leads Sloterdijk to question how one confronts obvious falsehoods with courage and conviction. Diogenes' solution is an obvious choice and Sloterdijk adopts it, calling it "cheeky" in that to confront high minded thinking one can bring it down to earth by reminding everyone about our natural functions; something Diogenes did so well.

In his explanation of the Enlightenment and subsequent understanding of its flaws in regard to Rameau, Sloterdijk again turns to Diogenes who can be used as the beginning of a new revolt against the rationalism of Socrates and Plato. He says,

With the appearance of Diogenes marks the most dramatic moment in the Process of truth of early European philosophy: whereas "high theory" from Plato on irrevocably cuts off the threads to material embodiment in order instead to draw the threads of argumentation all the more tightly together into a logical fabric, there emerges a subversive variant of *low theory* that pantomimically and grotesquely carries practical embodiment to an extreme. The process of truth splits into a discursive phalanx of grand theory and a satirical-literary troupe of skirmishers. With Diogenes, the resistance against the rigged game of "discourse" begins in European philosophy.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid. 158.

¹⁷ Ibid. 158.

¹⁸ Ibid. 11

¹⁹ Ibid. 14

²⁰ Ibid. 102

Sloterdijk's assessment of the modern predicament of philosophy is important. He claims first that philosophy has embarrassed itself. The further it retreated from life and was therefore subjected to competition from other disciplines which claimed to be more knowledgeable, the more impotent it became. He says, other disciplines like science which claim to know more than philosophy, really do not. If they did, he asks, why do we have a "world full of injustice, exploitation, war, resentment, isolation and blind suffering"?²¹

Secondly, Sloterdijk says that modern cynicism has despaired of finding a solution to our lack of meaning in life. He remarks that in looking for some overarching idea to ground our thinking, we find nothing. That despair has led the modern world to grudgingly accept our lot for the sake of self-preservation.²² He puts it this way,

In the final analysis, it is a matter of the social and existential limits of enlightenment. The compulsion to survive and desire to assert itself have demoralized enlightened consciousness. It is afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestablished relations that it finds dubious, to accommodate itself to them and finally even to carry out their business.²³

This is what he means by "enlightened false consciousness."²⁴ Sloterdijk argues that this despairing attitude originated with the Greek idea of "know thyself," which worked well for the ancient world, but is no longer possible for us. He explains that in the ancient view knowledge of self would lead to a universal understanding of our nature—a nature common to all.²⁵ Thus, individuals are bound together through reflection²⁶ and in doing so discover our common humanity.

According to Sloterdijk that confidence in finding commonality between our selves "burst apart" in the modern era, and today the phrase "know thyself" becomes "an ego trip for escapist ignorance."²⁷ Since the ancient path is no longer viable, Sloterdijk claims that philosophy has found itself trying to formulate objective ways of living from a basis in subjectivism which is where knowing oneself has left us with no way of getting out of

²¹ Ibid. 536

²² Ibid. 5

²³ Ibid. 6

²⁴ Ibid. 5

²⁵ Ibid. 537

²⁶ Ibid. 537

²⁷ Ibid. 537

ourselves. In this situation we have no common "home," as Hegel suggests, and therefore no basis for a practical philosophy.

Given this, Sloterdijk suggests that the way forward is to consider a reflective "letting things be." Stilling the mind by not doing allows, not a universal essence to be discovered, but rather a basic individual nature to shine through to consciousness.²⁸ In this way we can return to an ancient way of thinking where we can, in Socratic fashion, "be permeated by the 'self-revelation' of truth."²⁹

Sloterdijk believes that to continue to wallow in enlightened false consciousness is to allow "crazies" into the room—crazies who will not listen to reason and who will even act aggressively toward those who would impose reason on them.³⁰ Unfortunately, he gives little help as to the way forward. In the end, he says, the rhythms of daily life that carry us forward sometimes rewarding us with insights and clarity of thought such that one "feels an exuberant experience of a life well spent."³¹ He doesn't say so, but presumably he means an inner satisfaction with the deeper aspect of our selves such that individually we at least are in tune with our own inner "home."

Evaluating Sloterdijk

Sloterdijk's energy is for the most part used to explain how dire our situation is today and his efforts are well spent. His superb use of language and satire in the Cynic tradition effectively argue the Cynic message that we must change, but we wish more from him as to how. To tell a people steeped in subjectivism to reflect on themselves is to put more fuel on the flames of a subjective attitude which in the process could create a veritable bonfire of egoists without a shred of altruism left in them. He can't on the one hand tell us that today "know thyself" creates subjectivists with no way out of their own minds (really solipsism) and then at the same time tell us to continue to dig deeper until we find some inner me which will allow us to relate to the outside world.

His idea of letting things be has more promise. Already exhausted by the demands of contemporary life, many of us would choose a simpler path, not as simple as Diogenes'

²⁸ Ibid. 540

²⁹ Ibid. 541

³⁰ Ibid. 546

³¹ Ibid. 547

perhaps, but a less hectic lifestyle seems attractive. That doesn't seem to be what Sloterdijk means, however. He seems to be indicating a different kind of life; a minimalist, meditative life, which is not something that is possible for everyone given modern work, even if it was something all of us would chose to do. He is right, however, that on occasion most of us have experienced occasions when our lives do have the kind of feeling he mentions—a deep sigh of satisfaction within our entire being. We can only wish he had spent at least more of his energy looking into that.

Foucault's Last Lectures

If we think back to Diogenes' criticism of norms in Athenian society formed by the new wealthy elite, behind the acceptance of those norms was a power play for the hearts and minds of the Athenian people. Given enough power, any group can impose its standards upon other groups. How to discover those patterns of power and how to effectively defuse them was the context of the work of Michel Foucault. Essentially, Foucault's argument to disarm powerful forces was to use the tools of law and ethics to convince individuals to use a "minimum of domination."⁵⁶ However, both were built on a foundation of "truth-telling" or, as the ancients called it, *parrhesia*. He says,

It seems to me that in Cynicism, in Cynic practice, the imperative of a particular form of life, of a very distinctive form of life, with clearly articulated rules and conditions is strongly tied to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling without shame and without fear, of an unlimited and courageous truth-telling. . . . [There is] a fundamental link, essential to Cynicism, between living in a certain manner and devoting oneself to speaking the truth.⁵⁷

In his books, and especially in his last lectures at the College de France in 1984,⁵⁸ he relates the concept of *parrhesia* to societal norms and how they are formed, and to Cynicism and to Diogenes in particular. There is poignancy in this since the lectures occurred from February through March, and he died only a few months after the semester ended in June.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault. "The Ethics of care for the self as a practice of freedom: An Interview, trans. By D. Gauthier in *The Final Foucault*, edited by James William Bernauer and David M. Rasmussen. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987. 78.

⁵⁷ Shea, Louisa. *The Cynic Enlightenment* 176.

⁵⁸ Foucault did not have time to publish his lectures before his death, but his lectures were recorded by many of his students, and the book *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II* edited by Frederick Gros New York :Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 is a copy of those recordings.

The lectures were the culmination of a year's research, which he was required to discuss in a college lecture once a year. Following up on the previous year's lecture, in the 1984 lectures he distinguished between the approaches one can take regarding truth-telling. In 1983, he focused on "epistemological structures" or the ways that a discourse can be recognized as true. In his last lectures he put that question aside, and focused on the individual practice of truth telling. He said that in looking at how *parrhesia* was practiced in antiquity, he noticed its connection to the famous aphorism; "know thyself" (*gnothi seauton*).⁵⁹ For the ancients, coming to know oneself was not a private, meditative practice. There was always an interlocutor, another person, with whom one spoke the truth about oneself. The dialogue one has with oneself and another or others forces us to be more cautious about the truths one claims about oneself. We are reminded of Nietzsche's claim that one needs to speak the truth "in front of witnesses"⁶⁰ in this regard.

