

Plan of Life

Following the Cynics

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The following plan comes from the Cave's
The Best of the Cynics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Ancient Cynics.

As with any other plan, a plan of life is made to accomplish many goals or possibly just one significant goal. The following plan consists of the most significant Cynic goals and practices from ancient Cynic philosophy.

1. Live according to virtue, according to nature.

Turn down the noise of convention, of human customs. Hear instead the hum of nature alone. Observe how animals behave, how they are content. Nature directs us to what is *actually* virtuous rather than merely *apparently* virtuous. Accordingly, we may discover what is good, bad, and indifferent; and so, we are able to “alter the currency,” to shift our conception of what is truly valuable and what is not.

2. Cultivate shamelessness. Be a dog. Imitate the behavior and attitude of dogs. Do what needs to be done, what *you* need to do, without worrying about what others will think or say. Practice shamelessness. Do something usually judged embarrassing today.

3. Exercise frankness. Don't hide your thoughts; don't let your words imprison you. Don't be fake, wearing a sham speech-mask that is not you. Speak freely to be free and to aid others in the same.

4. Build soul wealth. Understand that happiness is a matter of internal goods such as contentment and inner strength rather than external things like fine clothing, gourmet food, a “good” reputation, political

power, piles of money, and other possessions. Soul wealth is built by fostering soul health—by engaging in specific practices related to following the Cynic plan of life.

5. Keep freedom in mind. Know that everything we do has the potential to liberate or enslave us. Ask yourself: will *having* something release or restrict me? Will *doing* something liberate or bind me? Will *feeling* or *thinking* something free or fetter me? Will *saying* something help or hinder me? The Cynic always moves toward freedom and flees enslavement—for himself and for others (like Crates of Thebes or Heracles).

6. Practice endurance. Embrace toil, hardship, and suffering. When necessary, stand your ground against the allure of pleasure. Practice in the manner of Diogenes, who walked barefoot in the snow, rolled in the hot sand, bravely battled a fever, and begged alms from a statue to practice rejection.

7. Reduce your desires. Know that desire always leaves us desiring more. As such, desire indicates dissatisfaction. By reducing desires, we are able to reduce dissatisfaction. Said another way, desire

reduction increases satisfaction. Reduce your desires, therefore, to expand your overall sense of contentment and satisfaction.

8. Develop self-control. Desire reduction is essential for the Cynic development of self-control. The reason is simple: self-control increases as desire decreases. Thus, as you practice reducing your desires, know you are simultaneously establishing self-control.

9. Strive for self-sufficiency. Be independent—of life conditions, of others, of desires or wants that are hard

to satisfy. Focus on what is necessary. Practice contentment with what is near to hand and easy to get. What are you? What do you have? What are you doing? What do you feel? May these be sufficient. Say, “I am satisfied with—.”

10. Live simply. Wear simple clothes. Reduce your possessions. Eat basic fare. Drink water. Living in this way, simply or frugally, follows upon the practices of desire reduction and self-sufficiency. Imitate Socrates who rejoiced in all the things he could go without.

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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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