

## THE LIVES AND OPINIONS OF EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS

By Diogenes Laertius, translated by C.D. Yonge\*

### Life of Diogenes

I. DIOGENES was a native of Sinope, the son of Tresius, a money-changer. And Diocles says that he was forced to flee from his native city, as his father kept the public bank there, and had adulterated the coinage. But Eubulides, in his essay on Diogenes, says, that it was Diogenes himself who did this, and that he was banished with his father. And, indeed, he himself, in his *Perdalus*, says of himself that he had adulterated the public money. Others say that he was one of the curators, and was persuaded by the artisans employed, and that he went to Delphi, or else to the oracle at Delos, and there consulted Apollo as to whether he should do what people were trying to persuade him to do; and that, as the God gave him permission to do so, Diogenes, not comprehending that the God meant that he might change the political customs<sup>1</sup> of his country if he could, adulterated the coinage; and being detected, was banished, as some people say, but as other accounts have it, took the alarm and fled away of his own accord. Some again, say that he adulterated the money which he had received from his father; and that his father was thrown into prison and died there; but that Diogenes escaped and went to Delphi, and asked, not whether he might tamper with the coinage, but what he could do to become very celebrated, and that in consequence he received the oracular answer which I have mentioned.

II. And when he came to Athens he attached himself to Antisthenes; but as he repelled him, because he admitted no one; he at last forced his way to him by his pertinacity. And once, when he raised his stick at him, he put his head under it, and said, "Strike, for you will not find any stick hard enough to drive me away as long as you continue to speak." And from this time forth he was one of his pupils; and being an exile, he naturally betook himself to a simple mode of life.

III. And when, as Theophrastus tells us, in his *Megaric Philosopher*, he saw a mouse running about and not seeking for a bed, nor taking care to keep in the

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\*Based on text available on Peithō's Web (<http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes>), from *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, by Diogenes Laertius, literally translated by C.D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853).

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<sup>1</sup>The passage is not free from difficulty; but the thing which misled Diogenes appears to have been that *nomisma*, the word here used, meant both "a coin, or coinage," and "a custom."

dark, nor looking for any of those things which appear enjoyable to such an animal, he found a remedy for his own poverty. He was, according to the account of some people, the first person who doubled up his cloak out of necessity, and who slept in it; and who carried a wallet, in which he kept his food; and who used whatever place was near for all sorts of purposes, eating, and sleeping, and conversing in it. In reference to which habit he used to say, pointing to the Colonnade of Jupiter, and to the Public Magazine, “that the Athenians had built him places to live in.” Being attacked with illness, he supported himself with a staff; and after that he carried it continually, not indeed in the city, but whenever he was walking in the roads, together with his wallet, as Olympiodorus, the chief man of the Athenians tells us; and Polymeter, the orator, and Lysanias, the son of Aeschorion, tell the same story.

When he had written to some one to look out and get ready a small house for him, as he delayed to do it, he took a cask which he found in the Temple of Cybele, for his house, as he himself tells us in his letters. And during the summer he used to roll himself in the warm sand, but in winter he would embrace statues all covered with snow, practising himself, on every occasion, to endure anything.

IV. He was very violent in expressing his haughty disdain of others. He said that the *scholē* (school) of Euclides was *cholē* (gall). And he used to call Plato’s *diatribē* (discussions) *katatribē* (disguise). It was also a saying of his that the Dionysian games were a great marvel to fools; and that the demagogues were the ministers of the multitude. He used likewise to say, “that when in the course of his life he beheld pilots, and physicians, and philosophers, he thought man the wisest of all animals; but when again he beheld interpreters of dreams, and soothsayers, and those who listened to them, and men puffed up with glory or riches, then he thought that there was not a more foolish animal than man.” Another of his sayings was, “that he thought a man ought oftener to provide himself with a reason than with a halter.” On one occasion, when he noticed Plato at a very costly entertainment tasting some olives, he said, “O you wise man! why, after having sailed to Sicily for the sake of such a feast, do you not now enjoy what you have before you?” And Plato replied, “By the Gods, Diogenes, while I was there I ate olives and all such things a great deal.” Diogenes rejoined, “What then did you want to sail to Syracuse for? Did not Attica at that time produce any olives?” But Favorinus, in his *Universal History*, tells this story of Aristippus. At another time he was eating dried figs, when Plato met him, and he said to him, “You may have a share of these;” and as he took some and ate them, he said, “I said that you might have a share of them, not that you might eat them all.” On one occasion Plato had invited some friends who had come to him from Dionysius to a banquet, and Diogenes trampled on his carpets, and said, “Thus I trample on the empty pride