The word *parrhesia* has many etymological meanings, both good and bad. In the good sense it means freespokenness, openness and frankness. In the negative sense it can mean "licence of tongue" as Isocrates used it.⁶¹ Ariston is a good example of its negative meaning. Zeno became so annoyed with him because he "discoursed at length in an uninspired manner," in a headstrong and overconfident way, that Zeno exclaimed, "Your father . . . must have been drunk when he begat you".⁶² Zeno subsequently referred to him as a "chatterbox."⁶³

Parrhesia has a special importance as it relates to forms of government. In a democracy, free speech can have a deleterious effect not only on the society which practises it, but also on the individuals within that society. While most people then and now would consider freedom of speech a good thing, Foucault shows how it can degrade a culture and create false norms. His explanation pertains to Diogenes and his criticism of destructive cultural practices.

Foucault argues that *parrhesia* allows citizens to say whatever they wish. In which case, people will listen to "both good and bad orators", including those "pursuing their own interest." When this happens, "false discourses, useful as well as bad or harmful opinions, all

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth*. 7.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 26.

⁶¹ Lidell and Scott, *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* 611.

⁶² DL VI 18

⁶³ Ibid. 18

become mixed up and intermingled in the game of democracy.”⁶⁴ Those who try to “seduce the people” and control them “will please them, say what they want to hear, and flatter them.”⁶⁵ So this is the way false notions and norms can take hold in a society. Pity the upholder of truth in this situation.

Upholders of truth like Socrates and Diogenes faced considerable danger because if the truth did not please the masses, such discourse would lead “to negative reactions, irritation and anger.”⁶⁶ Looking at truth telling in this way puts a little more bite into Socrates’ claim to be a “gadfly.” The sting is very real and a harmful backlash can be very real as it ultimately was for him.

Foucault’s approach to the issue of truth and false knowledge indicates not only how they occur, but also shows how hard it is to eradicate them when they do. Socrates’ method of dialogue and irony did not allow him to escape the anger of those captivated by questionable norms. Since Diogenes did manage to live to the age of 90, what were the factors that allowed him to do so? One reason is the one Socrates mentions himself. He tried to stay out of politics, as did Diogenes. As an exile, Diogenes could not have participated in the Athenian democracy in any case. However, Socrates, because of the anger he generated by questioning Athenian citizens, especially powerful ones, and because some of his students were involved in the tyranny created by the Spartans after Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War, was tried and convicted on those grounds. Had Diogenes angered the wrong people, such would have been his fate as well.

Foucault saw another pattern emerging in connection with *parrhesia* and truth in relation to Diogenes. In his lecture he began by tying together *parrhesia* and Cynicism in a general way and showed how Diogenes escaped violent censure. He claims that “dedicating oneself to telling the truth” is “connected to living in a certain way.”⁶⁷ He cites the passage in DL that

⁶⁴ Ibid. 36

⁶⁵ Ibid. 36. In *Fearless Speech*, Foucault quotes Plutarch, “How to tell a flatterer from a Friend, “just as clever cooks employ bitter extracts and astringent flavorings to remove the cloying effect of sweet things, so flatterers apply a frankness which is not genuine or beneficial, but which as it were, winks while it frowns, and does nothing but tickle. For these reasons, then, the man is hard to detect, as in the case with some animals to which Nature has given the faculty of changing their hue, so that they exactly conform to the colors and objects beneath them. And since the flatterer uses resemblances to deceive and to wrap about him, it is our task to use the differences in order to unwrap him and lay him bare, in the act, as Plato puts it, of “adorning himself with alien colors and forms for ant of any of his own” (Phaedrus, 239d (51c-d)

⁶⁶ Foucault. *The Courage of Truth*. 37.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 165

reads, “Being asked what was the most beautiful thing in men,” Diogenes replied, “Freedom of Speech.”⁶⁸ Foucault directly links this statement with *parrhesia* as “the beauty of existence.”⁶⁹ So the most beautiful life is the truthful life. He then goes on to show how this beauty can be seen in a person, but he takes an unusual route to get there.

His argument begins with Epictetus. According to Foucault, Epictetus thought of a Cynic as a kind of scout (κατασκοπος) who “in advance of humanity determines what may be favourable or hostile to man in the things of the world.”⁷⁰ Fleshing out Epictetus’ argument first provides some background so that we have a better context from which to assess Foucault’s argument.

Epictetus was taken with a scene in the anecdotes in which Diogenes is brought before King Philip of Macedonia. DL explains what happened:

Dionysius the Stoic says that after Chaeronea he was seized and dragged off to Philip, and being asked who he was, replied, “A spy upon your insatiable greed.” For this he was admired and set free.⁷¹

Epictetus’ reaction to this passage is unusual. In his *Discourses*, Epictetus discusses Cynicism generally, but of the true Cynic he says, he is

A messenger sent from Zeus to men, concerning good and evil; to show them that they are mistaken, and seek the essence of good and evil where it is not, but do not observe it where it is; that he is a spy like Diogenes, when he was brought to Philip after the battle of Chaeronea. For, in effect, a Cynic is a spy to discover what things are friendly, what hostile, to man; and he must, after making an accurate observation, come and tell them the truth; not be struck with terror, so as to point out to them enemies where there are none; nor, in any other instance, be disconcerted or confounded by appearances.⁷²

There are many interconnected ideas within this anecdote, for example, Diogenes’ courage, the fact that he was let go, the idea of greed, and the idea of the spy.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 166 and DL VI 69. This passage is found in Hick’s translation as “the most beautiful thing in the world.” Foucault is correct, however, that in Greek it reads *τι καλλιστον εν ανθρωποις*—the most beautiful thing for “man” or “mankind generally” according to Liddell and Scott. This distinction matters given the argument Foucault proposes.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 165

⁷⁰ Ibid. 167

⁷¹ DL VI 44

⁷² Epicurus. *Discourses* Book 3.

In this passage and in other discussions of Cynicism, Epictetus is like Julian and Dio Chrysostom in that it is a Stoic reaction and interpretation of what Cynicism should and could be—an interpretation based on Stoic assumptions. However, as the original anecdote demonstrates, Diogenes does not in this episode or any other show any interest in the gods and their influence on mankind. Nothing like that is to be found in DL. Epictetus' influence has, unfortunately, affected modern interpretation of Diogenes, as for example that of Margaret Billerbeck. In her discussion of Cynicism and Epictetus, she, like Epictetus, focused on the mention of Zeus in the passage we are looking at. She uses other remarks to emphasize that what it takes to be a true Cynic comes not from mankind itself, but rather is a gift from Zeus. She cites the “extraordinary character of this vocation”, such that it is not for everyone, “For it is for Zeus alone to call him to an imitation of Diogenes” as a “healer of the gods”.⁷⁵

Given this bit of background, we can appreciate the approach Foucault takes to this episode that much more. Foucault evaluates the scene of Diogenes with Philip as he finds it, without any Stoic filters. Foucault argues that a scout, by the nature of his work, would be a person who wanders about with no home or country and who must return to report the truth without the fear of doing so.⁷⁶ This raises the question as to how the scout or anyone can be trusted. Since without a homeland, who can testify for him? The dialogue between Nicias and Laches in Plato provides his answer. In that dialogue, Foucault describes Socrates' boldness in speaking the truth. His courage to speak in that way came from the interlocutor's acceptance that his statements conformed to the way of life he lived.⁷⁷

So, too, says Foucault, “the Cynic falls, in a way, within the general framework of this homophony between speaking and living.”⁷⁸ In another example Julian criticized the cynic, Heracleios, for abusing his vocation. Heracleios carried the Cynic staff, but he did not live the life proper to the Cynic. The staff, the wallet, the worn cloak, and the long beard signalled the way of life he should have been living. They knew what he, as a Cynic, was supposed to stand for, but in Heracleios' case he did not measure up to the standards of a Cynic life. In Foucault's words, how one lives as a Cynic “reveals what life is in its independence, its

⁷⁵ Ibid 208

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*. 167.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 169

⁷⁸ Ibid. 170

fundamental freedom, and consequently it reveals what life ought to be.”⁷⁹ We must live as we speak. In this way, the Cynic, and Diogenes in particular, went far beyond a reasoned explanation of what he believed. He lived it and for this reason his approach is unusual. It is a kind of performance in which we take from it what we can, as we see Foucault doing here. The believability of what is shown is determined by the consistency with which one performs what one shows. One thinks of Ariston mentioned above as an actor in this respect. One’s actions can take the form of Thersites or Agamemnon, and we are known by the performance we choose.

