Diogenes

Gentrain
Stephanie Spoto

Diogenes the Cynic (412/404 BCE - 323 BCE)

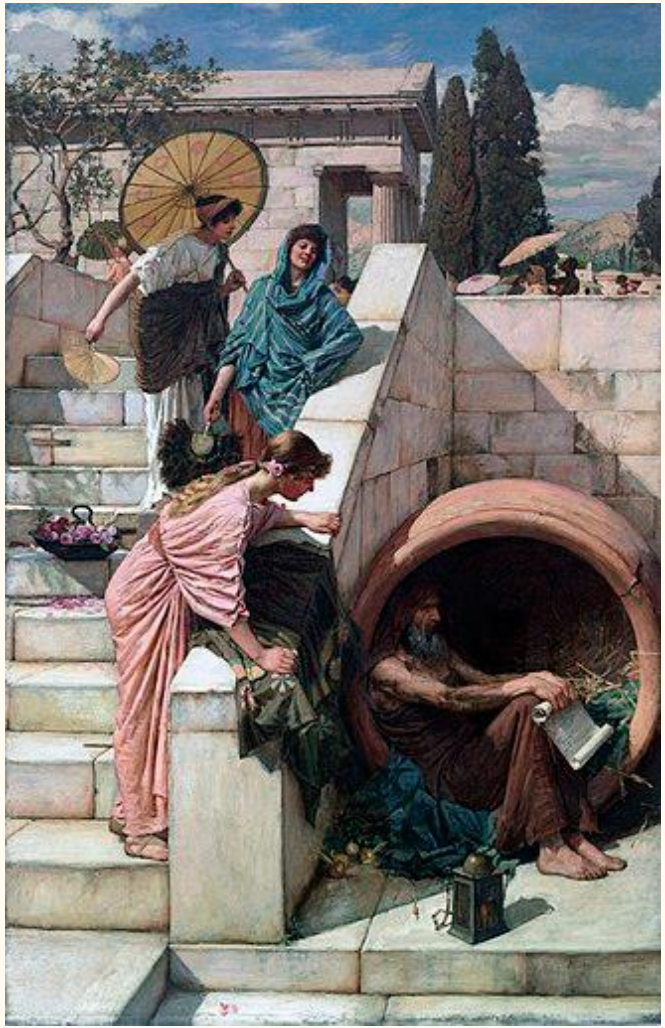
- Diogenes the Cynic or Diogenes of Sinope → one of the founders of the philosophy of Cynicism
- Born Ionian colony (Sinope) and died in Corinth
- Controversial figure in his lifetime and still today
- Exiled or fled from Sinope after debasement of currency
- Fled with his father to Athens and ended up in Athens → here Diogenes criticized many social norms

What Diogenes is known for

- Hero of Heracles: virtue better expressed in action than in theory (inspiration to Diogenes)
- Simple lifestyle used to criticize cultural values → saw many institutions as corrupt and saw society as confused
- Gained reputation for unconventional lifestyle:
  - Slept and ate wherever he chose → usually large ceramic jar in the market place
  - Made a virtue of poverty
  - Begged for a living
- Tried to toughen himself against nature
- Never claimed loyalty to one place → first to call himself a cosmopolitan
- Became known as the “faithful hound” of Antisthenes (whom he saw as the true inheritor of Socrates, not Plato)
- Known for carrying lamp in daytime, looking for an “honest man” ("ἄνθρωπον ζητῶ")
- Hated and criticized Plato and his interpretation of Socrates
  - Would sabotage Plato’s lectures by bringing food and eating
- At some point, captured and sold by pirates, settling in Corinth

