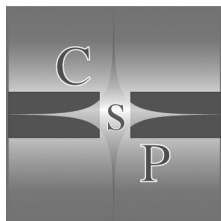


Ancient Philosophy and Everyday Life

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By

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PREFACE

For a short book, this one has had quite a long history. It began life over ten years ago as an idea for a history of ancient moral philosophy. Compared with my original plan, the final product is less ambitious in its scope, focusing on only four philosophical movements and their major figures instead of the whole of ancient philosophy. On the other hand, the way these schools are treated here goes some way beyond what was originally intended. In particular, there is now a strong emphasis throughout the book on the practical dimension of ancient philosophy, on the way that a particular outlook on the world led to a particular way of living in it. The point is made more than once that a philosophy was a way of life. The writings of Pierre Hadot and others in recent years have helped to shine increasing light on this practical side of ancient philosophy and I have sought to incorporate some of their insights here.

Unfortunately, while there have been some excellent books on ancient philosophy published since I first had the idea of writing one, there have also been others of considerably inferior quality. Those to which I object most treat works of ancient philosophy primarily as sources of quotations, caring little for context or theory. While it is both possible and permissible to quote from any text, there is only so much that can be understood about, for example, Stoicism, from, for example, a quotation from Marcus Aurelius. A particularly bad example I stumbled across quoted an observation on pleasure by Epicurus, but failed to point out that by “pleasure” he meant specifically “the absence of pain”, and so managed to give a thoroughly misleading impression of Epicureanism. Even if there has been an increased emphasis on the practical side of ancient philosophy in recent years, it is important not to neglect the theoretical side. The philosophical schools articulated outlooks on the world that were meant to be both coherent and supported by argument. There can be no proper understanding of them without looking at how they sought to justify and explain themselves.

It may be worth pointing out that ancient philosophy often tends to be seen as a specialist field within classics rather than within philosophy. In some ways, this is no bad thing. Clearly classicists may be expected to be much more sensitive to and proficient with regard to textual matters, and less likely to interpret (or misinterpret) ancient works in the context of contemporary philosophical debates. On the other hand, classicists may also sometimes concern themselves with matters that are of relatively little interest to philosophers. And those coming to ancient philosophy from modern philosophy need to feel that it has something relevant to say to them in terms they can

understand. Despite the fact that my own first formal educational encounter with philosophy came while studying Latin, my training and background are primarily philosophical rather than classical, and so it is primarily a philosophical rather than classical perspective that I have brought to bear upon discussions. Consequently, no knowledge of either Greek or Latin is assumed.

However, while philosophers tend to take pleasure in dissecting theories and revealing their flaws for all to see, my aim here has been a little different. I have sought to explain the outlooks of the different schools as sympathetically as possible on the assumption that their adherents were no more lacking in intelligence than the readers of this book. Whether or not they were wrong, they clearly thought they were right and I think it is worth trying to understand why. Bearing in mind that all of the philosophies discussed in this book were influential for hundreds of years, the very least they seem to deserve is a fair hearing.

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T.C.
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CHAPTER ONE

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Why should anyone living in the twenty-first century want to read a book about ancient philosophy? The answer is that ancient philosophy was about everyday life and in many ways everyday life has changed very little since the days of the ancient philosophers. Despite all that has happened in the intervening centuries, the basic elements of the human condition remain substantially unaltered. Love and death, toil and strife continue to confront us. These matters and more occupied the minds of ancient philosophers. But they did not just think about these things, they also talked publicly about them and put their theories into practice. This brought with it certain risks. When Diogenes the Sophist (probably a Cynic) harangued Vespasian's son Titus and his mistress in a crowded Roman theatre in AD 75, he was flogged. When Heras (definitely a Cynic) did the same thing some time later, he was beheaded. No wonder Vespasian was one of several Roman emperors who tired of philosophers and banished them Rome. Three hundred years later, simply *being* a philosopher was virtually proof of treason as far as the Emperor Valens was concerned.

But that was then and this is now. Although even today philosophy is not entirely a risk-free activity (as recently as 1977, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka died of a heart attack during interrogation), modern philosophers are far more likely to be ignored than banished. The world has moved on in all kinds of ways since the time of Vespasian and philosophy has moved on with it. That might suggest that the best book to read about philosophy and everyday life would be one that deals with modern philosophy. Paradoxical as it may seem, the answer may be "no". It may be an exaggeration to say that the life expectancy of philosophers has gone up as the scope and relevance of philosophy has gone down, but there is an element of truth at the heart of it. Where ancient philosophers took the whole of life as their challenge, modern philosophers have narrowed their focus.