Foucault is enticed, too, by the idea of how *parrhesia* creates “greatness of spirit,” which is “the courage of truth, the courage of one who speaks and who in spite of everything takes the risk of speaking all the truth he knows, but it is also the courage of the interlocutor who agrees to receive as true the wounding truth he hears.”⁸⁰ Foucault advances the idea that the Cynic is the final upholder of virtue and of a moral life that can allow for peaceful exchanges. Harking back to the original Cynicism of Diogenes who consistently voiced the need for *parrhesia*, Foucault brushes aside all modern and contemporary connotations of cynicism and returns its meaning to its original use in antiquity. The *virtu* or habit of *parrhesia* was a foundation principle of Diogenes’ Cynicism. It was the loss of this understanding through time, and especially in later antiquity, that created a situation in which Cynicism itself was misunderstood then, and further misunderstood in the modern period.

It is Lucian and Julian who in Foucault’s mind poison the Cynic well considerably. He cites a passage from Julian’s *To the Cynic Heracleios*, “Now in the name of the Muses, answer me this question about Cynicism: is it a form of insanity, a kind of life unworthy of a man, not to say a brutish tendency of the soul.” He adds “Should not those who preach these doctrines be banished, without blows of the thyrsi⁸¹ like expiatory victims . . . but put to death by stoning? For how do they differ . . . from desert pillagers and coastal bandits who rob those who disembark?”⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid. 172

⁸⁰ Ibid. 252

⁸¹ Thyrsi are staffs decorated in pine cones and ivy and used in religious ceremonies.

⁸² Foucault. *The Courage of Truth*. 197.

Likewise Lucian, in *The Runaways*, says of those who seek to be philosophers: “He belongs to that species of contemptible men, for the most part servile and mercenary, who, given over to rough work since childhood, have been unable to form any relationship with me.” Instead Lucian says, since they are so ill prepared for philosophy, they “call to their aid their usual allies, Insolence, Ignorance, and impudences, equip themselves with a new provision of insults, which they keep ready at hand; then ... they disguise themselves as best they can and put on an appearance similar to my own.”⁸³

What is unusual about these criticisms, in Foucault’s mind, is that the authors also show considerable favour for Cynics as well. Foucault quotes Julian in his discussion of Diogenes and Crates:

So what form did the dealings of our philosophers take? Their deeds preceded their words. Those who honoured poverty demonstrated that they were the first to despise their patrimony; those who prized modesty were the first to practice simplicity in everything; those who removed the theatrical pomp and arrogance from other’s lives were the first to live on the public squares and in the precincts consecrated to the gods. Before waging a war of words against libertinage, they fought it with their actions and proved by deeds, not by vociferations, that it is possible to reign with Zeus when one has hardly any needs and is not bothered about the body.⁸⁴

Foucault claims that the ability to be able to distinguish true Cynicism from a kind of sham Cynicism “appears to be quite unusual in the history of ancient philosophy.”⁸⁵ He explains that it is not just a matter of noticing that the ideals of the master can degrade over time and become “corrupted.” He observes that in order to distinguish between true cynicism and false cynicism, one must refer to a “universally valid Cynicism.” He claims that Julian does that and more in viewing Cynicism as a “universal philosophy, which is valid for and accessible to everyone.”⁸⁶ Foucault quoting from Julian’s *To the Uneducated Cynic* says,

As for myself, who would speak with deference of the gods and those who have made their way towards the divine life, I am convinced that even before him [Heracles], there were men—not only among Hellenes, but even among Barbarians—who professed this philosophy, which it is, as it seems to me, universal, entirely natural, and demands no special study. It is sufficient to choose what is decent out of desire for virtue and aversion to vice; there is no need to work on thousands of volumes, for, it is said, ‘erudition does not give one sense.’ One does not have to submit oneself to

⁸³ Ibid. 196-7

⁸⁴ Ibid. 199-200

⁸⁵ Ibid. 201

⁸⁶ Ibid. 200

any other discipline than that which the followers of the other various philosophical schools endure.⁸⁷

There is in this a way to come to grips with Diogenes' view of nature. Since an idea is a common one, an idea accepted generally, it could be seen to be natural by virtue of its universal acceptance. Granted, Zeno went out of his way to describe what ideas come to us naturally, but it too is based on the understanding that there are commonly accepted natural ideas. Seen this way, Diogenes could be said to try to prevent newer ideas concerning wealth, power, and sexuality from becoming commonly accepted and thus natural.

Given this interpretation, it is easy to see why Foucault directs his attention to the phrase "altering the currency," Diogenes' famous aphorism, and he proceeds (as did Julian) to tie the phrase to other Cynic principles of "know thyself" and "care of self." If one is to live a good life one must revalue one's currency. Foucault says Julian poses an important question in connection with this. "Must one value one's currency in order to know oneself or is it that by knowing oneself one can revalue one's currency?"⁸⁸ Honestly, this is a good question. How do we discover our inner self? Is it constructed solely by the norms (currency) we have come to accept, or do we accept certain norms because of the kind of person we are? Foucault says he chose the latter approach. As we continue looking at his view of Cynicism we see how he may be right, at least about himself.

Foucault's discussion of Lucian and his positive thoughts about Cynicism is especially interesting because other cynic themes are brought into the discussion. Foucault explains Lucian's attraction to Demonax as a person who had an "impulse" toward philosophy, someone who was a "philosopher by nature."⁸⁹ That did not mean he was crude. In fact, Demonax was a highly educated person who in addition performed "exercises in physical endurance, enabling him to resist deprivation and suffering: physical exercises for the cold and for hunger."⁹⁰ Julian chooses the second way, thinking "the person who knows himself will know exactly what he is and not merely what he passes for being."⁹¹

It's not that one gets to know oneself, rather one gets to a view one must accept; the idea that the coin or person does have an underlying universal value. This is not an issue that

⁸⁷ Ibid. 200

⁸⁸ Ibid. 241

⁸⁹ Ibid. 198

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth*. 241.

⁹¹ Ibid. 241-2

Foucault addresses using his archaeological method. His method is to uncover the underlying assumptions that allow individuals to think one idea or another. From this methodological approach, Foucault has uncovered something in the idea of currency which others have missed. Even better, he shows how the idea is pervasive even into late antiquity with Julian. There must be something underneath when we alter currency or alter ourselves. That, for the ancients, is what is natural—something common to all.

Unfortunately, what happens is that philosophers generally have followed another route, which ultimately has been undermined, says Foucault.⁹² Originally, he says, philosophy was tied to a particular way of living, as Julian explained with his story of Heracleios. Like Epictetus' view of the scout, the philosophical life is necessarily one that coincides with one's project. For a scout, the project is to bring back knowledge of what lies ahead. In that he must tell the truth, and he must have the courage to do so even if the news is hard to accept, and he must live a life such that one can be believed when revealing the truth. To separate the assessment of the trustworthiness of what he says from the character he displays in doing so, in the ancient mind at least, prevents one from verifying the truth of that knowledge.

