

# The Cynics

## Reading 5 – Diogenes – Anecdotes & Sayings

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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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### Reading 5

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The primary source for the following text is

Book 6 of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*.

All section numbers are part of Book 6. For example, section 25, or [25], is 6.25.

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## Diogenes

### Anecdotes & Sayings

#### Diogenes Laertius writes:

**D**IOGENES WAS GREAT at pouring scorn on his contemporaries. He said the school of Euclides<sup>1</sup> was full of black bile. And Plato's discourses were exhausting. And the performances at the Dionysia a great marvel for morons.<sup>2</sup> And the demagogues the servants of the mob.

He also used to say that when he saw ship captains and physicians and philosophers living life, he

regarded humans the wisest and most intelligent of all living beings. But when he saw interpreters of dreams and diviners, and those who paid attention to them, or those who were puffed up with their own outward appearance or wealth, he acknowledged that there was no more thoughtless and empty creature than a human being.

Diogenes would continually say that for the conduct of life we need either reason or a bridle.

[25] Observing Plato one day eating olives at a

costly banquet, Diogenes said, “How is it that you, the philosopher who sailed to Sicily for the sake of these dishes, do not enjoy them now that they are in front of you?” Plato replied, “By the gods, while I was there I mostly ate olives and similar things as well.” “Why then,” Diogenes said, “did you go to Syracuse? Was it that Attica did not grow olives at that time?” But in his *Miscellaneous History*, Favorinus attributes this to Aristippus.<sup>3</sup>

Another time Diogenes was eating dried figs when he encountered Plato and offered him a share of them. When Plato took them and ate them, he said, “I said that you might have a share of them—not that you might eat them all.”

[26] And one day, when Plato invited friends coming from Dionysius into his house, Diogenes trampled on his carpets and said, “I trample on vain and frivolous pursuits.” Plato’s reply was, “How much vanity you reveal by not appearing to be vain.” Others tell us that what Diogenes actually said was, “I trample on the vanity of Plato.” And the latter said, “Yes, Diogenes, with another kind of vanity.”

Moreover, in his fourth book, Sotion<sup>4</sup> declares that the Cynic said the following to Plato. Diogenes once asked Plato for some wine and later on for some dried figs. Plato sent him a whole jar full. In reply, Diogenes said, “If someone asks you how many are two plus two, will you answer, twenty? Thus it seems you neither give as you are asked nor answer as you are questioned.” In this way, Diogenes ridiculed Plato as one who talked and talked without end.

[27] When Diogenes was asked where he saw good men in Greece, he said, “Good men? Nowhere. But there are good boys in Lacedaemon.”

One day, while he was giving a serious lecture and no one came to listen to him, he began to hum and whistle. When at that point people began to gather around him, he criticized them for eagerly arriving to listen to nonsense, whereas they carelessly delayed coming for something serious.

Diogenes would say that men strive in punching and kicking to outdo one another, but no one strives to become a noble and good man. He was amazed that literary scholars investigate Odysseus’ mis-

fortunes while they are ignorant of their own. And that musicians tune their lyre’s strings while their soul’s disposition and habits are out of tune. [28] And that mathematicians gaze at the sun and the moon but overlook matters close at hand. And that orators are so zealous and serious when they speak about justice, but they never practice it. And that those who are greedy blame everything on money while loving it excessively.

Diogenes used to condemn those who commended just men for being above their property and money while being jealous of the very rich.

He was moved to anger by the fact that men sacrifice to the gods to ensure health, but during the sacrifice they feast in a manner that harms health.

He was astonished that when slaves saw that their masters were greedy gluttons that they still did not snatch any of the food for themselves.

[29] Diogenes would praise those who were about to marry—and didn’t. And those who were going to go on a voyage—and didn’t. And those who were about to engage in politics—and didn’t. And those who were going to have and raise a family—and didn’t. And those who were about to move in with rulers—and didn’t.

He used to say, moreover, that we should hold out our hands to our friends without closing the fingers. . . .

[32] Someone took Diogenes into a magnificent house and told him that he must not spit therein. Subsequently, when he cleared his throat, he spit in the man’s face since he was unable, he said, to find a worse place to spit. Others say this is Aristippus’ story.<sup>5</sup>

One day Diogenes called out for men to come to him. When they gathered around him, he struck them with his staff, saying, “I called for men, not for trash!” Hecaton<sup>6</sup> tells this story in the first book of his *Anecdotes and Sayings*.

Alexander [the Great] is reported to have said, “If I had not been Alexander, I would have liked to have been Diogenes.”

[33] Diogenes held that the word that means “impaired or disabled” should not be used for those who

cannot speak or hear or see, but for those who have no leather bag.

As Metrocles<sup>7</sup> declares in his *Anecdotes and Sayings*, one day, with his head half shaved, Diogenes went to a party where everyone was young, and he was seized and beaten by them. Later on he wrote the names of those who had struck him on a white writing tablet and hung it around his neck until they were stricken with judgment and reprimanded for their behavior.

Diogenes used to say that he himself was the dog of those men who were praised, but that none of them dared to go out hunting with him.

Someone said to him, “I conquered men at the Pythian games.”<sup>8</sup> Diogenes responded, “In fact, I conquer men. You merely conquer slaves.”

