

**Possessed:
The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure
(Presidential Prize Award Winner)**

G. M. Trujillo, Jr.
University of Louisville

Abstract: Aristotle argued that you need some wealth to live well. The Stoics argued that you could live well with or without wealth. But the Cynics argued that wealth is a hinderance. For the Cynics, a good life consists in self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), or being able to rule and help yourself. You accomplish this by living simply and naturally, and by subjecting yourself to rigorous philosophical exercises. Cynics confronted people to get them to abandon extraneous possessions and positions of power to live better. And while the Cynics were experts in living in this way, their ascetic lifestyles made their message curious to some audiences. This paper reflects on Cynic ascetic practices and the ways others perceived them.

Keywords: Cynicism, Diogenes of Sinope, wealth, poverty, asceticism, political engagement

“Wealth is the vomit of fortune.”

—Diogenes of Sinope

It meant something when Diogenes of Sinope told Alexander the Great, “Stand out of my light” (D.L., 2018, VI. 38).¹ Alexander was the wealthiest man in the world, commanding the largest standing army. And he was one of the most educated. Alexander loved reading and kept literature with him on campaigns. As an adolescent, Alexander was even tutored by Aristotle, who taught him both exoterica like ethics and esoterica like metaphysics (Plut., 1919, VII-VIII).

By contrast, Diogenes was a disgraced man, exiled from Sinope for altering currency with his father (D.L., 2018, VI.20, 56, 71). Diogenes relished his material poverty. He wore no shoes on his feet. His torso bore only a simple cloak, tied up when hot or folded over when cold. His stomach contained only beans and water, if anything. Diogenes lived out in the open and migrated with the seasons (D.L., 2018, VI.22, 34, 48, 76; D.Chr., VI.30; Hard, 2021, p. 14).

So, reimagine the famous Alexander scene. Everyone marveled at the Emperor and his entourage. Then Alexander approached a gaunt, old

man bathing in the sun. The crowd went from awe-struck and curious to nervous.² The men started with introductions. “I am Alexander, the Great King.” “I am Diogenes, the Dog” (D.L., 2018, VI.60). And then Alexander offered Diogenes anything. Diogenes barely opened his eyes as he muttered, “Stand out of my light” (D.L., 2018, VI.38). The Emperor—in fine clothing and perfume, offering riches and favors—was reduced to a mid-afternoon annoyance by a man in tattered clothing who smelled of digested lupins and onions. Everyone laughed and walked away upon hearing Diogenes’ request, and Alexander remarked, “Had I not been Alexander, I would like to have been Diogenes” (D.L., 2018, VI.32).³

The drama of the anecdote explains why it was preserved by Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, and others (see: Hard, 2012, pp. 53-6). But we can lose the profundity of the message in the eloquence or comedy. What I want to point out here is this: the two reactions to Diogenes—an entertained but dismissive audience and a spurned but reflective Alexander—represent two reactions to Cynic philosophy and its constituent asceticism. The disciplined practices of Cynics established them as authorities on simple, natural living, and the ascetic displays accused powerful, educated, comfortable Greeks. But audiences to the Cynics could also ignore the same Cynics because the radical asceticism made Cynic life unbecoming. Here, I want to argue that Cynic asceticism and contrarianism keep them from being complicit in Greece’s ills. But those same attributes are barriers to political reform and uptake by audiences.

1. Cynic Happiness: Self-sufficiency and Discipline

For the Cynics, happiness (*eudaimonia*) was self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), or being able to rule and help yourself. Diogenes valued self-sufficiency above all things. For example, when asked who the richest in life were, he replied “the self-sufficient” (*G.V.*, 180, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 17). He argued that the gods needed nothing, so the godlike need very little (D.L., 2018, VI.105).⁴ Cynics “countered luck with courage, convention with nature, and emotion with reason” (D.L., 2018, VI.38). This meant living with minimal possessions or political entanglements. As Dio Chrysostom wrote of Diogenes, “He took care to have a sufficient supply of food and moderate clothing, but from public affairs, lawsuits, rivalries, wars, and factions he kept himself clear” (D.Chr., 1932, VI.30-1).