Philosophers have disburdened themselves from tying their truths to their actions. This separation occurred first with religion, Foucault says. He cites the "confiscation by religion of the theme and practice of the true life." "Religious institutions, asceticism, and spirituality took over this problem in an increasingly evident manner from the end of Antiquity down to the modern world."⁹³ In his mind, science compounded the problem since science institutionalized the process of truth telling. However, Foucault asks, if "scientific practice, scientific institutions, and integration within the scientific consensus are by themselves sufficient to assure access to the truth, then it is clear that the problem of the true life as the necessary basis for the practice of truth-telling disappears."⁹⁴ The situation is so grave and protracted that today "it is now possible for the relation to truth to be validated and manifested in no other form than that of scientific knowledge."⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid. 235

⁹³ Ibid. 235

⁹⁴ Ibid. 235

⁹⁵ Ibid. 237

Certainly, if science could consistently be a vehicle of truth telling, as Sloterdijk also mentions,⁹⁶ this separation within philosophy would be acceptable. We know, however, that scientists, too, can overlook and alter data to support their theories.⁹⁷ That means that Cynicism as an example of another way of validation of truth through philosophical life becomes important. “When the Cynic replaces the false currency with a new stamp of its true value, other false coins are revealed to be false. In the same way, by living a true life one reveals the lives of others and the norms of their culture to be false. So altering the currency and knowing oneself can lead to sweeping changes.”⁹⁹

Those changes would create another way of life for us. Foucault sees it as the emergence of a whole other world, and not only that

Its aim, its final aim, is to show that the world will be able to get back to its truth, will be able to transfigure itself and become other in order to get back to what is in its truth, only at the price of a change, a complete alteration, the complete change and alteration in the relation one has to self.¹⁰⁰

Foucault has high hopes for us with a return to Cynic practice. The Cynic is not a usual type of person. As such the new Cynic “by the very otherness” of his life, will show others “what you are looking for is somewhere other than where you are looking for it, that path you are taking is other than the one you should be taking.”¹⁰¹

These are Foucault’s words, but Diogenes could have said them too. Foucault is right that people who live honestly and forthrightly are noticed and often admired. Even a ragged beggar like Diogenes earned praise for this, but what of Rameau and of all the Rameaus in the ancient world and today? What about the ones who see the path Diogenes and others have marked out and decide not to take it? It could be that they just do not see even the possibility of a different way of thinking.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Foucault developed a method of analysis which sought to make clear the intellectual landscape of a particular period in human history such that those

⁹⁶ Peter Sloterdijk. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. 536.

⁹⁷ Famously Newton’s reluctance to address the fact that Mercury’s erratic orbit could not be explained by his physics is a case in point. It was precisely this inconsistency that caught Einstein’s attention, which thus led to Einstein’s theory of relativity upsetting Newton’s physics in the process.

⁹⁹ Foucault. *The Courage of Truth*. 244.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 315

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 314

who investigate it can understand how some ideas arise within that period and how some ideas are not thought of at all. Foucault used the example of Chinese categorization of animals to make his point. In the *Order of things* he quotes a passage from a Chinese encyclopaedia “in which it is written that animals are divided into (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.”¹⁰³ This passage led Foucault to wonder what kind of mind-set would cause someone to think in that way. This question about the Chinese passage or any other passage that is difficult for us to fathom encouraged him to create a method that could deal with situations like this. In the end he labelled that method “archaeology”—what would allow someone to think “that”?

Foucault uses this method often and at one point in his lectures, he specifically uses it to interpret the idea of *parrhesia* as used by Dio Chrysostom. While previously Foucault freely used material written by Dio, material we have hesitated to use here, at one point he admits that Dio had a tendency to add to the myth of Diogenes. His explanation concerns Diogenes’ conversation with Alexander. Foucault begins by admitting that the entire conversation is a “fiction.”¹⁰⁴ Yet he continues with an analysis of the discourses in question to “make some headway in the analysis of this figure of the anti-royal king.”¹⁰⁵ Foucault’s archaeological method leads to conclusions that are interesting, but because of the way the information is gathered, it is impossible to determine if they are valid. Ideas can be true only insofar as they can be said to represent the ideas within the ideological system in which they occur. So historical facts are not necessary to this type of analysis; it is the overall system and its boundary of what it is possible to think that is of interest to Foucault.

The episode of interest here, of Diogenes and Alexander, gives us an opportunity to examine Foucault’s system. Since it is a fictional account constructed by Dio Chrysostom who lived hundreds of years after Diogenes, the ideological world of Dio, a Roman one, is not the world of Athens in the Fourth century B.C.E. So we can glean nothing from this about Diogenes himself. Is it possible to understand the world of Cynicism in Dio’s Roman

¹⁰³ Foucault. *The Order of Things* xv.

¹⁰⁴ Foucault. *The Courage of Truth* 275.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 275

experience? No, since it is fictional, all it can provide is the boundary of Dio's understanding of the world. Foucault cannot legitimately come to any conclusion about Cynicism even in late antiquity, which unfortunately he does. In fact, Dio has no warrant to come to any conclusions either. A fictional tale can only tell us the interpretation of something within the mind of the writer of the tale. It could be taken as a valuable metaphor, but to someone truly interested in the truth of an idea or episode, a fiction can only be a story.

Foucault and Hadot

Toward the end of his life, Foucault began to move away from his archaeological method and thanks to conversations with Pierre Hadot, his colleague at College de France, he began to think of philosophy as a way of life rather than as a methodology. Evidence of this shows up in his final lectures and is a logical offshoot of his discussion of truth telling. Speaking of Epictetus and the true Cynic, he says,

He [the Cynic] is the physical model itself of the truth, with all the positive effects this model may have. Epictetus describes this modelling of the truth in the Cynic's body and comportment in this way: 'He must not be content with displaying the qualities of his soul in order to convince the uninitiated that one can be honest and good in all that they admire,' but must also, 'prove with the qualities of his body that the simple, frugal life in the open air does not harm even the body. This is what Diogenes did; he went about in fact 'blooming with health, his body alone attracting the crowd's attention.' The Cynic is therefore like the picture of the truth. Stripped of all vain ornament, of everything that would be, as it were the equivalent of rhetoric for the body, he appeared at the same time, in full blooming health; the very being of the true rendered visible through the body. This is one of the first ways, the first paths by which the cynic life must be a manifestation of the truth.¹⁰⁷

It seems such a basic notion that the sage as a person who seeks wisdom would seek the truth and structure his life around the truths he discovered. But what does one do when the truth and the truth-teller are disregarded, as in the case of Rameau? He might, as Rameau does, simply label himself "vile," and continue on as before. Rameau, as we noted above, was not vile, but he was addicted to wealth and privilege. The people who truly were and are vile, however, are the people and societies, which Sloterdijk introduced us to. In speaking of our modern economic world he complains,

¹⁰⁷ Foucault . *The Courage of Truth*. 310

Those who speak of the hardships of life land almost automatically in a realm beyond moral and economic reason. What in the physical world is the law of gravity appears in the moral world as the law that the survival of societies always demands its sacrifices. Every survival demands to be paid for, and it exacts a price that no merely moral consciousness can approve of and no merely economic calculations can compute. The laboring and struggling groups in human society must experience the price of survival as such a bitter tribute to the reality principle because they pay it with their own *blood, sweat, and tears*. They scrape it together in the form of subjugations to "higher" forces and facticities; they bear it in the forms of pains, accommodations, privations, and hardening self-limitations. They continually pay this price in living currency that cuts into the flesh.¹⁰⁸

Statisticians and economists tell us today that our lives are improving and that poverty is being reduced all over the globe. Those figures are meant to suggest that wealth equates with a better life generally. When people are starving, that is true. Raising income to tolerable levels, however, does not mean that such a life is a good one. Today we build cities with monumental buildings as the ancients did. We create works of art and literature and make scientific discoveries on a grand scale and we think of these achievements as reason enough to do them and feel satisfied with life because of them. But we differ from the ancients in that, as Hegel says, we do not have a universal peace-of-mind—no shared mental home. This lack of mental comfort can lead to endless strivings with little satisfaction in our achievements as having fulfilled some aspect of purpose in connection with our nature. So striving becomes endless.