[34] To those who said to him, “You are an old man, you should take a break and rest,” Diogenes replied, “Why? If I were running a long race, should I slow down when I was near the finish line? Should I not endure to the end?”

When he was invited to dinner, he said that he would not go. The reason? The day before, he said, no one had thanked him for coming.

He would walk in snow barefoot and do the other things mentioned above. Moreover, he attempted to eat meat raw, but he could not digest it.

On one occasion he found the orator Demosthenes<sup>9</sup> dining at a tavern. When he withdrew within, Diogenes said, “All the more you will be inside the tavern.” When some foreigners wished to see Demosthenes, he stretched out his middle finger and said, “This man is the demagogue of the Athenian people.”

[35] Someone dropped a loaf of wheat bread and was ashamed to pick it up. Seeing this, Diogenes wished to offer him a lesson, and so he tied a rope to the neck of a wine-jar and dragged it across the Ceramicus.<sup>10</sup>

He used to say that he imitated the chorus masters. They also set the note a little high so that the rest would hit the right note.

Most people, he said, are within a finger’s breadth of being out of their minds—for if you walk along

with your middle finger stretched out, someone will believe you mad, but if it is the fore finger, he will not.

He said that very valuable things were sold for worthless things—and the other way around. Accordingly, a statue goes for three thousand, while a choenix measure of barley meal is sold for two copper coins.

[36] Someone wished to study philosophy with Diogenes, so he gave the man a big fish to carry and told him to follow after him. Eventually, thanks to the shame he felt, the man threw the fish away and departed. Sometime later, Diogenes encountered him, and laughing, he said, “Our friendship ended thanks to a big fish!” The version given by Diocles,<sup>11</sup> however, is as follows. When someone asked Diogenes to tell him what to do, he led him away and gave him a half obol’s worth of cheese to carry. But the man refused. Consequently, Diogenes said, “Our friendship ended thanks to a block of cheese worth a half obol.”<sup>12</sup>

[37] One time Diogenes saw a child drinking out of his hands. Consequently, he pulled the cup from his leather bag and tossed it away, saying, “A child has outdone me in frugality.” Another time, when he similarly observed a child who had broken his own spoon taking up lentil soup with a hollow crust of bread, he threw away his spoon.

Diogenes used to make this argument: “All things belong to the gods. The wise are friends of the gods, and friends hold all things in common. Therefore, all things belong to the wise.”

According to Zoilus of Perga,<sup>13</sup> Diogenes once saw a woman supplicating the gods in an unseemly manner. Wishing to release her from her superstition, he stepped up to her and said, “Woman, are you not afraid that a god may be standing behind you and that you may disgrace yourself? I say this because every place is full of god.”

[38] Diogenes dedicated to Asclepius<sup>14</sup> a striker—a man whose job it was to run up to and beat all those who prostrate themselves before the gods with their faces to the ground.

He was in the habit of saying that all the curses

and calamities found in tragedy had befallen him —

Without a city and a house, robbed of his own fatherland,  
A beggar, a wanderer, enduring life each day.

Nevertheless, Diogenes asserted that he could counter Fortune with courage, convention with nature, and emotion with reason.

One day, when Diogenes was sitting in the sun nearby the Craneum grove of Corinth, Alexander stood over him and said, “Ask me for anything you desire.”<sup>15</sup> Diogenes replied, “I would like you to stop blocking the light.”

Some man had been reading aloud for a very long time, and when he drew near to the end of the scroll and pointed to a space with no writing, Diogenes said, “Take courage, men. I see land.”

When a man demonstrated by a syllogism that he had horns, Diogenes touched his forehead and said, “I don’t see them.” [39] Similarly, when someone declared that there is no such thing as motion, Diogenes stood up and walked back and forth.

When a man was giving an address about those things hanging in the sky, Diogenes asked, “How many days has it been since you’ve come down from the sky?”

A wicked eunuch inscribed on his house, “May nothing evil enter.” Diogenes asked him, “How, then, is the master of the house supposed to enter?”

When Diogenes had anointed his feet with sweet smelling oil, he declared that the sweet smelling oil went from his head up into the air, but from his feet into his nose.

The Athenians urged Diogenes to be initiated into the mysteries.<sup>16</sup> They told him that in the nether world, initiates enjoy special privileges. “It would be laughable,” he said, “if the Spartan king Agesilaus and the Theban general Epaminondas continue on in the mud while some worthless jokes who have been initiated will be in the Islands of the Blessed.”<sup>17</sup>

[40] When a mouse crept onto the table, Diogenes declared, “Ah, I am now feeding a freeloader.”

When Plato called him a dog, Diogenes said, “Yes—since I return to those who sold me.”

When he was leaving the public baths, someone asked whether there were many human beings bathing. Diogenes said, “No.” Yet when another man asked him whether there was a great crowd of bathers, he said, “Yes.”

Plato defined a human being as “a featherless animal with two feet,” and he was applauded for this. Diogenes then plucked a chicken, brought it to Plato’s school, and said, “This is Plato’s man.” As a result, “and with broad, flat nails” was added to the definition.

When someone asked him what the proper time for lunch was, he said, “If you’re a rich man, whenever you want. If you’re poor, whenever you can.”

[41] When he was in Megara and saw the sheep covered with leather garments while the children were naked, he said, “It is better to be a Megarian man’s ram than his son.”