Cynics sought simplicity by favoring human animality to cultivated civility. They wore only a single cloak, ate mostly vegetarian diets that sustained them, and begged for daily necessities (D.L., 2018, VI.103-5).⁵ In short, they let their bodies do what human bodies naturally do in the wild.⁶ Cynics lived a *hemerobios*, literally a “daily life.” Diogenes even

joked that by living in a wine barrel, he could roll his house wherever he wanted, and he could move its opening toward the sun in the winter and away from the sun in the summer (Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, 2.14, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 10). Such a lifestyle, he argued, gave him advantages and joys that kings could only imagine (D.Chr., 1932, VI.10ff).

Cynics studied only ethics, and they shunned all speculative thinking—not only physics, geometry, and logic, but also literature and music (see: D.L., 2018, VI.103-4). So, their appeal to self-sufficiency is practical. And their arguments often form implicit dilemmas that contrast the alternatives. In other words: become self-sufficient or become something worse. The implication in many arguments about self-sufficiency is that if you do not develop it, you will not be able to live well. For example, Diogenes said, “Commoners obey their passions as servants do their masters” (D.L., VI.66 [own translation]).⁷ He also called most people “triple-slaves” because their stomachs, sexual organs, and fatigue controlled them rather than their minds (*G.V.*, 195, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 152). The argument is that neglecting self-sufficiency leads to a wretched life (as when being ruled by externals or non-rational faculties). So, you should develop self-sufficiency, as that is the only good option.

Many Cynic arguments take the form of disjunctive syllogisms or dilemmas. But in typical Cynic fashion, Diogenes does not extol the beauties of reason and self-sufficiency as much as he maligns the alternatives. The most dramatic example of this is his saying: to get through life, you need either reason (*logos*) or a noose (*brochos*) (D.L., 2018, VI.24). But Diogenes’ usual negative tack does not mean he lacks a positive route.

The Cynic lifestyle was built on *askēsis* (literally “exercise” or “training,” the root of the English word “asceticism”). Most explicitly stated, “He used to say that no success can be achieved in life without training [*askēseōs*], which he said could overcome anything” (D.L., 2018, VI.70). Training is a necessary condition for a good life, and it is necessarily coextensive with someone who lives self-sufficiently and well. You will find no person who lives well who is not disciplined.⁸

The training that Diogenes had in mind was both *physical* and *mental*. For example, to acclimate his body to heat, he would roll over hot sand, and to acclimate his body to the cold, he would hug snow-covered statues (D.L., 2018, VI.23).⁹ Diogenes argued that physical training contributes to virtuous action.

Yet, while both physical and mental training are necessary for good living, neither alone is sufficient. He recoiled from sages who neglected their bodies and from people who sought wisdom but mistreated their

health: “Diogenes laughed at those who lock away their treasures with bolts and locks and seals, but throw open their own body with all its windows and doors, namely their mouth and genitals and eyes and ears” (Stobaeus, 3.6.17, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 157). Similarly ridiculous are people who only paid attention to their bodies. Diogenes called useless and incomplete those single-minded musicians and athletes who ignored other aspects of their lives (D.L., 2018, VI.70).¹⁰ Proper *askēsis* trains the whole person.

Diogenes argued that training is crucial because it affects what you pursue in life and how you experience what happens. Diogenes was reported as arguing:

The contempt for pleasure, if it has become habitual, is exceedingly pleasurable. Just as those who have been accustomed to living pleasurably find the opposite unpleasant, so do those who have engaged in the opposite practice find that despising pleasures gives them more pleasure than would the pleasures themselves. (D.L., 2018, VI.71)

Two things deserve emphasis here. First, whenever people are unreflective about their lives (e.g., by not evaluating whether what they experience is appropriate), they automatically and immediately pursue pleasures and avoid pains. This is part of what makes luxury so destructive. In contrast to luxury, everything appears a pain and unworthy of pursuit, even if it makes you a better person. For example, Diogenes told a lazy man, “If you avoid the discomforts of the industrious, you will incur the misfortunes of the neglectful” (*Codex Patmos*, 263, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 281). Delicate people atrophy and die at their own hands.

But more importantly, and this is the second point, Diogenes’ theory of pleasure and pain prioritizes second-order evaluations. Philosophical training is less about first-order sensations of pleasure and pain and their causes. Rather, philosophical *askēsis* is more about controlling the effects of first-order sensations on your self-sufficiency and aligning them with that goal. Philosophy trains your evaluative capacities, which can change your experience of the first-order sensations through second-order appraisals. There are two relevant examples here. First, Diogenes was asked whether philosophers eat cake, an astute question after observing that Diogenes mostly drank cold water and ate lupins. Diogenes replied, “They [philosophers] eat cakes of all sorts, <but not> like the rest of humankind” (D.L., 2018, VI.56). Second, in a satirical work by Lucian, Diogenes says that he would not be distressed by being flogged. His interlocuter asks how, since Diogenes has no armor like a crab or tortoise.