Life constantly requires us to make choices. Should I get out of bed now or later? Which clothes should I put on? What should I have for breakfast? And so it goes on throughout the whole day, each and every day. Many of these choices may appear trivial, but they all have to be made. Other choices may appear less trivial. Should I drive faster than the legal speed limit? Should I tell the truth to the tax office? Should I keep a promise I have made to a friend? And some choices may appear the very opposite of trivial. Should I commit suicide?

Modern philosophers would generally regard breaking the law, telling the truth and keeping promises as matters deserving their attention. Killing someone, including killing oneself, would certainly interest them, but getting up, dressing and having breakfast would not. Yet if I stay in bed too long, it is sloth; if I spend too much time worrying about how I look, it is pride; if I eat too much breakfast, it is gluttony. I can commit three deadly sins before I even leave home in the morning without most modern philosophers batting an eyelid.

The part of ancient philosophy that directly addressed the question of how to live in the world became known as “ethics”, from a Greek word meaning “character”. Because my character is central to who I am, it might be said that ancient philosophy was about self-development. Its aim was to produce better people who lived better lives. Because “life” includes everything we think, do or feel, ancient philosophy was all-encompassing in its approach. Decisions about when to get up, what to wear and what to eat did not escape its attention.

Ancient philosophy was not just about character it was also about *characters*. A philosophy was literally embodied in those who practised it, from Stoics like Seneca who impressed others with the calm way they faced their deaths to Sceptics like Pyrrho who practised an indifference to everything. The founder of a philosophy was regarded as its ideal embodiment, and the model for all its subsequent followers. What people did was just as important as what they said, if not more so. A philosophy that preached the value of courage could not have a coward as its founder.

This book will look at four different philosophies; Cynicism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Scepticism. These were not the only ones of their time, but the fact that their names are still recognisable today says something about their influence, significance and durability. Furthermore because they were in many ways very different from each other, they will help to illustrate an important point; to become a follower of a particular philosophy was to make a fundamental choice in life. An Epicurean had a radically different outlook on the world from that of a Sceptic. In focusing on these four, I am deliberately ignoring the schools founded by Plato and Aristotle, as well as some minor ones. This is not because they were unimportant or uninteresting, but this book is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of ancient philosophy. The four philosophies I shall discuss here are sufficient to reveal both the variety of ancient philosophy and the way in which it concerned itself with everyday life. And those wishing to find out more about Plato and Aristotle will find plenty of other books to choose from.

The remainder of this book falls into six chapters. First comes a general introduction to the nature of ancient philosophy, focusing on the period from the fourth century BC onwards when Cynicism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Scepticism were in their heyday. Next come four chapters dealing with these

four philosophies, one dedicated to each. They all follow the same pattern. First, there is an outline of its history. Second, there is an account of its teaching. Third, there is a discussion of how people could and did live in accordance with that teaching. Although for obvious reasons most of the illustrations will come from the lives of the ancient philosophers who embodied those teachings, I also consider how people might live in accordance with that teaching today. In order to give some structure to this discussion, and in order to make it easier to compare the different philosophies, I have focused on a limited number of topics, although taken together they are broad in their scope. They are: death, diet and health, work, recreation, and personal relationships. The final chapter considers some comparisons between the different philosophies, how one might choose between them, and the extent to which they may still be relevant.

Although they talked about the same things that we do, ancient philosophers often talked about them in a different way, which means that a certain amount of technical vocabulary is inevitable. However, it has been kept to an absolute minimum and is always explained. The aim has been to provide an introduction to the four philosophies that anyone with an interest in them can understand, and to give an account of four different approaches to life that people can still follow today if they choose to do so.

CHAPTER TWO

HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Cicero once famously observed:

Socrates ... was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens ... and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil.
(Cicero 1945, p. 435)

While there is some truth in this, it also needs to be treated with some caution. Cicero is simply wrong in assuming that those who preceded Socrates in the history of Greek philosophy took no interest in “questions about life and morality”. Although our knowledge of earlier philosophers is fragmentary and imperfect, it is clear that at least Pythagoras and his followers combined an interest in the heavens with more practical concerns. On the other hand, the influence of Socrates does seem to have led to a significant shift in emphasis within philosophy, and the schools that developed after his death were on the whole more overtly, and more centrally, concerned with “things good and evil”.