A man hurled a gate’s crossbar at him and said, “Keep watch!” In reply, Diogenes said, “What, are you about to strike me again?”

He used to call demagogues the servants of the crowd and the wreathes crowning them the flowering of popularity.

He lit a lamp in the middle of the day and walked around saying, “I’m searching for a human being.”

Once, Diogenes was made to stand still while someone poured water over him. When those standing around pitied him, Plato said, “If you want to pity him, stand back” —referring to his love of fame.

When someone struck him with his fist, he said, “Heracles! How did I forget to wear a helmet when I walked out?” [42] But when Meidias assaulted him and said, “There are three thousand for your credit,” the next day, Diogenes wrapped his own hands with boxing straps, beat him up, and said, “There are three thousand for *yours*.”

When Lysias the apothecary asked him if he believed in the gods, Diogenes said, “How can I not believe in them when I suspect you are hated by the gods?” Others attribute this reply to Theodorus.<sup>18</sup>

Observing someone purify himself, Diogenes said, “Unhappy man! Don’t you know that you cannot get rid of sins by means of purification rites any more than

you can get rid of grammar errors?" He would generally chide men for the way they prayed, declaring that they asked for the seemingly good rather than the truly good.

[43] As for those who were terrified by their dreams, Diogenes would say that they did not pay attention to what they did while they were awake, but were curious busybodies about all the images they see while asleep.

At Olympia, the herald announced, "Dioxippus is victorious over men!"<sup>19</sup> Diogenes said, "More exactly, he is victorious over slaves—I over men."

The Athenians were fond of Diogenes. When a young boy broke the wine-jar in which he lived, they beat the boy and gave Diogenes another jar.

Dionysius the Stoic reports that after the battle of Chaeronea, Diogenes was dragged off to Philip and questioned. Upon being asked who he was, he answered, "I am a scout spying on your insatiable greed." Hearing this, Philip admired him and set him free.<sup>20</sup>

[44] Once when Alexander had sent a letter to Antipater at Athens by the hands of a man called Athlios, Diogenes, who was present, said, "Wretched man from a wretched man by means of a wretched man to a wretched man."<sup>21</sup>

When Perdiccas<sup>22</sup> threatened to put Diogenes to death if he did not come to him, Diogenes said, "That's not surprising since a scorpion or a tarantula would do the same." Instead of that, Diogenes expected the threat to be something like, "If you live apart from me, I will live happily."

His voice resounding, Diogenes often declared that the gods had given men an easy life. But the easy life had become obscure over time by their seeking honey-cakes and perfumes and like things. Accordingly, to a man who had his servant put on his shoes, he said, "You won't be happy until he wipes your nose. And that won't happen until your hands are disabled."

[45] Once Diogenes saw some temple officials leading away someone who had stolen a libation bowl belonging to the treasurers, and he said, "The great thieves are leading away the little thief."

Another time, when he was watching a young boy throwing stones at a cross used for executions, he said, "Well done, one day you will hit the target."

When some young boys stood around him and said, "Look out that he doesn't bite us." In response, Diogenes said, "Take courage, boys! A dog doesn't eat beetroot."

To the man who was proud of wearing a lion's skin, his words were, "Stop dishonoring virtue's clothing."

When someone was pronouncing Callisthenes<sup>23</sup> happy and talking about the extravagance he shared at the side of Alexander, Diogenes said, "So then the man is unhappy since he takes his morning and evening meals when Alexander chooses."

[46] When he was in need of money, Diogenes told his friends that he was reclaiming it from his friends, not begging for it.

One day when Diogenes was masturbating in the marketplace, he declared, "I wish I could rub my belly in the same way and relieve my hunger."

When he saw a young man going off to dine with some satraps, he dragged him away to his friends and called on them to watch over and protect him.

When a young man who was beautifully adorned asked him some question, Diogenes said he would not answer until he first pulled up his clothes and showed him whether he was a man or a woman.

A young man was playing kottabos<sup>24</sup> in the baths. Diogenes said to him, "The better you play, the worse it is for you."

During a feast, some people kept throwing bones at him as if he were a dog. Consequently, he urinated on them just like a dog.

[47] Diogenes used to call all rhetoricians and those who spoke for fame "three times human," by which he meant, "three times wretched."

He called an ignorant rich man "a sheep with golden wool."

When he spotted the announcement "For sale" written on the house of a profligate man, Diogenes said, "I knew that after such carousing and feeling sick you would readily vomit up your owner."

To the young man who complained about the number of people who annoyed him by their attentions, he

said, “Stop hanging out a sign of invitation.”

Addressing a public bath that was very dirty, he said, “Where do people wash after they have bathed here?”

When everyone was criticizing a thick-witted harp player, Diogenes alone praised him. When asked why, he said, “Even though he is as he is, he plays the harp and he doesn’t steal.”

[48] To the harpist whose audience was always leaving him, he saluted, “Rejoice, rooster!” When the man asked him why he called him that, Diogenes replied, “Because your song makes everyone get up.”

A young man was showing himself off, delivering a set speech to a crowd of people, when Diogenes, having filled the front fold of his garment with lupin beans, stood opposite him eating the beans. When the crowd began to look at him instead of the young man, he said that he was astonished that they had stopped looking at the young man in order to look at him.

