

The Cynics

The Cast of Significant Cynics – A Quick Reference & Chronology

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

The Cast of Significant Cynics

A Quick Reference & Chronology

CYNICISM: a philosophy and way of life that seeks freedom from desire and wants through a virtuous, self-sufficient life of radical simplicity and poverty. Cynicism may be defined as the art of endurance that produces true happiness. It is a path that follows the lead of nature rather than human convention. As such, Cynics prize the naturalness and shamelessness of dogs and other animals (thus the name "dog" from the Greek *kyōn* or *kuōn*). Central to Cynicism is training or exercise, the active embrace of hardship and suffering. Cynicism was developed in the late fifth into the fourth century BC.

THE EARLY CYNICS—late fifth into the third century BC

ANTISTHENES: the son of Antisthenes (an Athenian citizen) and a Thracian woman; born in Athens c. 445 BC. Antisthenes began as a rhetorician listening to the lectures of the sophist Gorgias, among others, but turned to philosophy under the influence of Socrates, from whom he learned the art of endurance. He may have been the first to be called "Dog" and the first to reduce his clothing and possessions to the Cynic uniform—a tattered cloak, a leather bag, and a staff. He reportedly wrote many works, but only fragments remain. Antisthenes

believed in the positive value of hardship and suffering. Among other points, he taught that the wise man is self-sufficient and that virtue is enough for happiness. The “strength of Socrates,” or endurance, amounts to virtue. Antisthenes died c. 365 BC.

DIOGENES OF SINOPE: the son of Hicesias, who was a banker and money-changer; born in Sinope (a city on a peninsula in northern Turkey that juts out into the Black Sea) c. 410 BC (dates vary). Diogenes was exiled from Sinope, apparently for debasing the coinage. He subsequently made his way to Athens, where he reportedly encountered Antisthenes and turned to philosophy and particularly to Cynicism or the Cynic way of life. Diogenes was nicknamed “Dog” (from the Greek *kyōn* or *kuōn*, the source of “Cynic”) since he lived a radically simple life of poverty, rejected human customs by “altering the currency,” and practiced shamelessness, doing like a dog in public what was usually done in private. Plato called Diogenes “a Socrates gone mad” because he took Socrates’ “art of endurance” to an extreme—living as a homeless beggar, embracing every manner of hardship and suffering, practicing pain, and shunning pleasure. Diogenes advocated ongoing training to develop the ability to endure. Frankness or freedom of speech was essential to Diogenes’ mission as a Cynic, in which he preached and called on passersby to embrace a simpler, freer life. He famously carried a lamp in broad daylight declaring, “I’m searching for a human being.” Although he wrote several works, only fragments remain. He died c. 323 BC.

CRATES OF THEBES: the son of Ascondas; born in Thebes (central Greece) c. 365 bc. Crates is known for his radical conversion to Cynicism. He was Diogenes of Sinope’s student and eventually his successor. Though originally a wealthy man, one account states that he converted all his property into wealth and gave it away to follow the Cynic way of life. As one who made his way into people’s houses in order to admonish and advise them, he was known as the “Door-opener.” Among his other teachings, he declared that “wealth is prey to vanity.” Contrary to most Cynics who did not marry, Crates married Hipparchia of Maroneia, a young woman who wished to pursue the Cynic way of life with him. Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, was originally the student of Crates. Although Crates wrote several works, including tragedies “characterized by a very lofty philosophy,” only fragments remain. He died c. 285 BC.

MONIMUS OF SYRACUSE: a household slave who feigned madness in order to be dismissed and have the liberty to learn from and follow Diogenes of Sinope. He also followed Crates of Thebes. Monimus is known for the saying, quoted by Marcus Aurelius, among others, that “all opinion is vanity.” Nothing of his two significant writings survive. He lived and died during the fourth century BC.

ONESICRITUS: born on the Greek island of Astypalaea, though possibly Aegina (an island near Athens), c. 360 BC; the student of Diogenes of Sinope. Onesicritus reportedly accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaign east that ended in India. There Onesicritus observed what the ancient Greeks called “gymnosophists,” naked philosophers. He reported that these philosophers were similar to the Cynics in their ideas and way of life. Although none of it remains, Onesicritus wrote a work about how Alexander the Great was educated. He died c. 290 BC.

METROCLES OF MARONEIA: born in Maroneia in Thrace (northern Greece); the brother of Hipparchia of Maroneia. Originally the student of Theophrastus, the Peripatetic philosopher who was the successor of Aristotle, Metrocles eventually converted to Cynicism following the lead of Crates of Thebes, who helped him overcome an embarrassing incident and practice shamelessness. Metrocles’ sister Hipparchia married Crates.

Metrocles lived and died during the fourth century BC.