of Plato;” and Plato made him answer, “How much arrogance are you displaying, O Diogenes! when you think that you are not arrogant at all.” But, as others tell the story, Diogenes said, “Thus I trample on the pride of Plato;” and that Plato rejoined, “With quite as much pride yourself, O Diogenes.” [ . . . ] On one occasion, when no one came to listen to him while he was discoursing seriously, he began to whistle. And then when people flocked round him, he reproached them for coming with eagerness to folly, but being lazy and indifferent about good things. One of his frequent sayings was, “That men contended with one another in punching and kicking, but that no one showed any emulation in the pursuit of virtue.” He used to express his astonishment at the grammarians for being desirous to learn everything about the misfortunes of Ulysses, and being ignorant of their own. He used also to say, “That the musicians fitted the strings to the lyre properly, but left all the habits of their soul ill-arranged.” And, “That mathematicians kept their eyes fixed on the sun and moon, and overlooked what was under their feet.” “That orators were anxious to speak justly, but not at all about acting so.” Also, “That misers blamed money, but were preposterously fond of it.” He often condemned those who praise the just for being superior to money, but who at the same time are eager themselves for great riches. He was also very indignant at seeing men sacrifice to the Gods to procure good health, and yet at the sacrifice eating in a manner injurious to health. He often expressed his surprise at slaves, who, seeing their masters eating in a gluttonous manner, still do not themselves lay hands on any of the eatables. He would frequently praise those who were about to marry, and yet did not marry; or who were about to take a voyage, and yet did not take a voyage; or who were about to engage in affairs of state, and did not do so; and those who were about to rear children, yet did not rear any; and those who were preparing to take up their abode with princes, and yet did not take it up. One of his sayings was, “That one ought to hold out one’s hand to a friend without closing the fingers.”

Hermippus, in his *Sale of Diogenes*, says that he was taken prisoner and put up to be sold, and asked what he could do; and he answered, “Govern men.” And so he bade the crier “give notice that if any one wants to purchase a master, there is one here for him.” When he was ordered not to sit down; “It makes no difference,” said he, “for fish are sold, be where they may.” He used to say, that he wondered at men always ringing a dish or jar before buying it, but being content to judge of a man by his look alone. When Xenias bought him, he said to him that he ought to obey him even though he was his slave; for that a physician or a pilot would find men to obey them even though they might be slaves.

V. And Eubulus says, in his essay entitled, *The Sale of Diogenes*, that he taught the children of Xenias, after their other lessons, to ride, and shoot, and sling, and

dart. And then in the Gymnasium he did not permit the trainer to exercise them after the fashion of athletes, but exercised them himself to just the degree sufficient to give them a good colour and good health. And the boys retained in their memory many sentences of poets and prose writers, and of Diogenes himself; and he used to give them a concise statement of everything in order to strengthen their memory; and at home he used to teach them to wait upon themselves, contenting themselves with plain food, and drinking water. And he accustomed them to cut their hair close, and to eschew ornament, and to go without tunics or shoes, and to keep silent, looking at nothing except themselves as they walked along. He used, also to take them out hunting; and they paid the greatest attention and respect to Diogenes himself, and spoke well of him to their parents.

VI. [...] Once, when a man had conducted him into a magnificent house, and had told him that he must not spit, after hawking a little, he spit in his face, saying that he could not find a worse place. But some tell this story of Aristippus. Once, he called out, "Holloa, men." And when some people gathered round him in consequence he drove them away with his stick, saying, "I called men, and not dregs." This anecdote I have derived from Hecaton, in the first book of his *Apophthegms*. They also relate that Alexander said that if he had not been Alexander, he should have liked to be Diogenes. [...]

Once, when he was invited to a banquet, he said that he would not come: for that the day before no one had thanked him for coming. He used to go bare foot through the snow, and to do a number of other things which have been already mentioned. Once he attempted to eat raw meat, but he could not digest it. [...] He used to say, that he imitated the teachers of choruses, for that they spoke too loud in order that the rest might catch the proper tone. Another of his sayings, was that most men were within a finger's breadth of being mad. If, then, any one were to walk along, stretching out his middle finger, he will seem to be mad; but if he puts out his fore finger, he will not be thought so. Another of his sayings was, that things of great value were often sold for nothing, and vice versa. [...]