A very superstitious man said to him, “I will split open your head with one blow.” Diogenes replied, “And I will make you tremble with a sneeze from the left.”<sup>25</sup>

When Hegesias asked Diogenes to lend him one of his writings, he replied, “You are a vain and thoughtless man, Hegesias. For in the case of figs, you would not choose painted figs but real ones, yet in this case you pass over genuine practice for what is merely written.”

[49] When someone criticized him for his exile, Diogenes said, “No, unhappy man. It was because of my exile that I began to pursue philosophy.”

And when someone reminded him that the citizens of Sinope had sentenced him to exile, he said, “And I sentenced them to stay there.”

Diogenes once saw an Olympic victor tending sheep, and said to him, “My excellent man, you’ve gone too quickly from Olympia to Nemea.”

When he was asked why athletes are so senseless, he said, “Because they are built up of swine and cattle flesh.”

Diogenes once begged alms from a statue. When asked why he did this, he said, “To practice being rejected.”

Once, when he was begging—as he did at first when he was in need—he said to someone, “If you have already given to anyone else, give to me also. If you have not, begin with me.”

[50] When a tyrant asked Diogenes what kind of bronze is best for making a statue, he replied, “The kind from which Harmodius and Aristogiton<sup>26</sup> were made.”

When someone asked him how he treated his friends, Diogenes said, “Like bags—as long as they are full he hangs them up, but when they are empty, he throws them away.”

A newlywed put this inscription on his house: “Hercules the noble victor, the son of Zeus, dwells here. May nothing evil enter.” To which Diogenes added, “After the battle, an alliance.”

He said that the love of money is the mother-city or origin of all evils.

Seeing a profligate man eating olives in a tavern, he said, “If you had eaten breakfast in this way, you would not be eating dinner in this way.”

[51] Diogenes called good men images of the gods.

He said that love was the business of those with nothing to do.

When someone asked him what was wretched in life, he said, “An impoverished old man.”

When he was asked what animal’s bite is the worst, he said, “Of wild animals, the sycophant’s. Of tame animals, the flatterer’s.”

Once, when he saw two poorly painted centaurs, Diogenes said, “Which of these is Chiron?”<sup>27</sup>

He compared flattering speech to honey used to gag you.

He called the belly “the Charybdis”<sup>28</sup> of one’s livelihood.

Hearing once that Didymon the flute player had been caught in the act of adultery, he said, “His name alone is sufficient to hang him.”

When he was asked why gold is pale, he said, “Because gold has so many people plotting against it.”<sup>29</sup>

Seeing a woman carried along in a litter, he said, “The cage is not well-matched to the animal.”

[52] And seeing once a runaway slave sitting on the edge of a well, he said, “Be careful, young man, that you do not fall in.”

Seeing a young man stealing clothes at the public baths, he said, "Is it for unguents or for other clothes?"

Once, when he saw some women hanging from an olive tree, he said, "I wish that every tree bore such fruit."

When he saw a thief stealing clothes, he quoted Homer, saying, "What are you doing, good man? Are you stripping the corpses of the dead?"<sup>30</sup>

When he was asked if he had a young girl or boy, he said, "No." The person further asked, "So then, when you die, who will carry you out?" To which, he replied, "Whoever needs the house."

[53] Seeing a handsome young man sleeping without a guard, he poked him and said in imitation of Homer, "Wake up! May someone not plant a spear in your backside while you're sleeping!"<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, to someone who was buying very expensive delicacies in the marketplace, he said, "You are doomed to a speedy death, my child, from your purchase in the marketplace."

When Plato was conversing about the forms using the terms "tableness" and "cupness," Diogenes said, "I can see a table and a cup, Plato, but I cannot see your tableness and cupness." Plato replied, "That's reasonable enough since you have eyes to look at a cup and a table, but you do not have the mind to see tableness and cupness."<sup>32</sup>

[54] When someone asked Plato, "In your mind, what kind of a man does Diogenes seem to be?" He said, "A Socrates gone mad."

When Diogenes was asked about the right time to marry, he said, "For a young man, not yet. For an old man, nevermore."

When asked what he would take to let a man punch him on the head, he said, "A helmet."

Seeing a young man beautifying himself, he said, "If it is for men, you are unfortunate. If it is for women, you do wrong."

He once saw a young man blushing, and said, "Take courage—such is the color of virtue."

One day after listening to two lawyers argue a case, Diogenes condemned both sides, saying that the one man had stolen but the other had not lost anything.

When he was asked what wine he found pleasant to drink, he replied, "Wine that another man provides."

One man said to him, "The many laugh at you." He replied, "But I am not laughed down."

[55] When someone said that life is bad, Diogenes said, "Not life, but living badly."

When people were advising him to search for his runaway slave, he said, "It would be laughable if Manes is able live without Diogenes, but Diogenes is unable to live without Manes."

When Diogenes was eating a breakfast of olives among which he found a cake, he flung the olives away and declared, "Away, stranger, from the royal road." Another time, "He lashed an olive."<sup>33</sup>

When he was asked what kind of a dog he was, he said, "When hungry, I'm a Maltese lapdog. When I'm full, I'm a Molossus. Most people praise these dogs, though they do not venture out hunting with them because of the hard work involved. So neither can you live with me because of your fear of suffering."

[56] When he was asked if wise men eat cakes, Diogenes said, "They eat everything, just as the rest of mankind."<sup>34</sup>

When he was asked why people give to beggars and not to philosophers, he said, "Because they fear that one day they may become disabled or blind, but they never expect to become a philosopher."