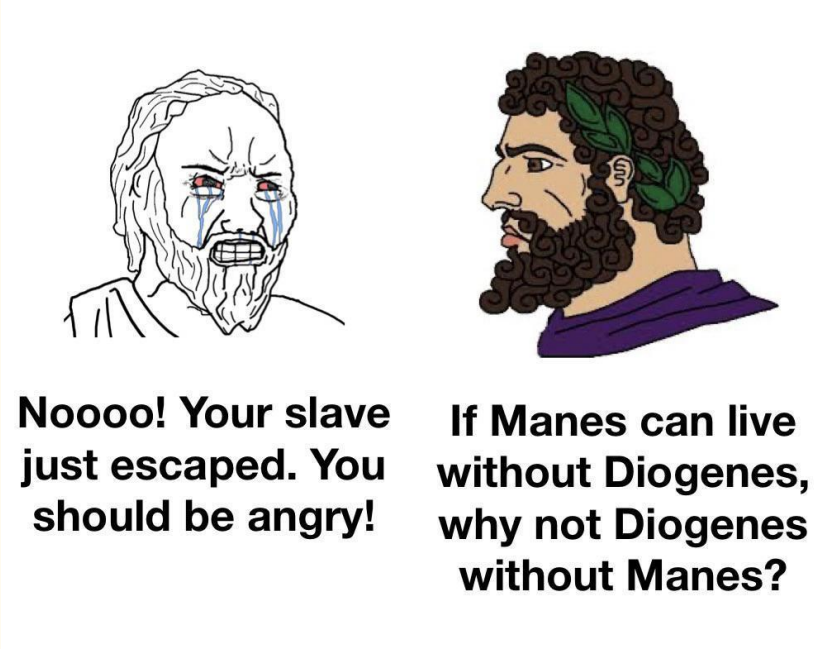
What survives

- After arrives in Corinth he passes his philosophy of Cynicism to Crates who taught it to Zeno of Citium
- This became the school of Stoicism, one of the most long lasting philosophical schools
- No writings of Diogenes survive
    - Some details survive of his life and philosophy from anecdotes recorded in Diogenes Laertius book's *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*



Defacement of Philosophy

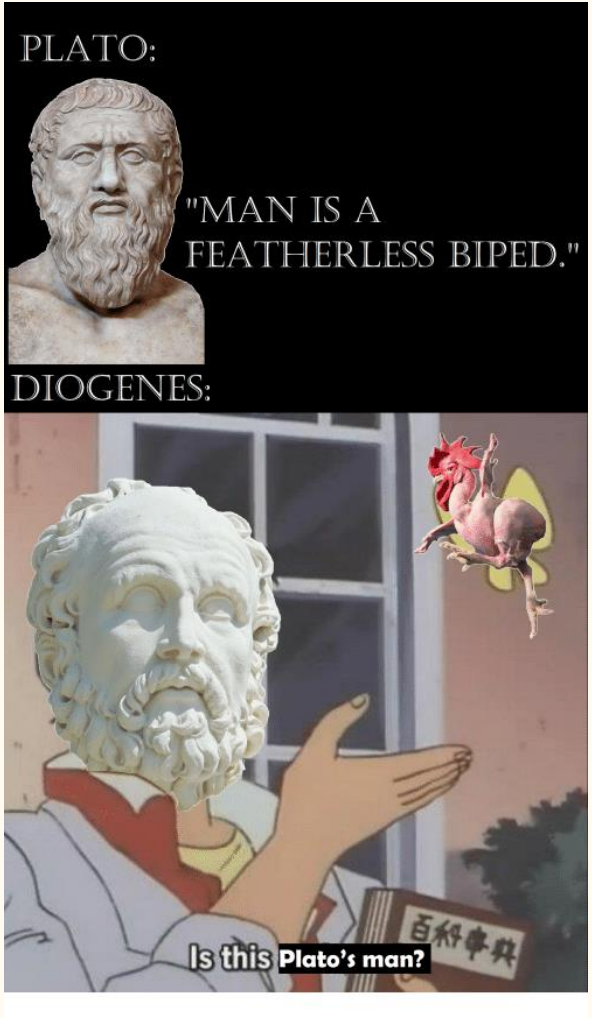
- Oracle of Delphi instructs Diogenes to “deface the currency” → after the chaos on Sinope, Diogenes reinterprets this oracle to mean that he should deface political currency → makes this his life’s goal in Athens
- Claimed that people are not really troubled about the true nature of evil, but instead lean on customary interpretations
- When he arrives in Athens he has a slave who abandons Diogenes: “If Manes can live without Diogenes, why not Diogenes without Manes?”
- Mocked relations of dependency → esp. the figure of the Master who could do nothing