Diogenes explains, “You can apply that notorious line from Euripides... ‘Your mind will feel pain, but not your tongue’” (qtd. Hard, 2012, p. 4). Both examples show that neither pain nor pleasure seem intrinsically good or bad; the philosopher can enjoy the luxury of cake without being corrupted, and the philosopher can endure the pain of torture without losing resolve. The Cynic is neither hedonist nor masochist; the Cynic is an autarkist, valuing self-sufficiency above everything.

The goal of self-sufficiency demands rigorous training. It can take the aversion out of pain and give you second-order pleasure. And in Cynic moral psychology, the second order takes priority. This means that everything natural—pleasure or pain—becomes pleasant, as you can understand how it contributes to your self-sufficiency. But everything conventional—pleasure or pain—becomes unpleasant, as it detracts from your self-sufficiency.¹¹ This is crucial. Cynics spend considerable time addressing what leads to disquiet—worrying about reputation, working stressful jobs, or generally doing anything required to gain access to luxury or the urbane societies that host orgies. Inversely, the toils that come with a simple, natural life become pleasant. For example, Plato once found Diogenes washing lettuce, and Plato said that had Diogenes paid tribute to Dionysios II, tyrant of Syracuse, then he would not need to wash lettuce. Diogenes retorted that had Plato washed lettuce, he would not need to court Dionysios (D.L., 2018, VI.58). Tolerating a tyrant corrupts the most sumptuous fare, but relishing self-sufficiency makes lettuce a delicacy. Besides, tyrants host tedious and anxiety-inducing dinners.

The Cynics lived lives that poets would consider tragic. They were ill-regarded beggars, forced to wander and struggle to subsist. Yet Diogenes never denounced life in general. Whenever someone told him that living was bad, Diogenes corrected him by saying, “Not living itself, but living badly” (D.L., 2018, VI.55). Diogenes insisted that his circumstances made him as happy as a king (*G.V.*, 201, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 15b).

2. Promethean Poison and Herculean Freedom

When Diogenes said he was as happy as a king, however, he meant so ironically. Cynics consistently lambast material comfort. The Cynics judged literal kings to be miserable. Tyrants live uneasy lives. Wealthy, they fear poverty. Wishing to maintain power, they fear conspirators from within and without. Craving respite, they long for intoxication or sleep, but both make them more vulnerable. And if tyrants wish to flee elsewhere, they will meet the enmity of others. Tyrants cannot eat, sleep, or go anywhere without paranoia defiling every moment. And as opposed to other misfortunes, which usually run their course, the tyrants’ sufferings

cannot end. Being a tyrant means maintaining power and luxury, which are the root of the misery. Worse still, tyrants cannot even entertain alternatives to their fortune because they are surrounded by admiring crowds that tell them that they live the best life possible (D.Chr., VI.35-59). The paranoia and aversion to poverty of tyrants taint every pleasure, and their echo chambers prevent them from finding any solutions.¹²

Cynics actively oppose power and luxury. They despise the moment Prometheus brought fire to humankind, and they felt Zeus justified for chaining him to a rock to have his liver eaten by a vulture for eternity. Prometheus's fire made humans soft (*malakia*), and it began humanity's love of luxury (*truphē*) (1932, VI.25). For example, Diogenes scorns a healthy rich man who uses a servant to dress him (D.L., 2018, VI.44), and he argues that wealthy people use their money on indulgences that are as accessible as supple fruits growing on a cliff (D.L., 2018, VI.60; Hard, 2012, s. 160). In short: "... Humans do not employ their cleverness (*sophia*) to promote courage or justice, but to procure pleasure" (D.Chr., 1932, VI.28-9). Rather than use Promethean fire for nutritious food and toolmaking, humans used it for indulgences and trifles.