Diogenes was begging from a greedy man who was slow to respond. "Man," he said to him, "I'm begging for nourishment not for burial expenses."

When he was once criticized for having debased the coinage, he said, "That was when I was such as you are now. But as I am now, you will never be."

Another time, when he was reproached for the same thing, he said, "And I used to piss sitting down, but now I don't."<sup>35</sup>

[57] When he came to Myndus and saw large gates but a small city, he said, "Men of Myndus, shut your gates—or your city will get away!"<sup>36</sup>

When he once saw a man who had been caught stealing purple dye, he said, "Carried off by a purple death and by mighty Fate."

When Craterus demanded that he come and visit

him, Diogenes said, “I would rather live on a few grains of salt in Athens than enjoy a table full of costly food with Craterus.”<sup>37</sup>

Diogenes went up to the orator Anaximenes, who was a fat man, and said, “Give some of your belly to us beggars. You will relieve yourself and benefit us.”<sup>38</sup>

And once, when the same man was giving a lecture, Diogenes held up some pickled fish and thus distracted the audience. This annoyed the orator, and Diogenes said, “An obol’s worth of pickled fish has ended Anaximenes’ lecture.”

[58] Being once criticized for eating in the marketplace, Diogenes said, “I did so since it was in the marketplace that I became hungry.”

Some authors attribute the following to him. Plato saw him washing greens. So he approached him and quietly said to him, “If you had paid court to Dionysus, you would not now be washing vegetables.” Equally quiet, Diogenes replied, “If you had washed vegetables, you wouldn’t have paid court to Dionysus.”<sup>39</sup>

When someone said, “Most people laugh at you,” his reply was, “Yes—and it is likely that asses laugh at them. But even as they pay very little attention to asses, so do I not pay attention to them.”

When Diogenes once saw a young man studying philosophy, he said, “Well done, inasmuch as you are leading those who admire bodily things to the beauty of the soul.”

[59] When someone marveled at the votive offerings set up in Samothrace, Diogenes said, “There would have been far more if those who were not saved had set them up.” Others attribute this remark to Diagoras of Melos.<sup>40</sup>

To a handsome young man who was going to a drinking party, he said, “You will return a worse man.” When the young man came back and said, “I went and became no worse,” Diogenes remarked, “You’re no Chiron; rather, you’re Eurytion.”<sup>41</sup>

Diogenes was begging from a discontented man. The man said to him, “If you can persuade me.” Diogenes replied, “If I could persuade you, I would have persuaded you to hang yourself.”

When Diogenes was returning from Lacedaemon to Athens, someone asked him, “Where are you coming from and where are you going?” He replied, “I’m going from the men’s part of the house to the women’s part.”

[60] When he was returning from Olympia, someone asked him whether there was a large crowd. “Yes,” he replied, “there was a great crowd but very few men.”

He compared profligates to fig trees growing on a cliff. Their fruit is not enjoyed by any man, but is eaten by ravens and vultures.

When Phryne the prostitute set up a golden statue of Aphrodite in Delphi, Diogenes is said to have written on it, “From Greece’s lack of self-control.”

One day Alexander the Great stood by Diogenes and said, “I am Alexander, the great and mighty king.” In response, Diogenes said, “And I am Diogenes, the dog.”

When someone asked him what he had done to be called a dog, he said, “I wag my tail for those who give me something, and I bark at those who don’t, and I bite worthless men.”

[61] Diogenes was gathering figs. When the watchman told him that earlier a man had hanged himself from the same tree, Diogenes said, “Well then, I will clean the tree of its fruits.”

When Diogenes saw a man who had been a victor at the Olympian games looking again and again at a prostitute, he said, “Look at that warlike ram who is overpowered by the first girl he happens to meet.”

He compared prostitutes to deadly honeyed potions.

Diogenes was eating breakfast in the marketplace, and those standing around gathered around him calling out, “Dog!” In return, he said, “But you are the dogs, standing around and watching me eat breakfast.”

When two effeminate men hid themselves from him, he said to them, “Don’t be afraid! A dog doesn’t nibble on beetroot.”

When someone asked him where a boy was from who had become a prostitute, he said, “He is from Tegea.”



[62] After seeing an unschooled and rather dull wrestler making rounds as a physician, Diogenes said, "What is this? Do you now want revenge from those who defeated you?"

Seeing the son of a prostitute throwing stones at a crowd of people, he said, "Take care that you do not hit your father!"

When a boy showed him a dagger he had received from a man who admired him, he remarked, "It is a beautiful and noble blade with an ugly and shameful handle."

When some people were praising someone who had giving him something, he said, "Why don't you praise me, the one who was worthy to receive it."

When someone asked Diogenes to return his cloak to him, Diogenes said, "If it was a gift, then it is now mine. If it was a loan, then I'm now using it."

When a child told him that he had gold tucked away in his cloak, Diogenes said, "Yes, that's why you sleep with it under your head."

[63] When someone asked him what result he obtained from philosophy, he said, "If nothing else, this: I am prepared for every turn of fortune."

When someone asked him where he came from, Diogenes said, "I am a citizen of the world."

When a couple was sacrificing to the gods so that a son might be born to them, he said, "Why don't you sacrifice to ensure what kind of man your son will be?"