A Daoist might say the reason for endless striving and acquisitiveness is that we do not focus on the way—the path of nature. Instead, we follow others, failing to ask if they know the way they are going. We have been following others going off in one direction or another ever since the collapse of the Greek home. History shows the attempt at the creation of other homes, for example, a Christian one, Enlightenment one, a scientific one, and a globalization one, but they have all failed to achieve universal acceptance.

Maybe it's time to listen to those who have achieved a kind of collective sanity about life and have been living it since the time of Diogenes—the Cynics. It is also apropos to return to the view of the person who offered advice in the first chapter, Pierre Hadot, about all of this as he explains the importance of Cynicism. The advantage Cynics have, says Hadot, is their

¹⁰⁸ Sloterdijk, Peter. *The Critique of Cynical Reason*. 321.

tradition of seeing things from above. The scout must have a high enough vantage point from which to see the lay of the land in order to counsel others truthfully. In his explanation, Hadot turns to Lucian who provides an illuminating story.

In his story of *Charon*, Lucian introduces two characters, Charon and Hermes. Charon is the ferryman who carries shades (souls) across the rivers Styx and Acheron to Hades. He charges one obol (one coin) for the ride. Those who have no coin must wander the shore as ghosts. Hermes is the god of commerce who is a link between the gods and mankind. In Lucian's story, Charon decides that he needs a better vantage point from which to understand why men do the things they do. So he takes the day off (informing Pluto that he has done so), climbs up to Olympus, and finds Hermes there, so he asks him for help.¹⁰⁹

Hermes hems and haws, but finally agrees. Charon explains that he is there to "see what life is like; what men do with it, and what are these blessings of which they all lament the loss when they come down to us."¹¹⁰ In order to do this, they decide they need a much higher vantage point, so they decide to place two more mountains on top of Olympus so that they can see all. Charon passes one mountain after the other to Hermes and then he pulls Charon along with him up to the top.

After a time they are able to pick out various places and people. They note the Olympian Milo and Cyrus who are destined to soon visit Charon in the boat, and then they pick up a conversation between Croesus and Solon on the subject of wealth. After a time Charon decides he has found the information he has come for and he concludes,

And things being what they are, they do—the things you see: squabbling among themselves, and contending for dominion and power and riches, all of which they will have to leave behind them, when they come down to us with their penny a piece. Now that we are up here, how would it be for me to cry out to them at the top of my voice, to abstain from their vain endeavours and live with the prospect of death before their eyes? "Fools" (I might say) "why so much in earnest"? Rest from your toils. You will not live forever. Nothing of the pomp of this world will endure; nor can any man take anything hence when he dies. He will go naked out of the world, and his hours and his lands and his gold will be another's, and even another's." If I were to call out something of this sort, loud enough for them to hear, would it not do some good," Would not the world be better for it?¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Lucian, *Charon Vol. 1* translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, Internet Sacred Texts Archive, www.sacred-texts.com/cla/loc/index.htm. Accessed on 2 October 2016, 168.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* . 167

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 180

Hermes replies that only a few are willing to listen. Charon takes one last look at all of the civilizations before him with all of their greatness that have come and gone and says, “Dear, dear, what a world it is—And never a word of Charon.”¹¹²

Returning now to Hadot, he sees in Lucian’s story the value of Cynicism. Like Charon, the Cynic finds a vantage point from which to survey mankind. It isn’t a mountain; it is the vantage point of death. From that perspective, everything becomes very clear and Hadot concludes,

The Cynic never ceases denouncing mankind’s delusions: forgetful of death, people passionately attach their hearts to some object—luxury or power, for example—which, in the course of time, they will inevitably be forced to give up. This is why the Cynics called upon mankind to rid themselves of superfluous desires, and to reject social conventions, and the whole of artificial civilization, as being nothing but a source of worries, care and suffering. The Cynics would have us return to a simple, purely natural way of life.¹¹³

Hadot is important for another reason than valuing Cynicism. In his works he returns us to the ancient idea that philosophy is more than just finding ways to determine fundamental truths by using methods of reasoning to uncover them. He sees philosophy as the ancients did—as a way of life. He comments:

Philosophy presented itself as a method for achieving independence and inner freedom (*autarkeia*), that state in which the ego depends only upon itself. We encounter this theme in Socrates, among the Cynics, in Aristotle—for whom only the contemplative life is independent.¹¹⁴

Above all, the conception of philosophy as an art and form of living is not linked to political circumstances, or to compensate for lost political freedom. Already for Socrates and his disciples, philosophy was a mode of life and a technique of living. Philosophy did not change its essence throughout the entire course of its history in antiquity.¹¹⁵

Things did change, however, and Hadot succinctly explains how it did so. He tells us that the Middle Ages inherited a conception of monastic life as Christian philosophy, philosophy

¹¹² Ibid. 183.

¹¹³ Pierre Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. 247.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 266

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 269

became a “servant of theology”¹¹⁶—a theology taught in universities established by the Christian church. These schools became “one of professors who train professors, or professionals training professionals”.¹¹⁷ It was all downhill for philosophy from this point, Hadot concludes:

Education was then no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialize in order that they might learn how to train other specialists. This is the danger of “Scholasticism,” that philosophical tendency which began to be sketched at the end of antiquity, developed in the Middle Ages, and whose presence is still recognizable in philosophy today.¹¹⁸

He concludes that with Kant and Hegel, for example, philosophy becomes “philosophical discourse” –no longer a way of life. As we saw with the great discontent in Europe in the 18th century and in our time the malaise Sloterdijk portrays so well, something is missing in modern life. Hadot believes he knows what is missing. It is the “home” that Hegel sought for mankind in a coherent model for the living of life. It provides the meaning to life that Yovel said Hegel searched for and yet did not find. Hadot says the answer lies in the ancient way of living and philosophizing. It is the goal of the *agathos* life according to Adkins. Hadot says,

This concern for living in the service of the human community and for acting in accordance with justice, is an essential element of every philosophical life. In other words, the philosophical life normally entails a communitary engagement. This last is probably the hardest part to carry out.¹¹⁹

Diogenes lived this life. He did not create a school or attempt to politicize his message. Like Socrates he lived within the community, shaming those who deserved it, and when a *paidagogos* became a true moral educator as well as the tradition of the ancients.

As discussed above, Foucault fused the idea of *parrhesia*, a way of life as scout and Cynicism together. From this he came to a realization about Cynics and in his very last lecture (28 March 1984) added a footnote in which he says, “I am well aware that by presenting things in this way I give the impression of according Cynicism a crucial place in ancient ethics and of making it an absolutely central figure.”¹²⁰ He was aware, too, that at

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 269

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 269

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 270

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 274

¹²⁰ Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth* 339.

that moment Cynicism did not have such status. Had he lived another year, he may have tackled that issue as well. Regrettably, he did not live to do so, so it falls to others to make this case for him, because as he implies we cannot do less with a point of view that is absolutely central to philosophy.