The Cynic opposition to wealth is a motif. Diogenes called avarice the motherland of all evils (D.L., 2018, VI.50), and he argued that virtue could not live in rich households or cities (Stobaeus, 4.31.88, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 141). Wealth, even in small instances like wearing perfume, can cause a moral stink in other areas of our lives (D.L., 2018, VI.66). And it is wealthy people, not poor people, who become tyrants (Stobaeus, 4.33.26, and Julian, *Oration* 9, 199a, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 150, 158 respectively). But even if wealth does not produce vice directly as its most proximate cause, wealth will always be found with vice. Or, as Diogenes explains, "Houses that have the most food in them also have many mice and weasels" (Stobaeus, 3.6.37, qtd. Hard, s. 156).

So, if not the wealthy, the powerful, or the divinities bringing fire, who ought we to admire? The noblest people, Diogenes said, are "those who despise riches, reputation, pleasure, and concern for life, and are thus able to overmaster their opposites, poverty, ill-repute, suffering, and death" (Stobaeus, 4.29.19, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 78). In other words, Cynic *askēsis* aims to make people like Hercules. Diogenes likened his lifestyle to that of Hercules undergoing his Twelve Labors. Like Hercules, Cynics value freedom over everything (D.L., 2018, VI.71). And like Hercules, they dedicate their lives to making the world better. Apuleius explains the similarities between Hercules and a famous Cynic, Crates:

The poets recount how Hercules of old, through his indomitable

Possessed: The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure

courage, vanquished dreadful monsters... and this philosophical Hercules [Crates] achieved just the same in his combat against anger, envy, greed, and lust, and all other monstrous and shameful urges of the human soul. All these plagues he drove out of people's minds, purifying households and taming vice, he too going half-naked and being recognizable by his club. (*Florida*, 22, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 416d)

Given the world that we inhabit with all the monsters of convention, the labors of the Cynic are never done. So, Cynics travel from town to town to speak out against wealth, power, and vices that undermine self-sufficiency. But Cynics cannot walk around like contemporary, glamorous portrayals of Hercules. Poverty is necessary. Diogenes said that poverty compels us to do what philosophy merely tries to persuade of (Stobaeus, 4.32.11, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 19). Philosophy does not matter if it cannot get you to live simply.¹³

3. Cynics Versus Everyone

The Cynic dismissal of wealth was not uncontested. Cynics, Aristotelians, and Stoics all disagreed on the point, and the ancient world kept these philosophical positions distinct (see: Moles 1983, esp. Appendix). For example, Aristotle argued that some wealth is necessary for *eudaimonia* (*E.N.*, 2019, I.8-9; see also: Cashen, 2012).¹⁴ Without money, life becomes difficult, and one cannot easily develop one's character, social relationships, or community projects. By contrast, Stoics seem to think that wealth is something inconsequential to happiness, and that people can play their parts in life equally well, with or without money (see: Epictetus, 1987, s. 17).¹⁵

The Cynic disagrees with Aristotle and agrees with the Stoic that wealth is not necessary for living well. You can find people who live well who do not have money. But the Cynic adds that wealth actively hinders one's life, so Stoics are wrong to be indifferent to it. Instead, Cynics try to convince Stoics that they should oppose wealth because it corrupts character and life. The Cynics would scoff at any Stoic who claimed his wealth did not detract from his happiness, perhaps especially Stoics like Marcus Aurelius (Emperor of Rome) or Seneca (Roman statesman).

To Cynics, Stoics appeared as Cynics who lost their resolve and became complicit tools of the ruling powers. A Stoic, arguing that you need no wealth but availing himself of all its advantages, rings hollow words. But Stoics would say that Cynics are fools for allowing the *status quo* to perturb them. After all, even the Cynics are reported to have said

that true happiness is maintaining calm and cheerfulness in the face of any fate (see: Hard, 2012, s. 106a-c).¹⁶ They both would lambast the other's contemporary descendants of their movements—Stoics largely consisting of casual philosophers writing self-help and secular gospels of prosperity, and Cynics consisting of upper-class (so, not ascetic) academics who speak truth to power only through digital petitions.

But there is no perfect resolution. Sometimes our defining strengths become the tragic flaws that shatter our lives. Stoics can immure themselves from the world's troubles in the fortresses of their minds, but this can render them indifferent to the sufferings of others or the successes of political movements. Aristotelians can develop savvy, and they can work toward institutional reform, but this can lead to complicity in injustice. And Cynics can oppose the powers that be, but in taking issue with all things, they leave no commonalities to find favor, or perhaps even audience, with the powerful.