When someone asked him for a contribution for a common meal, he said to the presiding collector, "Collect from the rest—keep your hands off Hector."

He used to say that courtesans were the queens of kings since they make them do their bidding.

When the Athenians voted to call Alexander, "Dionysus," Diogenes said, "You can make me, 'Sarapis.'" <sup>42</sup>

When someone criticized him for going into impure places, he said, "The sun shines into a bathroom without losing its shine."

[64] Diogenes was eating in a temple when some dirty loaves of bread were set before him. Taking them up and throwing them away, he declared that nothing dirty should enter a temple.

To the man who said to him, "You know nothing, even though you are a philosopher," Diogenes replied, "If I aspire to wisdom, this is being a philosopher."

When someone brought a child to him and declared that his disposition was good and that he had excellent character traits, Diogenes said, "So then, why does he need me?"

Those who express weighty sentiments without doing anything, Diogenes used to compare to a harp. For like them, the harp can neither hear nor feel.

Diogenes was going into a theater while everyone else was going out in the opposite direction. When someone asked him why, he said, "This is what I practice doing every day of my life."

[65] Once when Diogenes saw a young man behaving effeminately, he said, "Are you not ashamed that the plans you have for yourself are worse than what nature has for you? For nature made you a man and you are forcing yourself to be a woman."

Observing a foolish man tuning a harp, he said, "Are you not ashamed to give this piece of wood harmonious sounds while you fail to harmonize your soul with your life?"

To the one who said, "I am unfit for doing philosophy," Diogenes replied, "Why then do you live if you do not care to live happily?"

To the one who looked down on his father in contempt, Diogenes said, "Are you not ashamed to look down on the very one without whom you would not be here to exhibit such pride?"

Noticing a handsome young man chatting in an inappropriate manner, he said, "Are you not ashamed to draw a lead dagger from an ivory scabbard?"

[66] When someone criticized him for drinking in a tavern, Diogenes said, "I also get my hair cut in a barber's shop."

When he was criticized for receiving a cloak from Antipater, he quoted Homer, saying, "The glorious gifts of the gods are not to be thrown away." <sup>43</sup>

A man shook a gate's crossbar at him and said, "Keep watch!" In response, Diogenes struck the man with his staff and said, "Watch out!"

To the man who was earnestly entreating a prostitute, he said, "Why, miserable man, do you want success when it would be better for you to be unsuccessful?"

To the man with perfumed hair, he said, "Be careful that your sweet-smelling head doesn't make for a foul-smelling life."

He said that bad men obey their desires as house slaves obey their masters.

[67] When someone asked him why slaves were called footmen, Diogenes said, "Because they have the feet of men but a soul such as my interrogator has."

Diogenes asked a profligate man for a mina, a rather large sum of money. When the man asked him why he asked others for an obol, or a smaller amount, but he asked him for a mina, Diogenes said, "Because I hope to receive something from others again, but whether I get anything from you again is up to the gods."

When Diogenes was criticized for begging when Plato did not beg, he said, "He does. But when he does, he holds his head down close so that none may hear him."

Seeing an untalented archer, Diogenes sat down next to the target and said, "I'm sitting here so I won't get hit."

He said that the pleasure shared by lovers is their own misfortune.

[68] When someone asked him if death is something bad, he said, "How can it be bad if, when it is present, we do not feel it?"

Alexander stood opposite him and asked, "Are you not afraid of me?" Diogenes replied, "Why? Are you good or bad?" When Alexander said, "Good," Diogenes replied, "Who then would fear something good?"

According to Diogenes, education is a source of moderation for the young, diversion for the old, wealth for the poor, and ornamentation for the wealthy.

When the adulterer Didymon was once treating a girl, Diogenes said to him, "Be careful that in caring for the eye you do not destroy the pupil."

When someone said that his own friends were plotting against him, Diogenes said, "What will you do if you have to treat your friends and your enemies alike?"

[69] When someone asked Diogenes what was the most beautiful thing among men, he said, "Freedom of speech."

Entering a school, Diogenes saw many statues of the Muses but few students. And he said, "Together with the gods, you have many students."

Diogenes was in the habit of doing everything in public—both the business of Demeter and Aphrodite. Accordingly, he used to make the following arguments. "If to eat breakfast is not at all unnatural, then neither is it unnatural to eat breakfast in the marketplace. But it is not unnatural to eat breakfast; therefore, it is not unnatural to eat breakfast in the marketplace. And continually masturbating in public, he said, "I wish I could rub my belly in the same way and stop hunger."

And many other sayings are attributed to him—so many that it would take too long to recount them.

[70] Diogenes declared that there are two kinds of exercise—training of the soul and training of the body. And that the latter exercise gives rise to perceptions that facilitate virtuous deeds. Each practice is incomplete and ineffectual without the other. Good health and strength have to be present with whatever else is important, whether for the soul or for the body. He offered positive proof for how easily we arrive at virtue by means of physical exercise. One can see that craftsmen acquire hand-speed with careful practice. And flute players and athletes excel by means of their own labor. And if these transferred the practices to the soul, then the exercises would not be without profit and incomplete.

[71] Diogenes said that absolutely nothing in life is successful without training, which has the power to conquer anything. Rather than unprofitable, toilsome exercises, men should prefer those which follow nature in order to live happily. Men are unhappy because of a lack of understanding.