Evaluating Foucault

Had Foucault lived to edit and publish the ideas found in *The Courage of Truth* we might be now looking at an entirely different conception of the idea of *parrhesia* and the role Diogenes and Cynicism plays in our understanding of truth. What we do have within his recorded lectures and written notes are ideas that have the logic of his own interests and his conclusions are most often hesitant and inconclusive. That being said, the way Foucault shares his research is engaging and the scope of his knowledge is fully apparent and impressive—just the sort of thing to fully engage the students and visitors in the audience, numbering as mentioned in the hundreds. Since Foucault discussed the importance of how the parrhesiast is perceived to determine his believability, we have good reason here to cite how he appeared to his students. From the Preface to the book of his notes, Gerard Petitjean, describes a typical lecture:

When Foucault enters the amphitheatre, brisk and dynamic like someone who plunges into the water, he steps over bodies to reach his chair, pushes away the cassette recorders so he can put down his papers, removes his jacket, lights a lamp and sets off at full speed. His voice is strong and effective amplified by the loudspeakers that are the only concession to modernism in a hall that is barely lit by light spread from stucco bowls. The hall has three hundred places and there are five hundred people packed together filling the smallest free space. . . There is no oratorical effect. It is clear and terribly effective. There is absolutely no concession to improvisation. Foucault has twelve hours each year to explain in a public course the direction taken by his research in the year just ended. So everything is concentrated and he fills the margins like correspondents who have too much to say for the space available to them. At 19.15 Foucault stops. The students rush towards his desk; not to speak to him, but to stop their cassette recorders. There are no questions. In the pushing and shoving Foucault is alone. Foucault remarks: "It should be possible to discuss what I have just put forward. Sometimes, when it has not been a good lecture, it would need very little, just one question, to put everything straight. However, this question never comes. The group effect in France makes any genuine discussion impossible. And as there is no feedback, the course is theatricalized. My

relationship with the people there is like that of an actor or an acrobat. And when I have finished speaking, a sensation of total solitude . . .¹²¹

Another of his students confides that he was "held in thrall by the narrative that unfolded week by week."¹²² This is quite a different picture of the reception of philosophy from the one painted by Sloterdijk in the paragraphs above, and the contrast is so striking it is worth our time to understand the difference. We can mention first, that Sloterdijk is not an academic, but with his television program he too has a sizeable audience each week which like Foucault is at a distance with no interaction. Nevertheless, while both of them acknowledge the importance of truth-telling, Foucault is not a jaded cynic. His arguments are hopeful and his enthusiasm for what Diogenes and Cynicism can offer is not forced to fit into an ideological position he is trying to argue for. Simply reading the lectures conjures that enthusiasm in the reader as well. So thanks to Foucault we cannot say that philosophy is dying, and given the enthusiastic reaction of the students to the lectures, in which the arguments are often complex, gives rise to optimism that some subjects in philosophy speak meaningfully to them. The fact that in this series the lectures concern truth and specifically what Diogenes and Cynicism has to offer is heartening.

What we see here is that unbeknownst to Sloterdijk, ancient Cynicism crept up and quietly passed him while he was conjuring dark predictions about philosophy's future. Young people are not moribund—stuck in the malaise he speaks of. Yes, they are disturbed and angered by the lies they hear from so many arenas, but if Foucault's lectures are any indication, they have not given up on truth.

Conclusion

The insights Sloterdijk, Foucault and Hadot provide in this chapter are good ones. Sloterdijk raises the alarm by showing how we have fallen into a way of thinking that deadens us to the possibility of living a life that is based on truthfulness which can lead to the free and independent societies we wish for.

Foucault shows a possible way forward from nihilism, which haunts us. He goes beyond Sloterdijk and takes a position closer to what Diogenes would suggest himself, i.e., to be a spy on our own insatiable greed and regain the courage to speak openly about it. When we

¹²¹ Ibid xii

¹²² Ibid xiii

ask ourselves whether we could behave in this way, we might demure and say how can we be sure of the truth? It's here that we realize how very important the issue of human nature is to the Cynic argument, and to a possible solution for ourselves. As Hegel and Zellar showed, Diogenes' courage to speak truly came from a secure understanding of life and his own value. All the training in the world would have availed him nothing if he had no secure basis from which to act.

Ultimately then in order for a return to Cynicism to be successful, it must be as Foucault explained in Chapter Five, a "public display of his very nature and absolutely nothing can be concealed." And from Hadot the very tradition of early philosophy carries with it the burden of engagement with others for the common good. Whether this is something we should do or even be prepared to do is the subject of our evaluation of Diogenes' Cynicism in the following chapter.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

In the Preface several cautions were mentioned concerning any study of Diogenes and during the course of this work, care was taken to focus on them. The cautions structured the approach taken here. Being duly conscious of them provided us with a way to avoid Bayle's "heap of ruins", the mistakes and misunderstandings accumulated through hundreds of years of interpretation and analysis. One way to keep a sure footing as one plods through the heap is to ask the question, Why would Diogenes say *that*? Often we discovered that he never did. So stripping away obvious mistakes is at least something.

What we were after, however, is what he most likely did say and do. So we began with a general look at who Diogenes was and debunked myths that were untrue in order to create a better basis for making judgements by which to judge them and hereby use them to discover why Diogenes and Cynicism were so attractive to thinkers in the 18th century CE. We noted that Diogenes was distinctive in that his path of philosophy did not posit *eudaimonia* or happiness as a goal in life, nor did he believe in philosophical chatter or logical nonsense—what Rousseau was to later call logic chopping. Rather Diogenes claimed that we should aim at self-sufficiency and freedom to live the best life we can, and the way to achieve that was to accept the prescription of the ancients to do as nature recommends, a decided departure from the philosophy of Plato, hence the antipathy between them.

From ancient sources like Plato, Zeno, Julian and Dio Chrysostom, we have a picture of Diogenes that runs the gamut from mad to almost saintly. Modern scholars tend to be dismissive (Hegel, Guthrie, Zellar), unsure (Dudley), hostile (Sayre), some what favourable (Rousseau) or enthusiastic (Nietzsche, Foucault). Often misinformation is the culprit that leads so many scholars to such diverse views. It is for this reason that uncovering who Diogenes was is a first step in this analysis, for what is the point of attempting to see why Diogenes' path was valuable to the Moderns (and therefore by implication to ourselves), if the Moderns, using unreliable sources, got it wrong and their views were simply adding to the heap?

As it turns out, modern scholars with a keen interest in ancient philosophy did make an effort to sort out fact from fiction concerning the ancients, and why they did so is the subject of the second half of this study.

Our first step in the process of sorting out all of the information about Diogenes was to examine the source material that has come down to us. It was a lengthy process to determine what was reliable and what was not, and so we investigated ancient sources generally and the form of literature in which the sources were composed, acknowledging the value of literary sources.

Most ancient sources are copies of original works or fragments of original works, which have come down to us for the most part through the work of copyists. On the one hand, we are fortunate to have copies at all, but on the downside within them we find mistakes. Some of those mistakes were unintentional copying errors, but others were deliberate attempts by copyists to put their own stamp on the material they copied. It was commonly believed that copyists should not just copy; they should add something of their own to the works. One redeeming feature in all of this is that we found the authors were not allowed free license; they were not permitted to change the meaning of anything they copied.

One particular form of ancient source material is the *chreia*, a saying or anecdote in a sarcastic and humorous style that aptly described a famous person. Most of the information about Diogenes comes to us in the form of *chreiai*. The form of the *chreia* is more than an anecdote. The form of this literary style demanded that the sense or meaning of the saying be apt; *chreia* should not misrepresent the character of the person described. Sotion claimed that Diogenes wrote a book of *chreia* himself, and Metrocles, a follower of Diogenes also wrote one shortly after Diogenes' death. So, of the hundreds and hundreds of anecdotes about Diogenes, they began with information very close to the source serving as a basis for *chreia* written at a later date. This information provides a basis for the information found in ancient anecdotes, and therefore they deserve some credence and should not be summarily dismissed.

Too often the use of the term *askesis* led scholars to attribute a form of asceticism to Diogenes. It's true the extremity of his chosen poverty could lead to assumptions like that. There are two reasons why we should resist the idea of

asceticism. One reason comes from the use of the term itself and that was ably described for us by Dressler. The other reason comes from the overall ancient path or perspective the term fits into, and that framework was explained by Adkins. In both cases classical authority is against a claim of asceticism, with the preference being as per Adkins and Long a life of self-mastery by which one trains oneself to excel.