Asceticism

- Attracted by the ascetic philosophy of Socrates's student, Antisthenes (claimed he was the true inheritor of Socrates)
- Diogenes surpassed his master in fame and in austerity
- Diogenes saw his own asceticism a contrast to Athenian behaviors and is critical of them
- Saw his own behaviors as commentary on what he understood as vanity and artificiality of Athenian life

- These stories show the logical consistency of his character
- Destroyed the single wood bowl he had when he saw a peasant boy drink from the cup of his hands
    - “Fool that I am, I have been carrying superfluous baggage all this time!”
- Not the custom to eat in the marketplace, but of course he would
- Plato gave the definition of man as “featherless bipeds”, so Diogenes plucked a chicken of feathers and brought it to Plato’s Academy: “Behold your man!” (The Academy then added “with broad flat nails” to the definition)
- Diogenes would masturbate, spit, urinate in public



Featherless
Biped
THIS IS A MAN

Sold into slavery

- Captured by pirates on voyage to Aegina, sold into slavery on Crete to Xeniades
- Diogenes asked his trade: “I have no trade but governing men. Sell me to a man who needs a master”
- Brought to Corinth to tutor Xenaides’s two sons
    - Stories differ. Some claim he was set free after become muched loved by the family. Some say he was set free almost immediately. Some said he lectured to large audiences in Corinth at festivals.
- Apparently, he also took to living in a jar in Corinth:

A report that Philip was marching on the town had thrown all Corinth into a bustle; one was furbishing his arms, another wheeling stones, a third patching the wall, a fourth strengthening a battlement, every one making himself useful somehow or other. Diogenes having nothing to do—of course no one thought of giving him a job—was moved by the sight to gather up his philosopher's cloak and begin rolling his tub-dwelling energetically up and down the Craneum; an acquaintance asked, and got, the explanation: "I do not want to be thought the only idler in such a busy multitude; I am rolling my tub to be like the rest." - Lucian of Samosata

Diogenes and Alexander

- Diogenes met Alexander the Great in Corinth

Two stories:

- Diogenes in the sunshine
- Diogenes compares Alexander to a slave near a pile of bones:
  - "I am searching for the bones of your father but cannot distinguish them from those of a slave."

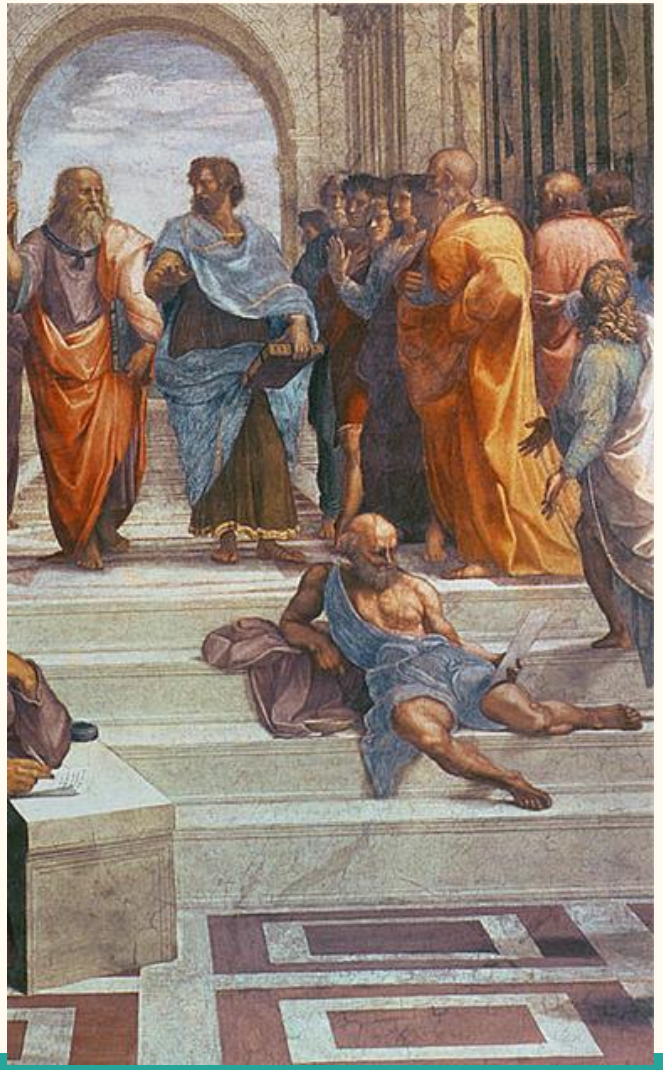
- Along with Antisthenes and Crates, Diogenes considered the founder of Cynicism
- Ideas of Diogenes must be arrived at indirectly → no writings of Diogenes survive (though stories claim he wrote over 10 books and several tragedies)
- Ideas of cynicism related to the practice → we understand his philosophy through his life choices
- Developments of technology and society are incompatible with human happiness and morality which thrives under simplicity of life and nature: “Humans have complicated every simple gift of the gods”
- His claim of being cosmopolitan was radical in a world where identity was tied to citizenship of particular city-state