According to Diogenes, contempt for pleasure is, if we get used to it, quite pleasant itself. And just as

those who are accustomed to living with pleasure feel nauseous when they have to give this life up, so too do those who have practiced the opposite life feel pleasure when they look down on pleasure.

Such were Diogenes' sayings and conversations. And it was evident that he acted accordingly—altering the currency, as it were, or reevaluating human customs, granting nothing at all in this way to human custom and law, but following nature. He declared that his manner of life was the same as that of Heracles. He preferred freedom more than everything else.

[72] Diogenes argued that all things belong to the wise by arguing in such a way that I mentioned before. "All things belong to the gods. The wise are friends of the gods, and friends hold all things in common. Therefore, all things belong to the wise."

And about the law, he argued the following: "It is impossible for society to exist without the law. For without a city, no advantage can be derived from that which is civilized. But the city is civilized, and there is no advantage in the law without a city. Therefore, the law is something civilized."

Diogenes ridiculed noble birth and reputation and all such distinctions, calling them the showy ornaments of vice.

The only true citizenship is that which is a citizenship in the whole cosmos.

Diogenes argued that women should be held in

common. He recognized no other marriage than the union of a man who persuades and the woman who is persuaded. For this reason, he also held that sons should be held in common.

[73] Diogenes said there was nothing monstrous in taking anything from a temple or in eating the flesh of any animal—nor was there anything impious about taking and eating even human flesh. He said this was clear from the customs of other nations. Moreover, according to right reason, he said that every element is contained in everything and pervades everything. Meat is in bread. And bread is in vegetables. And all other bodies also, by means of certain invisible passages and particles, find their way into and unite with all substances in the form of vapor. He makes this clear in the *Thyestes*—if the tragedies are really his and not the work of his friend Philiscus of Aegina or the work of Pasiphon, the son of Lucian, who, according to Favorinus in his *Miscellaneous History*, wrote them after the death of Diogenes.<sup>44</sup>

Diogenes held that we should abandon music, geometry, astronomy, and the like as useless and unnecessary.

[74] He was very successful in replying to arguments, as is clear from what we have already gone over.

So ends Reading 5. See you in the **next reading**.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> That is, the school of Euclides (also Euclid) of Megara, the Megarian school. Euclides was a student of Socrates.

<sup>2</sup> The Great Dionysia was the ancient Athenian spring festival during which various forms of drama—tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies—were competitively performed.

<sup>3</sup> Favorinus of Arelate (present-day Arles, France) was a second century AD Roman philosopher and sophist. Aristippus (c. 435–356 BC) was a philosopher from Cyrene (present-day Libya). Originally a companion of Socrates, Aristippus is known as the founder of Cyrenaicism (called such after his home city), a philosophy that promotes pleasure as the chief goal of life.

<sup>4</sup> Sotion of Alexandria was a third and second century BC Peripatetic, who wrote about the succession of philosophers in each school of philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> For Aristippus, see the note above.

<sup>6</sup> Hecaton (Hecato) of Rhodes was a second and first century BC Stoic philosopher and writer, who wrote about various philosophical topics (virtue and the goal of life, for example).

<sup>7</sup> Metrocles of Maroneia, the Cynic philosopher and brother of Hipparchia.

<sup>8</sup> The Pythian games were held at Delphi every four years in honor of the god Apollo.