On one occasion he saw a child drinking out of its hands, and so he threw away the cup which belonged to his wallet, saying, "That child has beaten me in simplicity." He also threw away his spoon, after seeing a boy, when he had broken his vessel, take up his lentils with a crust of bread. And he used to argue thus, — "Everything belongs to the gods; and wise men are the friends of the gods. All things are in common among friends; therefore everything belongs to wise men." Once he saw a woman falling down before the Gods in an unbecoming attitude; he, wishing to cure her of her superstition, as Zoilus of Perga tells us, came up to her, and said, "Are you not afraid, O woman, to be in such an indecent attitude, when some God may be behind you, for every place is full of him?" He consecrated a man

to Aesculapius, who was to run up and beat all these who prostrated themselves with their faces to the ground. [...] Once, while he was sitting in the sun in the Craneum, Alexander was standing by, and said to him, "Ask any favour you choose of me." And he replied, "Cease to shade me from the sun." [...] A man once proved to him syllogistically that he had horns, so he put his hand to his forehead and said, "I do not see them." And in a similar manner he replied to one who had been asserting that there was no such thing as motion, by getting up and walking away. [...] When Plato called him a dog, he said, "Undoubtedly, for I have come back to those who sold me."

Plato defined man thus: "Man is a two-footed, featherless animal;" and was much praised for the definition; so Diogenes plucked a cock and brought it into his school, and said, "This is Plato's man." On which account this addition was made to the definition, "With broad flat nails." [...] A man once struck him with a beam, and then said, "Take care." "What," said he, "are you going to strike me again?" [...] Having lighted a candle in the day time, he said, "I am looking for a man." On one occasion he stood under a fountain, and as the bystanders were pitying him, Plato, who was present, said to them, "If you wish really to show your pity for him, come away;" intimating that he was only acting thus out of a desire for notoriety. [...]

When Lysias, the drug-seller, asked him whether he thought that there were any Gods: "How," said he, "can I help thinking so, when I consider you to be hated by them?" but some attribute this reply to Theodorus. Once he saw a man purifying himself by washing, and said to him, "Oh, wretched man, do not you know that as you cannot wash away blunders in grammar by purification, so, too, you can no more efface the errors of a life in that same manner?" [...]

He was greatly beloved by the Athenians; accordingly, when a youth had broken his cask they beat him, and gave Diogenes another. [...] He used constantly to repeat with emphasis that an easy life had been given to man by the Gods, but that it had been overlaid by their seeking for honey, cheese-cakes, and unguents, and things of that sort. On which account he said to a man, who had his shoes put on by his servant, "You are not thoroughly happy, unless he also wipes your nose for you; and he will do this, if you are crippled in your hands." On one occasion, when he had seen the *hieromnēmones*<sup>2</sup> leading off one of the stewards who had stolen a goblet, he said, "The great thieves are carrying off the little thief." [...]

On one occasion he was working with his hands [i.e., masturbating] in the market-place, and said, "I wish I could rub my stomach in the same way, and so

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<sup>2</sup>The *hieromnēmones* were the sacred secretaries or recorders sent by each Amphictyonic state to the council along with their *pulagoras*, (the actual deputy or minister, L. & S. Gr. & Eng. Lex., in voc.)

avoid hunger.” [...] Once at a banquet, some of the guests threw him bones, as if he had been a dog; so he, as he went away, put up his leg against them [i.e., urinated on them] as if he had been a dog in reality. [...]

A man once reproached [i.e., insulted] him with his banishment, and his answer was, “You wretched man, that is what made me a philosopher.” And when, on another occasion, some one said to him, “The people of Sinope condemned you to banishment,” he replied, “And I condemned them to remain where they were.” [...]

When he was asked whether he had any girl or boy [i.e., slave] to wait on him, he said, “No.” And as his questioner asked further, “If then you die, who will bury you?” He replied, “Whoever wants my house.” [...] When Plato was discoursing about his “ideas,” and using the nouns “tableness” and “cupness;” “I, O Plato!” interrupted Diogenes, “see a table and a cup, but I see no tableness or cupness.” Plato made answer, “That is natural enough, for you have eyes, by which a cup and a table are contemplated; but you have not intellect, by which tableness and cupness are seen.” On being asked by somebody, “What sort of a man do you consider Diogenes to be?” “A Socrates gone mad,” said he [i.e., Plato]. [Note: in the previous two sentences, I have substituted R.D. Hicks’ translation for Yonge’s.] [...]