Remember the Alexander story. Alexander may have considered Diogenes' words, but his life seems to indicate that the lesson did not resonate for long. In fact, there are stories that show Alexander grew to oppose Diogenes. Diogenes once asked Alexander for a drachma, but Alexander said it was too small a gift for a king to give. But when Diogenes revised his request for a talent, Alexander said that amount was improper for a Cynic to request. And beyond quips, Alexander sent a dish full of bones to Diogenes. Diogenes admitted that it was a suitable gift for the Dog, but not something a Great would send (*G.V.*, 96, 104, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 241-2). Maybe, in the end, we must ask ourselves the question that the audience to the exchanges between Alexander and Diogenes did: is moral purity worth the discipline, ridicule, and struggle, or can I live with trying to improve the system, which means occasional cakes and titles but also complicity in some injustice? Either way, our lives will bear out our choices, and people will take notice. If we are lucky, there will be future generations to joke at our expense too.¹⁷

Notes

¹ For brevity, I use standard classicist abbreviations for authors—Diogenes Laertius as “D.L.,” Dio Chrysostom as “D.Chr.,” Plutarch as “Plut.,” *Gnomologium Vaticanum* as “G.V.,” and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as “E.N.” Where possible, I reference Robin Hard's *Diogenes the Cynic* anthology, giving the saying number rather than the page number.

Unless otherwise noted, when I quote Diogenes Laertius, I use Pamela

Possessed: The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure

Mensch's translation. I make one consistent change, however. She often renders *anthrōpos* as "man," whereas I will render it as "human." The Greek is gender-neutral and species-wide. So, I will reflect that. The Greek texts I reference come from the Loeb editions (e.g., D.L., 1925).

² Plato called Diogenes "Socrates gone mad" (D.L., 2018, VI.54).

³ I owe Shane McInnis for first telling me about Plutarch's account, which is similar to my reconstruction (1919, XIV.1-3). The Alexander story is notable for its seeming strategic restraint on the part of Diogenes. Diogenes was capable of more venom, which we know from other anecdotes. We have one story about Alexander specifically. Whenever a nobleman received a letter from Alexander, Diogenes reportedly said, "Wretched message from a wretch to a wretch, carried by a wretch" (D.L., 2018, VI.44). Diogenes also could have hurled insults or smacked Alexander with his staff, as his teacher Antisthenes did whenever Diogenes approached him to study under him (D.L., 2018, VI.21). This harshness is something Edward Corbett calls "the rhetoric of the closed fist," that is "the kind of persuasive activity that seeks to carry its point by non-rational, non-sequential, often non-verbal, frequently provocative means" (1969, p. 288).

⁴ Audrey N. M. Rich observes that *autarkeia* leads to a paradox for the Cynics: on the one hand, the self-sufficient are sub-human, since they descend to the level of animals, but they are also super-human, since they ascend to the level of the divine (1956, p. 24). But, as John Moles notes, Cynics often use paradox to express their core teachings (1983, p. 109). And I think this paradox discounts how much the Cynics loved animals; Diogenes only had dogs as friends, and he was once comforted by a mouse (Hard, 2012, s. 9b). And the only divinity they praised was Hercules, who is half-human. So, I would deflate both sides of the dilemma.

⁵ Diogenes was so anti-possession that he once broke a cup that he carried with him when he saw a child using his hands to scoop water (Hard, 2012, s. 12a-c).

⁶ Dio Chrysostom writes,

When some people urged that it is impossible for humans to live like the animals owing to the tenderness of their flesh and because they are naked and unprotected either by hair, as the majority of beasts are, or by feathers and has no covering of tough skin, he [Diogenes] would say in reply that humans are so very tender because of their mode of life, since, as a rule, they avoid the sun and also avoid the cold. It is not the nakedness of the body that causes the trouble. He would then call attention to the frogs and numerous other animals much more delicate than humans and much less protected, and yet some of them not only withstand the cold air but are even able to live in the coldest water during winter. He also pointed out that the eyes and the face of humans have no need of protection. And, in general, no creature is born in any region that cannot live in it. Else how could the first human beings to be born have survived, there

being no fire, or houses, or clothing, or any other food than that which grew wild? Nay, man's ingenuity and his discovering and contriving so many helps to life had not been altogether advantageous to later generations, since men do not employ their cleverness to promote courage or justice, but to procure pleasure. And so, as they pursue the agreeable at any cost, their life becomes constantly less agreeable and more burdensome. (1932, VI.26-9, see also: X.10)

⁷ This translation is my own. I rendered the Greek *phaulous* as "commoners," but it could also be translated as "useless," "mean," or "bad" people. Being a commoner would have carried negative connotations. And I chose this word because I do not think that Diogenes meant to criticize only a small class of people (as "bad people" might imply). He is trying to make a wide-ranging attack on most people.