- <sup>9</sup> Demosthenes was a highly regarded fourth century BC Athenian statesman and orator known for his anti-Macedonian stance.
- <sup>10</sup> The Ceramicus (*Kerameikos*) was the potter's quarter in Athens, a public space filled with many people, and so one would wish to avoid any embarrassing behavior.
- <sup>11</sup> Diocles of Magnesia (second or first century bc) was an ancient historian and writer of biography and summaries. He concentrated on the views, sayings, and lives of the earliest philosophers.
- <sup>12</sup> An obol was a silver coin. Six obols were worth one drachma.
- <sup>13</sup> Aside from Diogenes Laertius' reference to Zoilus of Perga, nothing more remains from or about him from antiquity.
- <sup>14</sup> The son of Apollo, and educated by the centaur Chiron, Asclepius was the Greek god of medicine.
- <sup>15</sup> The Craneum was a grove of cypress trees just outside Corinth, as Diogenes Laertius puts it, "at the gates." Alexander is Alexander the Great.
- <sup>16</sup> The "mysteries" here refer to the Eleusinian Mysteries, those celebrated at Eleusis (nearby Athens) in honor of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. For an early narrative of the institution of the Mysteries, see *Homeric Hymn 2 to Demeter* 473 ff.
- <sup>17</sup> The Islands of the Blessed were judged a location of immense happiness in the ancient world. For more on the Islands of the Blessed, see Hesiod, *Works and Days* 167-173; Pindar, *Olympian* 2.69-74; Plato, *Gorgias* 523b-c; and Drinking Song (Scolia) 894. For a collection of texts regarding the Islands, see *Happiness: What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness* (Sugar Land: The Classics Cave, 2026).
- <sup>18</sup> Theodorus, called "the Atheist," was a fourth and fifth century BC Cyrenaic philosopher—a member of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy founded by Aristippus of Cyrene. For more on Aristippus and Cyrenaicism, see the note above.
- <sup>19</sup> Dioxippus of Athens was victor in the pankration at the Olympic games of 336 BC.
- <sup>20</sup> Philip II of Macedon defeated the Greeks, led by Thebes and Athens, at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC. As noted before, Diogenes may have taken part in the battle.
- <sup>21</sup> One meaning of the word or name *athlios* (Athlios) is "wretched" or "struggling, miserable." Antipater (397-319 BC) was a Macedonian general and regent. He served under both Philip II and Alexander the Great. For several letters sent by Diogenes (pseudo-Diogenes) to Antipater, see Twelve, letters 4, 14, and 15.
- <sup>22</sup> Perdiccas was a mid-fourth century BC Macedonian king. For several letters sent by Diogenes (pseudo-Diogenes) to Perdiccas, see Twelve, letters 5 and 45.
- <sup>23</sup> Callisthenes of Olynthus, a relative of Aristotle, was a fourth century BC Greek historian, who accompanied Alexander the Great's expedition of conquest as its official historian.
- <sup>24</sup> Kottabos was an ancient drinking game in which players flicked wine (its sediments) at a target with an amorous or erotic intention or wish in mind.
- <sup>25</sup> In Homer, good omens (such as a flying eagle) appear on the right, whereas bad ones appear on the left. Sneezes also serve as a sign from the gods indicating good or ill. We see this in the *Odyssey* when Telemachus sneezes, confirming the impending doom of the suitors.
- <sup>26</sup> Harmodius and Aristogiton were responsible for the 514 BC assassination of Hipparchus, and the attempted assassination of his brother, the Athenian tyrant Hippias. Hipparchus and Hippias were the sons of the longtime Athenian tyrant Pisistratus (Peisistratus).
- <sup>27</sup> The son of Kronos (in the form of a horse) and Philyra, Chiron was a centaur (part human and part horse), who dwelled in a cave on Mount Pelion. Among others, Chiron brought up and educated the heroes Jason and Achilles, and the god Asclepius.
- <sup>28</sup> For the all-consuming monster Charybdis, see Homer, *Odyssey* 12.103-106: "On one of its lower rocks is a great and wild fig tree, blooming with leaves. Beneath this tree, wondrous Charybdis sucks down the deep, black water. Three times a day she releases the water, sending it up. But three times she sucks it down again—it's a terrible sight! May you not happen to be there when she noisily sucks down the water!"
- <sup>29</sup> In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, "pale" (*chlōros*) is oftentimes given as the color of fear. See, for example, *Iliad* 7.479 and *Odyssey* 24.450.
- <sup>30</sup> See Homer, *Iliad* 10.343, 387.
- <sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Homer, *Iliad* 5.40 and 11.447. In Homer, the brave man encounters the enemy face-forward, while the coward runs away offering his back as an easy target.
- <sup>32</sup> The reference is to Plato's teaching about the forms or ideas, those absolute realities in which all other dependent realities participate—such as Beauty itself and beautiful things, the Good itself and good things.

<sup>33</sup> Both lines refer to earlier Greek literature. The first is a play on Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 40, “Stranger [Friend], make way for the tyrant!” (when Laius’ charioteer orders Oedipus, Laius’ son, out of the roadway). In speaking the line, Diogenes recognizes the tyrannical part that cakes (or really, anything not simple) play relative to simple things, such as olives, which Diogenes calls *xenos* or friend (stranger). The other line points to Homer, *Iliad* 5.366 and 8.45, though in reference to horses that willingly take the charioteer where he wishes to go.

<sup>34</sup> Athenaeus of Naucratis reports that once, when Diogenes “was eagerly eating a cake at a feast,” he said to someone who questioned him about this that he was merely “eating bread that was made quite well” (*Deipnosophists* 3.80). Elsewhere, Diogenes highlights the fact that philosophers eat everything, “but not,” he says, “like everyone else” (see *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 188). So, yes, they eat what everyone eats—just not *like* everyone. And they see through what a thing is. Rather than “cake,” it is just “bread” (wheat bread or *artos*).

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps a reference to Hesiod’s advice: “Do not stand upright facing the sun when you take a piss. . . . A scrupulous man who has a wise heart sits down or goes to the wall of an enclosed court” (*Works and Days* 727, 731-732).

<sup>36</sup> Myndus was a city along the western coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

<sup>37</sup> Craterus was a fourth century BC Macedonian general, who helped to rule after Alexander the Great’s death.

<sup>38</sup> Anaximenes of Lampsacus was a fourth century BC Greek rhetorician.

<sup>39</sup> Dionysus II, the Younger, was the fourth century BC tyrant of the Greek city-state of Syracuse in Sicily.

<sup>40</sup> Samothrace is a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. Diagoras of Melos was a fifth century BC Greek sophist and poet, who had the reputation for atheism.

<sup>41</sup> For Chiron, see the above note. Eurytion was another centaur who did not have the good reputation enjoyed by Chiron.

<sup>42</sup> Dionysus was the Greek god of wine. Serapis was a Greco-Egyptian god associated with the sun, healing, and fertility.

<sup>43</sup> For Antipater, see the note above. Diogenes is paraphrasing the Trojan hero Paris, who, in Homer’s *Iliad* 3.64-65, states that “the lovely gifts of golden Aphrodite” should not “be thrown away.”

<sup>44</sup> Pasiphon was a third century BC writer. For Favorinus, see the note above.

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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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