When he was asked what sort of a dog he was, he replied, “When hungry, I am a dog of Melita; when satisfied, a Molossian; a sort which most of those who praise, do not like to take out hunting with them; because of the labour of keeping up with them; and in like manner, you cannot associate with me, from fear of the pain I give you.” The question was put to him, whether wise men ate cheese-cakes, and he replied, “They eat everything, just as the rest of mankind.” When asked why people give to beggars and not to philosophers, he said, “Because they think it possible that they themselves may become lame and blind, but they do not expect ever to turn out philosophers.” [...] When some one reproached him for having tampered with the coinage, he said, “There was a time when I was such a person as you are now; but there never was when you were such as I am now, and never will be.” [...] Being once reproached for eating in the market-place, he made answer, “I did, for it was in the market-place that I was hungry.” Some authors also attribute the following repartee to him. Plato saw him washing vegetables, and so, coming up to him, he quietly accosted him thus, “If you had paid court to Dionysius you would not have been washing vegetables.” “And,” he replied, with equal quietness, “if you had washed vegetables, you would never have paid court to Dionysius.” [Dionysius was the tyrant of Syracuse; Plato had become rich by associating with him.] When a man said to him once, “Most people laugh at you;” “And very likely,” he replied, “the asses laugh at them; but they do not regard the

asses, neither do I regard them.” [ . . . ]

A certain person was admiring the offerings in the temple at Samothrace,<sup>3</sup> and he said to him, “They would have been much more numerous, if those who were lost had offered them instead of those who were saved;” but some attribute this speech to Diagoras the Thelian. [ . . . ] He was begging once of a very ill-tempered man, and as he said to him, “If you can persuade me, I will give you something;” he replied, “If I could persuade you, I would beg you to hang yourself.” [ . . . ]

Once Alexander the Great came and stood by him, and said, “I am Alexander, the great king.” “And I,” said he, “am Diogenes the dog.” And when he was asked to what actions of his it was owing that he was called a dog, he said, “Because I fawn upon those who give me anything, and bark at those who give me nothing, and bite the rogues.” [ . . . ] The question was put to him what countryman he was, and he replied, “A Citizen of the world” (*kosmopolitēs*). Some men were sacrificing to the Gods to prevail on them to send them sons, and he said, “And do you not sacrifice to procure sons of a particular character?” [ . . . ] When a man said to him, “I am not calculated for philosophy,” he said, “Why then do you live, if you have no desire to live properly?” [ . . . ] A man once struck him with a broom, and said, “Take care;” so he struck him in return with his staff, and said, “Take care.” [ . . . ]

Once he was reproached for asking favours, while Plato never asked for any; and he said

He asks as well as I do, but he does it  
Bending his head, that no one else may hear.

One day he saw an unskilful archer shooting; so he went and sat down by the target, saying, “Now I shall be out of harm’s way.” [ . . . ] When Alexander was once standing by him, and saying, “Do not you fear me?” He replied, “No; for what are you, a good or an evil?” And as he said that he was good, “Who, then,” said Diogenes, “fears the good?” [ . . . ]

On one occasion he was asked, what was the most excellent thing among men; and he said, “Freedom of speech.” [ . . . ] He was in the habit of doing everything in public, whether in respect of Venus or Ceres; and he used to put his conclusions in this way to people: “If there is nothing absurd in dining, then it is not absurd to dine in the market-place. But it is not absurd to dine, therefore it is not absurd to dine in the market-place.” And as he was continually doing manual work [i.e., masturbating] in public, he said one day, “Would that by rubbing my belly I could

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<sup>3</sup>The Samothracian Gods were Gods of the sea, and it was customary for those who had been saved from shipwreck to make them an offering of some part of what they had saved; and of their hair, if they had saved nothing but their lives.

get rid of hunger.” Other sayings also are attributed to him, which it would take a long time to enumerate, there is such a multiplicity of them. [ . . . ]

This used to be the language which he held, and he used to show in practice, really altering men’s habits, and deferring in all things rather to the principles of nature than to those of law; saying that he was adopting the same fashion of life as Hercules had, preferring nothing in the world to liberty; and saying that everything belonged to the wise, and advancing arguments such as I mentioned just above. For instance: every thing belongs to the Gods; and the Gods are friends to the wise; and all the property of friends is held in common; therefore everything belong to the wise. [ . . . ] Another of his doctrines was that all women ought to be possessed in common; and he said that marriage was a nullity, and that the proper way would be for every man to live with her whom he could persuade to agree with him. And on the same principle he said, that all people’s sons ought to belong to every one in common; and there was nothing intolerable in the idea of taking anything out of a temple, or eating any animal whatever, and that there was no impiety in tasting even human flesh; as is plain from the habits of foreign nations; and he said that this principle might be correctly extended to every case and every people. For he said that in reality everything was a combination of all things. For that in bread there was meat, and in vegetables there was bread, and so there were some particles of all other bodies in everything, communicating by invisible passages and evaporating. [ . . . ]