⁸ Due to the ascetic elements in Cynic pursuits of happiness, the training and toil are often taken as "short cuts to virtue." V. Emeljanow explains, He who attempts the short cut must first undergo training (*askēsis*). ... In fact, it would be preferable to start *gymnos* ["naked"], i.e. stripped of all that hinders the prospective climber. Like the approach that Lucian rejects, it involves toil and thirst, and therefore, requires toughness and endurance. Nevertheless, it is much shorter and the climber finds that his goal transmutes his apparent hardships into pleasures. ... The road to Cynic happiness is non-doctrinal. 'Doctrine' in fact hinders the man who seeks happiness since it wastes time by leading him along a winding side-track. ... The Cynic was only concerned with happiness attainable in this life and not in the ultimate *eudaimonia* that might come after the final dissolution and separation of the soul from the trammels of the body. (1965, p. 184)

⁹ Epictetus criticized Diogenes' displays, not for their extremity but for their publicness (Epictetus, 1983, s. 47). Also worth mentioning, Diogenes would upset prostitutes so that he could practice getting insulted (D.L., 2018, VI.90).

¹⁰ Cynic exercises were tied intimately to Cynic metaphilosophy. Diogenes argued that good philosophers ought to provoke you, and only tepid philosophers (like Plato) could 'philosophize' without making people uncomfortable (Plut., On Moral Virtue 12, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 122). He thought everyone should undergo philosophical training. For example, whenever someone claimed to be bad at philosophy, he confronted him, saying, "Then why do you live, if it's not your concern to live well" (D.L., 2018, VI.65)? Philosophy and its exercises train you for every fortune (D.L., 2018, VI.63). And since it is easy to dine on confections, philosophy especially prepares you for misfortune. After all, misfortune happens to all of us sometimes, and some of us often. Fortune, not so much.

¹¹ This is oversimplified. The cake-eating example shows that some conventional things might be pleasant, but I think there is a deep suspicion

Possessed: The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure

of pleasure by Cynics. What would it mean to eat a cake “not like the rest of humankind”? I think that likely means that Cynics do not enjoy cake like we do. There might be fleeting moments of first-order joy, but they never overshadow the second-order evaluation. Convention and its products require constant vigilance.

In conversation, Lucy Vollbrecht suggested that we could take Diogenes’ identity with dogs seriously. Dogs devour treats, but they do not ruminate or pursue them further. Moreover, they do not have detailed theories about which treats are best. Just like the wine in Diogenes’ sayings (D.L., 2018, VI.54), the best cakes are someone else’s. I find this account plausible as well.

¹² In Book IX of *Republic*, Plato also details the paranoia of tyrants. Their paranoia explains why they often turn on those closest to them and amass large armies of mercenaries. Plato also expresses the danger of vast wealth inequality, which leads to the devolution of oligarchy and democracy into tyranny. In many ways, the worst theoretical problems of *Republic* spawn from Glaucon’s rejection of Socrates’ original proposal to live in a simple city. Glaucon calls the simple city a “city of pigs” and insists on luxury (2004, 372d). This luxury leads to border and resource expansion, a large army, intricate classes, and the need to safeguard against the consolidation of wealth and power. And in the end, Plato seems to say it could never work in the real world anyway (546a). Perhaps the Cynics would reject the simple city too, not because it was too simple, but because it was not simple enough.

¹³ All Cynics lived ascetically. But many of them fell into poverty involuntarily. Diogenes was exiled for manipulating currency, and Dio Chrysostom (when he lived as a Cynic) was exiled due to political enemies. Relatedly, Metrocles became a Cynic after he shamed himself by farting in public (D.L., 2018, VI.94-5).

¹⁴ Aristotle seems to be one of the few philosophers who bested Diogenes in battles of wit. One story recounts how Diogenes offered some figs to Aristotle, who guessed that he had a scornful joke prepared for him if he refused the figs. So, Aristotle took them, and said that Diogenes “lost his quip along with his figs” (D.L., 2018, V.18). This, of course, never stopped Diogenes from insulting Aristotle. He famously said that Diogenes can eat whenever Diogenes wants, but Aristotle must eat whenever the Emperor, whom he serves, wants (Plut., *On Exile*, 12, qtd. Hard, 2012, s. 235).

