

The Cynics

Reading 9 – Antisthenes’ Pride—from Xenophon’s *Symposium*

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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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This reading comes from the Cave’s
The Best of the Cynics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Ancient Cynics

The translation that follows is a modified version of O.J. Todd’s 1923 translation of
Xenophon’s *Symposium* (books 3.8 and 4.34-44).

SOCRATES SAID, “AND you, Antisthenes, what do you pride yourself on?”

“I pride myself on wealth,” he declared.

[. . .]

[34] “Okay, then,” Socrates went on, “given the little wealth that you have, tell us how you pride yourself on wealth.”

“I do because I believe that a man’s wealth or lack of wealth is not a matter of household goods but of soul goods. [35] I observe many private citizens who

think of themselves as poor even though they have a pile of money and possessions. For this reason they give themselves over to any toil or danger in order to increase their wealth. And I know of brothers who have an equal share of their inheritance. One of them has plenty, more than enough to meet expenses, while the other is in utter want. [36] And I’ve observed some tyrants who are so hungry for wealth that they are willing to do terrible things compared with those who are entirely poor. Because they lack

things, some people snatch things, others break in and take things, and others follow the slave trade. But there are some tyrants who destroy whole families, kill men by the crowd, and oftentimes enslave even entire cities, all for the sake of money. [37] I deeply pity these men for this oppressive disease. They are like the man who has plenty to eat but can't satisfy himself even though he keeps on eating.

"As for me, my possessions are so great that I can hardly find them myself. I have enough to eat so that I'm not hungry and enough to drink so that I'm not thirsty. And I have enough clothing so that when I'm outside, I'm no colder than Callias is, a man who is remarkably wealthy. [38] And when I go into a house, I look on the walls as exceedingly warm tunics and the roofs as exceptionally thick mantles. And the bedding that I own is so satisfactory that it is actually a hard task to wake me up in the morning. If my body ever stands in need of satisfying the urges of Aphrodite, I am quite satisfied with whomever is nearby. And those I go to are quite fond of me since no one else is willing to be with them.

[39] "All these things seem so pleasant to me that I would never pray for greater pleasure in engaging in any one of them. No, I'd rather pray for less. I would because I regard some of them as being more pleasurable than they are beneficial.

[40] "But the most valuable part of my wealth I count as this, that even if someone robbed me of what I now possess, I see no occupation so humble that it would not furnish me with adequate provisions. [41] For whenever I wish to enjoy myself, I do not

purchase highly prized items in the marketplace since they are very expensive, but I withdraw wealth from my soul. And this makes a difference in producing enjoyment—whether I have something only when I truly want it, or when I have something extravagant, like this fine Thasian wine that fortune has presented to me, and I am drinking without the promptings of thirst.

[42] "Yes—and it is natural that those whose eyes are set on frugality are more honest than those whose eyes are fixed on money-making. For those who are most contented with what they have are least likely to covet what belongs to others.

[43] "And it is worth noting that wealth of this kind also makes people generous. My friend Socrates here and I are examples. For Socrates, from whom I acquired this wealth of mine, did not come to my relief limiting it by number and weight, but he gave me all that I could carry. And as for me, I am now stingy with no one; rather, I openly display my abundance to all my friends and share my soul wealth with anyone who desires it.

[44] "But—most exquisite possession of all!—you observe that I always have leisure, with the result that I can go and see whatever is worth seeing, and hear whatever is worth hearing, and—what I prize the most—I pass the whole day, untroubled by business, in Socrates' company. Like me, he does not bestow his admiration on those who count the most gold, but he spends his time with those who are pleasing to him."

So ends Reading 9. See you in the **next reading**.



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