VIII. Music and geometry, and astronomy, and all things of that kind, he neglected, as useless and unnecessary. But he was a man very happy in meeting arguments, as is plain from what we have already said. [ . . . ]

X. And the man had the gift of persuasion in a wonderful degree; so that he could easily overcome any one by his arguments. Accordingly, it is said that an Aeginetan of the name of Onesicritus, having two sons, sent to Athens one of them, whose name was Androsthene, and that he, after having heard Diogenes lecture, remained there; and that after that, he sent the elder, Philiscus, who has been already mentioned, and that Philiscus was charmed in the same manner. And last of all, he came himself, and then he too remained, no less than his son, studying philosophy at the feet of Diogenes. So great a charm was there in the discourses of Diogenes. Another pupil of his was Phocion, who was surnamed the Good; and Stilpon, the Megarian, and a great many other men of eminence as statesmen.

XI. He is said to have died when he was nearly ninety years of age, but there are different accounts given of his death. For some say that he ate an ox’s foot raw, and was in consequence seized with a bilious attack, of which he died; others, of whom Cercidas, a Megalopolitan or Cretan, is one, say that he died of holding his breath for several days; and Cercidas speaks thus of him in his *Meliambics*:

He, that Sinopian who bore the stick,  
Wore his cloak doubled, and in th' open air  
Dined without washing, would not bear with life  
A moment longer: but he shut his teeth,  
And held his breath. He truly was the son  
Of Jove, and a most heavenly-minded dog,  
The wise Diogenes.

Others say that he, while intending to distribute a polypus [i.e., octopus] to his dogs, was bitten by them through the tendon of his foot, and so died. But his own greatest friends, as Antisthenes tells us in his *Successions*, rather sanction the story of his having died from holding his breath. For he used to live in the Craneum, which was a Gymnasium at the gates of Corinth. And his friends came according to their custom, and found him with his head covered; and as they did not suppose that he was asleep, for he was not a man much subject to the influence of night or sleep, they drew away his cloak from his face, and found him no longer breathing; and they thought that he had done this on purpose, wishing to escape the remaining portion of his life.

On this there was a quarrel, as they say, between his friends, as to who should bury him and they even came to blows; but when the elders and chief men of the city came there, they say that he was buried by them at the gate which leads to the Isthmus, And they placed over him a pillar, and on that a dog in Parian marble. And at a later period his fellow citizens honoured him with brazen statues, and put this inscription on them:

E'en brass by lapse of time doth old become,  
But there is no such time as shall efface,  
Your lasting glory, wise Diogenes;  
Since you alone did teach to men the art  
Of a contented life: the surest path  
To glory and a lasting happiness. [ . . . ]

Some, however, say that when he was dying, he ordered his friends to throw his corpse away without burying it, so that every beast might tear it, or else to throw it into a ditch, and sprinkle a little dust over it. And others say that his injunctions were, that he should be thrown into the Ilissus; that so he might be useful to his brethren. But Demetrius, in his treatise *On Men of the Same Name*, says that Diogenes died in Corinth the same day that Alexander died in Babylon. And he was already an old man, as early as the hundred and thirteenth Olympiad,

XII. The following books are attributed to him. The dialogues entitled the *Cephalion*; the *Icthyas*; the *Jackdaw*; the *Leopard*; the *People of the Athenians*; the

*Republic*; one called *Moral Art*; one *On Wealth*; one *On Love*; the *Theodorus*; the *Hypsias*; the *Aristarchus*; one *On Death*; a volume of *Letters*; seven tragedies, the *Helen*, the *Thyestes*, the *Hercules*, the *Achilles*, the *Medea*, the *Chrysippus*, and the *Oedippus*.

But Sosicrates, in the first book of his *Successions*, and Satyrus, in the fourth book of his *Lives*, both assert that none of all these are the genuine composition of Diogenes. [...]

XIII. There were five persons of the name of Diogenes. The first a native of Apollonia, a natural philosopher; and the beginning of his treatise *On Natural Philosophy* is as follows: "It appears to me to be well for every one who commences any kind of philosophical treatise, to lay down some undeniable principle to start with." The second was a Sicyonian, who wrote an account of Peloponnesus. The third was the man of whom we have been speaking. The fourth was a Stoic, a native of Seleucia, but usually called a Babylonian, from the proximity of Seleucia to Babylon. The fifth was a native of Tarsus, who wrote on the subject of some questions concerning poetry which he endeavours to solve.

XIV. Athenodorus, in the eighth book of his *Conversations*, says, that the philosopher always had a shining appearance, from his habit of anointing himself.