The issue of human nature and its use as a basis for human action was found to be complex and confusing as the idea of human nature itself became embroiled in social and political prejudices very early in human history. The difficulty was to uncover Diogenes' view of it as opposed to other societal or philosophical views. We discovered that it was the Stoic, Zeno, who had much to say about nature and how it could be used to inform human action, and that Diogenes had very little to say about nature other than that he preferred it to convention. It was the similarity between Aristophanes' view of education and Diogenes' stated view in the story of Xenocrates that provided an insight into the issue of human nature. We discovered that Aristophanes' view of education was the traditional view or heroic view of what a man should learn to be. Since Diogenes' view of education coincided with Aristophanes', we could justifiably claim he took a traditional stance. It was not the fourth century BCE view, but rather the fifth century view influenced by the Sophists who taught that a man's gifts at birth could be enhanced by *askesis* or training, further verifying our argument against *askesis* as asceticism.

The theme of education was enhanced by the story of Diogenes' enslavement to Xenocrates so that he could educate his two sons. Since the story was mentioned by DL twice, any thought to discredit the story because Menippus was not said to have written about it was short-sighted. It was noted by Hicks that the story was more likely written by Hermippus and was therefore a copying error on the part of DL. Establishing this story allowed us to see Diogenes in a different light—as a *paidagogos* or family tutor—giving him the dignity in later life that he honestly deserved, and also providing answers to his life in Corinth, his means to produce books, and a way to understand his longevity since the extremity of a life of extreme depravation, no matter the training, would probably not lead to a life of 90 years.

The story of Diogenes as educator gives us much more than that. The two passages alluding to his instruction of Xenias' sons are the only lengthy passages which show the man and his teachings. Since they coincide with Aristophanes' depiction of ancient traditional Greek education, they also tag Diogenes to tradition as well. Just as importantly, in this discussion we gained some insight into the epistemology of ancient thought, and the on-going dispute concerning it caused by the Sophists and even more so by Socrates. The Socratic view is on full display in Plato's *Apology*, where we saw Socrates bully Meletus and put him in the category of people "pretending to knowledge when they are entirely ignorant." Two faults in epistemology are noted here. The first is that Socrates correctly points out an inherent flaw in cultural tradition—it can allow individuals to be accepting and not actively thoughtful, but it also illustrates that there is wisdom in the experiences of individuals of the past and it should not be summarily dismissed as we see Socrates doing. Even Plato in his *Protagoras* deals more fairly with this issue asserting the expertise of individuals in the various crafts and the collective wisdom gained in political discourse—the collective knowledge of individual experience.

It was the studies of human nature by Adkins and Guthrie that brought to light through language what Zeller sought to uncover within history. In the Homeric Era, the ideal man was akin to the gods and very often was linked to the gods through ancestry with a god as parent who provided divine favour. The tribal lineages were based on a divine ancestor. This led to the formation of the aristocratic class, of which almost all citizens would have been a part in early Greek history. Later in history the introduction of a class system of craftsmen or seamen, in which some became wealthy, led to conflict with the aristocratic one. What the lower classes wanted was a way to allow them to also become men of means and power within the old heroic system. The Sophists provided a way to allow a man's nature whether aristocratic or democratic to enhance natural dispositions through training to create the *agathos* or a successful man. So nature for the Greeks is what a man is by nature—what excellences he is born with that will help him succeed. Zeno's worry over impulse and inclination and desires, were ancillary ideas to the issue and had been answered in the fourth century with the introduction of the idea of prudence as *askesis* to staunch *unhealthy* desires and inclinations.

It is within this context that Diogenes' preference for nature over convention is to be assessed, as well as his idea of virtue. For Diogenes, convention would be, as it was for any Athenian citizen, the way things were traditionally done. What caused controversy over this was the Sophist attempt to alter what was traditionally done, by allowing the underclass to become as educated as the aristocratic class thereby challenging aristocratic power and authority. We cannot claim that Diogenes condemned all conventional behavior within this context, because much of the conventional behavior was still traditional. What Diogenes did condemn was the hypocrisy of those who had power and wealth but did not behave nobly. Those who wish to make more of his attack on convention must show precisely where he claims all of Greek society is debauched. In reality he does no such thing; instead he compliments those who follow a modest lifestyle and condemns those who do not.

Certain themes persist throughout DL's account in addition to those of nature, convention, and training. Those themes are freedom, particularly freedom of speech, self-sufficiency, and cosmopolitanism. In looking at cosmopolitanism, we found that his status as an exile separated him from not only his home and family, but also created a barrier between him and Athenian society. His exiled status allowed Diogenes to create an objective assessment of Athenian society-- something that would have been hard for him to do if he was caught up in the city's intrigues, especially those that concerned banking and money making. To be a part of a society and not of it was a gift not given to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle or members of the other schools. To read Plato, for example, in his *Republic* is to appreciate his criticism of democracy, but it is also to see his prejudice for the aristocracy. To read Aristotle is to be painfully aware of his prejudice concerning slavery and women. And in spite of Socrates attempts to stay out of political controversy, he was tried and convicted of impiety and atheism and he was executed because he challenged the authority of the aristocratic class by questioning the basis on which it was established.

In contrast, one wonders how a person like Diogenes could insult King Philip and his son Alexander, and ignore the summons of various generals who controlled the Athenian city after its loss to Macedonia, and live another day to talk about it.

Maybe we could say with Foucault that his objectivity and humour made him believable. He was the spy whose character made him trustworthy. However, in our look at modern philosophy's resurrection of Cynicism in the 18th century CE, we found there was more to Diogenes than simply that.

Our focus on the 18th century and the European Enlightenment depicted by Diderot and his Rameau, show that the troubles with Sophistic reasoning in ancient Athens are much like the troubles found in the political and philosophical ideas of Europe. As we noted, both Kant and Hegel understood this and attempted logical systems to resolve issues specifically concerning human reason and autonomy. Rousseau and Kant expressed their doubts about the infallibility of reason and sentiment, a dilemma depicted in the character of Rameau. Rameau was fully capable of understanding the philosophy Kant proposed, but as we saw, he simply did not care to be good. What he did care about was wealth, comfort and a life of ease—society's ideal of the successful man during the 18th century.

To counter this view, what European thought needed was a new ideal of success. It was Rousseau who provided a new perspective, and as it so happens it was a Cynic one. Rousseau's works caused a sensation both for him and against him. People in positions of power saw him as a threat, as indeed he was since his influential *Social Contract* was one of the factors that led to the French Revolution. The ideas Rousseau espoused, however, were not revolutionary; they were part and parcel of ancient thought—a world Rousseau discovered through his love of books.

Unschooling in philosophy, Rousseau came to accept Cynic maxims simply on his own. His book *Emile* supposedly a book of instruction of a fictional character named Emile, is really a retrospective assessment of his own education and the maxims he came to value. We discovered that Rousseau believed that systems of philosophy and history created more harm than good. They provoked thinkers to accept only those ideas that could fit into a system, thereby allowing them to discount human experience itself. This systematizing imposed by philosophy became in his mind then nothing more than logic-chopping and valueless.

Instead, Rousseau asserted that human nature could be guided to be the most valuable basis for human thought and values. It was how an individual nature was

encouraged and nurtured that made the difference in his life. So it was incumbent upon those who instructed young people to guide them to follow their own inherent good nature and avoid the pitfalls most people fall into by following societal convention. It is easy to see how people like Weiland and Diderot would claim that Rousseau was a modern day Cynic and why Kant would consider his view a subtle version of Cynicism.

In spite of the obvious similarity in the views of Rousseau and Diogenes, there is much more to Cynicism than simply this. One of the things this study demonstrates is that there cannot be a school of Cynicism. The reason for this is that the true Cynic, of which Diogenes is the perfect example, is rare. One needs to begin with a moral and sensitive person, who encounters a society that has lost its way. In his very being and his expression of what he holds dear, he becomes a threat to his society and is sent away, imprisoned, or killed. Of the Cynics mentioned here (Diogenes, Rousseau, and Nietzsche), only Diogenes had the strength to hold his own against the negative societal onslaught. The mental stress on Rousseau and Nietzsche was damaging, but to their credit, they still persisted. All three paths while adhering to their inner impulse to freedom and nature were their own. They followed no maxims of Cynic behavior. They had no guide other than nature itself, and it is in that that we can claim any kind of affinity at all.