Diogenes is “a Socrates gone mad”

- Diogenes held intense dislike for Plato and all of his philosophy → considering it too abstract to be useful
- Diogenes saw the true heir of Socrates to be Antisthenes, shared Socrates’s love of virtue and indifference to wealth and general opinion
- Diogenes believed that, like Socrates, he could be a doctor of men’s souls to help them become moral → could simultaneously be annoyed at their obtuseness
- Plato: Diogenes is a “Socrates gone mad”

Teaching by example

- Happiness, virtue, wisdom belongs to person independent of society → believed civilization to be regressive
- Scorned family, socio-political organization, property rights, fame, human decency
    - Ate in the marketplace, urinated on someone who disagreed with him, pointed at people with his middle finger
- On eating in the marketplace: "If taking breakfast is nothing out of place, then it is nothing out of place in the marketplace. But taking breakfast is nothing out of place, therefore it is nothing out of place to take breakfast in the marketplace."
- On masturbating in public: "If only it were as easy to banish hunger by rubbing my belly."



Diogenes the Dog

- Diogenes loved dogs → many stories refer to his praise of a dog's virtues and his own dog-like behavior
- Perhaps was insulted with epithet "doggish" and then took it on and made it a virtue: "I fawn on those who give me anything, I yelp at those who refuse, and I set my teeth in rascals."
- We should study the dog rather than continue in our artificial life
    - Dog performs natural functions in ease with no anxiety, will eat anything, no fussing about where to sleep, no use for the pretensions of abstract philosophy
    - Dogs instinctively know who is friend and who is enemy (humans are easily fooled)
    - Diogenes: "other dogs bite their enemies, I bite my friends to save them."
- "Cynic" → κυνικός, kynikos, "dog-like"
- Antisthenes taught in the Cynosarges gymnasium at Athens

The word Cynosarges means the place of the white dog. Later Cynics also sought to turn the word to their advantage, as a later commentator explained:

There are four reasons why the Cynics are so named. First because of the indifference of their way of life, for they make a cult of indifference and, like dogs, eat and make love in public, go barefoot, and sleep in tubs and at crossroads. The second reason is that the dog is a shameless animal, and they make a cult of shamelessness, not as being beneath modesty, but as superior to it. The third reason is that the dog is a good guard, and they guard the tenets of their philosophy. The fourth reason is that the dog is a discriminating animal which can distinguish between its friends and enemies. So do they recognize as friends those who are suited to philosophy, and receive them kindly, while those unfitted they drive away, like dogs, by barking at them.

(Scholium on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in Dudley, Donald R. (1937). *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D.* Cambridge.)