

Sparks (Conversation Starters)

For the Cynics

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The following Spark quotations come from the Cave's
The Best of the Cynics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Ancient Cynics.
For more Sparks (quotations and questions), buy the Cave's *The Cynics Cave Sparks*.

Suggestions for use ■ Use the following Sparks to start a conversation with a friend or group. Or journal with them, using them to get to “know yourself”—an imperative straight from the ancient Greeks.

Spark 1 ■ Living Badly (or Well)

Spark 1 Quotation

“When someone said that life is bad, Diogenes of Sinope said, ‘Not life, but living badly.’ ” —Diogenes Laertius

Spark 1 Questions

1. On balance, do you believe that human life is good or bad? Explain.
2. Is there such a thing as “living badly”? If there is, what is it? Be specific. Does “living badly” apply to all human beings?—that is, is there a general or common way of “living badly”? Or is it better to discuss it in terms of specific individuals and their lives? Or both?
3. Is there such a thing as “living well”? If there is, what is it? Is it something common for all people, or does it vary by individual, or both? What can you do to live well? Name two specific, concrete practices.

Spark 2 ■ The Path to Happiness (Practice)

Spark 2 Quotation

“Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short.” —Crates of Thebes

Spark 2 Questions

1. Can we be happy by merely *talking* about happiness?
2. Is happiness something that we must practice?—that we must do? Explain.
3. What can we daily do to practice happiness? Be specific, concrete. What about weekly or monthly or even yearly practices?

Spark 3 ▪ The Good of Hard Work

Spark 3 Quotation

“Hard work, with all its toil and suffering, is something good.” —Antisthenes of Athens

Spark 3 Questions

1. What, to you, is hard work? Why is it “hard”? What suffering does it cause? What examples can you name from your own life?
2. Is hard work good? How? Is suffering good? Explain. How does our attitude to or positive embrace of hard work alter the nature of hard work or our experience of hard work? If you could, would you live a life without hard work? What would it be like? Evaluate such a life.
3. If it has, when has hard work (“with all its toil and suffering”) led to something good in your life? What about suffering? Explain how.

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“Cynicism is . . . a match for the most excellent kind of philosophy.” —Julian, the Roman emperor

“The Cynics hold that the goal of life is to live according to virtue. Some have said that Cynicism is a shortcut upon the path of virtue.” —Anonymous (reported by Diogenes Laertius)

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