HIPPARCHIA OF MARONEIA: born in Maroneia in Thrace (northern Greece); the sister of Metrocles of Maroneia. Hipparchia is known for her practice of the Cynic philosophy and way of life and for her husband, Crates of Thebes. Although Crates was unattractive and lived the life of a homeless beggar, Hipparchia fell in love with him for his teachings and practice, and eventually married him after dramatically convincing her parents to give her permission. They subsequently pursued the Cynic path together, living a simple life. She lived and died during the latter half of the fourth and early part of the third century BC.

BION OF BORYSTHENES: born in Borysthenes, also called Olbia (Ukraine, near the mouth of the Dnieper River) c. 325 BC. Although Bion was early on a slave, he was eventually liberated and travelled to Athens where he studied philosophy in the Academy and Lyceum. He was also influenced by the hedonist Theodorus, called “the Atheist,” and by Crates of Thebes. Bion is credited with developing the diatribe, a literary genre that frankly “treats of ordinary human problems in a common-sense spirit.” He died c. 250 BC.

OTHER CYNICS: The following are Cynics briefly mentioned by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives*. Students of Diogenes of Sinope were Menander, Hegesias of Sinope, and Philiscus of Aegina. Menippus the Phoenician and Menedemus were students of Crates of Thebes.

TELES OF MEGARA: aside from the detail that Teles was a teacher in Megara (a city near Athens) in the third century BC, little is known about him. The much later Joannes Stobaeus (fifth century AD) preserved seven lengthy extracts from Teles. Among other topics, they address self-sufficiency, exile, poverty and wealth, pleasure (that it is not the goal of life), and how one might be free from the passions, emotion, and various feelings.

LATER CYNICS—first century into the sixth century AD

DEMETRIUS: from Corinth, a Cynic who lived in Rome during the first century AD through the reigns of the emperors Caligula, Nero, and Vespasian. Demetrius is celebrated for refusing Caligula’s offer to change his way of life for a very large sum of money. He is also recognized for his opposition to the emperors, particularly to Vespasian. Along with other philosophers, he was expelled from Rome in 71 AD. Though a typical Cynic in his teachings and practice, Demetrius promoted total resignation to the will of God (likely in a Stoic sense) in contrast to the usual Cynic resignation to Fate.

DIO CHRYSOSTOM: born in Prusa (Brusa, Turkey) c. 40 AD, Dio Chrysostom (“the Golden-Mouthed”) originally practiced rhetoric in Rome until he was banished in 82 for his opposition to the emperor Domitian. Thereafter, Dio lived and taught as a Cynic, wandering throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond. When his exile was lifted, he focused once again on writing and speech making. We possess some eighty orations composed by Dio, a number of them with Cynic themes centering on Diogenes of Sinope. One, *Oration 6*, demonstrates the blessings of a Cynic way of life compared to the suffering brought on by the usual pursuit of ease and pleasure. Another, *Oration 8*, explores Diogenes of Sinope’s turn to Cynicism under the tutelage of Antisthenes, and offers a speech by Diogenes given at the Corinthian games explaining his own ongoing contest with hardship and pleasure. Dio Chrysostom was friends with the emperor Nerva, and the emperor Trajan favored him. He died c. 112 AD.

DEMONAX: born in Cyprus, Demonax was well educated. Turning to philosophy, he learned from the Stoics and Cynics. Though he professed eclecticism, he lived and dressed as a Cynic. He eventually made his way to Athens and lived there as a citizen for the remainder of his life, even taking part in its political life (something unusual for a Cynic). Demonax devoted himself to exhorting others, recalling the ephemeral nature of fortune, and consoling friends in the midst of personal suffering. While his dates are uncertain, scholars place him in the second century AD.

PEREGRINUS: born in Parium (Turkey) c. 95 AD, Peregrinus began his philosophical career as a Christian in Palestine, spending some time in prison for his role in leading the Christian community. After being released, he renounced his property and began to dress as a Cynic, though he was still supported by various Christians. When he was finally expelled from the Christian community, he spent time in Egypt with Agathoboulos, a particularly stringent Cynic, and in Italy speaking critically against the emperor. Peregrinus dramatically ended his life by self-immolation at the Olympic festival in 167 AD.

SALLUSTIUS OF EMESA: born c. 430 AD, Sallustius of Emesa (Homs, Turkey) likely lived into the early years of the sixth century. Beginning his life by studying law and practicing as a rhetorician, he eventually travelled to Athens and Alexandria, turning at some point to philosophy and finally to the Cynic way of life. Sallustius is the last known Cynic (mentioned by the Neoplatonist Damascius in his *Life of Isidore*).

So ends Item 4, “The Cast of Significant Cynics — A Quick Reference & Chronology.” See you in another reading or item in the Cave Library.

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