In the end it was the conditions of his life that allowed Diogenes to discover within himself, his own nature, and the natural tradition of Greek life that served as the basis for his practical and moral decision making. These circumstances were unique, and in addition to natural genius, do not happen often, but they can, and they did over two thousand years later in the person of Rousseau. His life was not exactly the same as Diogenes', but fairly close. In Rousseau's case the world was kept from him as he spent his early years reading on his own, learning a trade, and then under the tutelage of Madame de Warens studied even more. He created a moral world based on reading the wisest of men, and studying the workings of nature. He was well prepared to think, but ill prepared to enter the social world—one riddled by class-consciousness and political intrigue. Too naïve to handle the criticism against him and praise as well, he spent only a few years in the company of men, and the rest of his life trying to escape them. The experience left him with

paranoia from which he spent many years trying to overcome. His writings revealed that on occasion, he was able to rise above his illness, only to have some incident bring it upon him again.

In his struggles, Rousseau taught the world many things of which Kant, Nietzsche, and Foucault took notice. The most important idea he shares with us is that freedom of mind and body is our greatest treasure. To allow society to dictate to us how to live and how to live best together is to give up the essence of our humanity altogether. There can be no morality if we are not fully our own persons, we are simply slaves to society itself. Rousseau was right to ask, how can I be wrong about this?

We looked at the works of Hegel, too, and found that in spite of his argument that Cynicism suffers from a lack of system, which it does since it is a way of life, Hegel's understanding of the ancient world and more so what motivated it, is impressive. He illustrates how human nature can express itself freely and beneficially to individuals and to the society of which they are a part. He confirms what we see Diogenes attempting to forestall—the degradation of culture by the adoption of practices foreign to our nature. He shows we can appreciate things and value them as beautiful, but we cannot allow such things to supersede our own value and dignity, they cannot be a substitute for what we are.

Finally, what Hegel valued in Pericles speaks to what Diogenes was doing and to what we might do to encourage better thinking in “light-minded” people. We cannot preach; we should not argue; we should be the beacon or lantern of a true human being. Diogenes carried his lantern; Hegel, Rousseau, and Nietzsche use it symbolically; and we who desire to be true Cynics must carry one. We need not break it as Rousseau and Nietzsche did. We know that in time, our nature, as it did for Rousseau and Nietzsche, will assert itself in a person who will carry it again.

Moving into contemporary times, we find that those who wrote about Cynicism did not have the background to be one. The views of Sloterdijk and Foucault are philosophical studies of Cynicism and so in many ways are foreign to the Cynic message and path. In Sloterdijk's Germany, the bottled up frustrations and tensions of the citizens, led to a misguided cynicism—a false consciousness of nihilistic, self-indulgence. Sloterdijk, after he posits philosophical explanations of Diogenes (and a

one sentence discussion of Rousseau), wallows in the negative. How could one write a lengthy book on modern Cynicism and not see Rousseau's importance? Sloterdijk omitted Rousseau, because he was too preoccupied with modern cynicism and not enough with ancient Cynicism and as a consequence understood neither whence Cynicism came nor its potential solutions to modern problems. His is the philosophy Rousseau railed against. All it does is lead to more nail splitting.

Our final contributor to the issue of Cynicism, fares better than Sloterdijk and not as well as Rousseau even though his background is not conducive to what Cynicism offers. Foucault is a philosopher in today's sense of the word. His thoroughness and analytic skills are unimpeachable. His early experience in the academic world was impressive gaining a position upon submission of his dissertation. He was mentored by the great philosopher Jean Hyppolite, he was brilliant, and he was mentally unstable. Success, however, came too easy for him and while there was criticism of his work, it was of the normal kind, academic criticism, not societal rage. In other words, as far as Cynicism goes he had not suffered enough to be an estranged objective Cynic.

Doing philosophy in the traditional way from Descartes to Hegel is reaffirmed in Foucault. Admittedly, he makes efforts to break free. He follows Nietzsche's genealogy for a time, and substitutes, as we discovered, his archaeological method instead. In his last lectures, however, where he discovers Diogenes, he does not ask why Diogenes would say or do this or that, as archaeology would dictate. Instead he studies the history of Cynicism, the derivation of the word *parrhesia*, and the origination of the idea of the Cynic spy. He stays on the surface, and does not ask why. Had he not died so young, he might have come to it, but he did not.

In the end Cynicism is a challenge not only to individuals as to how best to live, it is also a challenge to philosophers as educators to speak to the whole person not simply to the mind. When Diogenes condemned conventional behavior, he was at the same time condemning philosophical ideas, which promoted and condoned such behaviour. Then as now, when society for whatever reason chooses to take a misguided path to life, how shall we explain a better path and how to begin to take it?

After this study we might characterize Cynicism as the individual path of the Cynic to whom we refer. In any case we would see an estranged individual free of the bonds of social conformity, and a social critic who weighs in on cultural foolishness thanks to his courage to become an autonomous and objective source of truth recognized as such by the excellence of his character, his desire to work for the common good, and his willingness to endure the difficulties this kind of life would bring. Diogenes' Cynicism can never solely be an intellectual exercise; conviction must be followed by action.

As we noted, Rousseau, and Nietzsche fit this characterization in varying degrees. With Rousseau and Nietzsche their estrangement occurred as the result of their own mental states separating them from their respective societies. Both toyed with minimalism; they were never poverty stricken although Rousseau's refusal to accept the King's pension brought him close to poverty.

With Diogenes, estrangement was probably the result of a political and moral decision against powerful forces at work in his community. Exile in his time would follow him negatively no matter where he decided to go or whatever he decided to do. His choice to live in Athens and then to live the life of a beggar brought him the potential to be seen as a person clothed as a man of wisdom with cloak, staff and satchel—the image of the wandering wise man protected by Zeus. Perhaps it satisfied his vanity and need for respect and esteem that he chose to do so. Plato certainly thought so. In any case, whether it was a guise at first or not, as he says in the end, this way of life led him to wisdom and to philosophy.

From our vantage point, it is not too difficult at all to be impressed by Diogenes' strength, not only physical strength, but also mental stamina. Compared with Rousseau and Nietzsche, Diogenes stands like an imperturbable rock not to be messed with by ignorant and foolish people. A little of this strength would have eased the lives of Rousseau and Nietzsche considerably. It was Diogenes' sarcasm and physical strength that protected him and overcame threats from all sides. Socrates could have used some of this to save his own life.

So what we find in the end of a study like this one, which sought not debates over philosophical assertions about Diogenes and Cynicism, but rather we sought reliable information about the man himself to understand why he fascinated

philosophers in the 18th century. What we uncovered was the quality of the man Diogenes came to be. What we found was not a philosophical genius, but instead an example of what the Greeks would have considered an *agathos* man—one who took what he was naturally given, trained himself to excel at what he had, and used all of that to deal with life successfully. That was enough to make his life meaningful. To be sure, the Greeks would have considered his exile as a fatal flaw, but to modern eyes overcoming exile was his greatest achievement. Thus, it was Diogenes, himself, as a model of what a person can be and the path he chose to achieve success which creates his value and why he was looked to for guidance in the Enlightenment period and why in the end he was loved by the Athenian people. Seeing Diogenes in his own time brought his value to light. In his own way he established and continues to assert the inherent natural value of a human life, and how one can create ultimate meaning from striving to live it well. So the ancient Greeks were wrong. Nobility comes not from a divine lineage; it comes from human life itself. Rousseau and Nietzsche understood this, hence their investigations into human nature. That is what Diogenes understood, too, and with its acceptance, Nietzsche is right that now we have hope and the Cynic model to construct a path of life for ourselves that can in the end be meaningful.

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