¹⁵ Stoics sometimes try to assign goods like wealth to an intermediate class of things. Wealth is not an ethical good like virtue, but it is not an ethical bad. Its goodness is some other type. The intermediate class is called “preferred indifferents,” and it is a controversial distinction to make among Stoics. Somehow things like health, wealth, and honor are good or preferable, but not in an ethical way. For an early discussion on what this means, see: Cicero (1931, III.16). Stoics like Epictetus seem of two minds about this too. For example, *The Handbook* indicates that someone should play their role well, whether poor or wealthy (1987, s. 17), but *The Handbook* also says that the god-like not only remain indifferent to luxuries but also actively refuse them (s. 15).

The slight difference between the Cynic and Stoic positions, no doubt, is

influenced by the proximity of each tradition to the other. Crates, a Cynic student of Diogenes, taught Zeno of Citium, who many argue is the founder of Stoicism. And even though some later Stoics lived decadent lives, Zeno himself maintained the ascetic traditions of his Cynic teacher.

¹⁶ Andreas Elpidorou asked me whether the Cynics were actually angry whenever they criticized the *status quo*. He argued that trolls might inspire anger in others, as Diogenes did many times. But that this behavior does not imply that Diogenes himself was angry.

Unfortunately, there is no clear answer, as there are conflicting reports. Several passages say that Diogenes championed a calm, stress-free, joyful spirit in the face of everything (see: Hard, 2012, s. 106a-c). Some passages say that, like a dog, Diogenes would growl at or bite evil, but not out of anger, only to keep evil at a distance and correct it (s. 95). And yet other sayings attribute anger directly to him, as when scolding religious hypocrites or tyrants enjoying luxury (s. 195, 251a). But none of these statements are as clear as Aristotle arguing that anger is an emotion of a properly attuned psychology to slights or injustice (*E.N.*, 2019, IV.5), or as Seneca arguing that anger corrupts one's psychology and life (2008, "On Anger").

¹⁷ Anything I get right in this paper is due in large part to Scott F. Aikin, who spent the summer of 2021 reading the Cynics with me, enduring my frenzied text messages, and tolerating my bizarre and abrasive sense of humor. Similarly, I owe many friends for helping me to refine the ideas here, most notably Karl Aho and Noah Greenstein. Many chatters on Twitch also bantered with me to help me focus my ideas.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. (2019) *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3rd edition. Terence Irwin (trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Cashen, Matthew. (2012) The Ugly, The Lonely, and the Lowly: Aristotle on Happiness and the External Goods. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29(1): 1-19.
- Cicero. (1931) *De Finibus*. H. Rackham (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Corbett, Edward P. J. (1969) The Rhetoric of the Open Hand and the Rhetoric of the Closed Fist. *College Composition and Communication* 20(5): 288-96.
- Desmond, William D. (2006) *The Greek Praise of Poverty: Origins of Ancient Cynicism*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame.
- Diogenes Laertius. (1925) *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Volume II, Books 6-10. R.D. Hicks (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- . (2018) *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. Pamela Mensch (trans.). Oxford: Oxford.
- Dio Chrysostom. (1932) *Discourses 1-11*. J.W. Cohoon (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Emeljanow, V. (1965) A Note on the Cynic Short Cut to Happiness. *Mnemosyne* 8(2): 182-4.

Possessed: The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure

- Epictetus. (1987) *The Handbook*. Nicholas P. White (trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Hard, Robin. (2012) *Diogenes the Cynic: Sayings and Anecdotes with Other Popular Moralists*. Oxford: Oxford.
- Moles, John. (1983) 'Honestius Quam Ambitiosius'? An Exploration of the Cynic's Attitude to Moral Corruption in His Fellow Men. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* (103): 103-23.
- Plato. (2004) *Republic*. C. D. C. Reeve (trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Plutarch. (1919) *Lives*. Vol. VII. Bernadotte Perrin (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Rich, Audrey N. M. (1956) The Cynic Conception of Autarkeia. *Mnemosyne* 9(1): 23-9.
- Seneca. (2008) *Dialogues and Essays*. John Davie (trans.). Oxford: Oxford.