Socrates himself founded no school and wrote nothing. Many of the schools that were established after his death in 399 BC laid claim, explicitly or implicitly, to his heritage, the differences between them at least in part reflecting different understandings of precisely what that heritage was. However, it was not long before the world in which the philosophers lived underwent very substantial political changes. Alexander the Great succeeded to the throne of Macedonia in 336 BC, and the empire-building activities of his short career ushered in a new period of history known as the Hellenistic age. While technically this period is generally held to have ended in 31 BC, when Augustus inaugurated the imperial age of Rome, culturally it lasted much longer. Although there were honourable and significant exceptions such as Cicero and Seneca who wrote in Latin, much of Roman philosophy was actually written in Greek. Even the emperor Marcus Aurelius was writing his personal philosophical journal (usually known as the *Meditations*) in Greek at the end of the second century AD. Furthermore, whether they were translated into Latin or not, the terms of reference of philosophy in the Roman age were generally those established during the Hellenistic period, if not before. There is therefore a

continuity, at least in terms of the history of philosophy, between the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and describing the philosophy of both as “Hellenistic” does little disrespect to the facts. When this hybrid period ended is a matter of contention, but for philosophical purposes a convenient date is 529 AD, when the remaining philosophical schools were officially closed down.

The Schools

What exactly were these schools? The short answer is that there is no short answer. It is not unusual in any age for charismatic individuals to attract a personal following, but what happens then, and in particular what happens after they die, is another matter. Although it has become customary to describe the philosophical movements that emerged in the period after the death of Socrates as “schools”, the term is both an imperfect one and also one that fits some movements better than others. At one end of the spectrum was the Academy founded by Plato. It acquired its own premises and developed its own formal curriculum. After Plato’s time it was always headed by an individual known as “the successor”. Although it underwent various changes the Academy remained in existence for hundreds of years. At the other extreme were the Cynics to whom any formal arrangements were anathema, and who therefore comprised the loosest possible association of similar-minded individuals. In between, somewhere or other and in some way or other, came everything else.

Today, the notion of a school generally conjures up an image of a place that teaches a range of subjects. Some schools may be better or more expensive than others, but they may all be expected to offer roughly the same thing. This image is misleading in thinking about the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period. Each had its own distinctive approach, based on the preserved or developed teachings of its founder. In this regard they were more like religious institutions. Indeed, in some ways it may be helpful to think of them as sects rather than schools. A classic definition of sects is offered by Ernst Troeltsch:

The sects ... are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection, and they aim at a direct personal fellowship between the members of each group. From the very beginning, therefore, they are forced to organize themselves in small groups and to renounce the idea of dominating the world. Their attitude towards the world, the State, and Society may be indifferent, tolerant or hostile, since they have no desire to control and incorporate these forms of social life; on the contrary, they tend to avoid them; their aim is usually either to tolerate their presence alongside of their own body, or even to replace these social institutions by their own society. (Troeltsch 1931, p. 331)

Although Troeltsch's comments are based on his study of specifically Christian movements, and not all of his comments apply equally to all of the schools, they do help to evoke something of their distinctive nature. People *belonged* to schools rather than went to them. While it is true that some did take a more eclectic approach, generally speaking people studied Stoicism in order to *become* Stoics. And, while it is true that the teachings of one school might from time to time affect what was taught in another, generally speaking the schools were seen as offering not only distinctive but also *competing* philosophies. To adhere to one school rather than another was to make a very significant choice. One of the words the ancient Greeks used to denote a philosophical school was *hairesis*, but it could also be translated as "choice" or "sect". If it is an exaggeration to regard joining a philosophical school as on a par with religious conversion, it may not be much of one. If this seems odd, it needs to be remembered that the Greek and Roman religions were primarily a public and civic matter. They did little to address people's spiritual aspirations, which therefore had to find their outlets elsewhere. While some might turn to secretive cults, for others the philosophical schools were the preferred vehicles for personal transformation.

Like religious sects, the schools were subject to division, both expansionist and schismatic. Practical considerations played their role in this. For example, it was scarcely feasible for everyone who wanted to be a Stoic to journey to Athens, which is where the school was originally established. There was nothing to prevent someone who had absorbed the lessons of a school from going away and teaching them to others elsewhere, quite likely armed with at least a handful of the school's key texts. Almost inevitably this led to divergences in doctrine, sometimes intentional, sometimes accidental. Some schools tended to be more conservative, some more progressive. However, since they were in various ways in competition with each other, a recurrent challenge for each was to meet the objections developed by others. Schools not only claimed to be right, they also claimed to have arguments to back up their claims. If one of those arguments was threatened, it had to be either defended or, as a very last resort, abandoned. This fact as much as anything else drove the need for change. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this phenomenon came less than a century after Plato's death when, under the leadership of Arcesilaus, the Academy felt the need to assimilate large doses of Scepticism. The force of the Sceptics' criticisms was felt to be too strong to ignore, so appropriate adjustments had to be made. Only the Cynics held themselves aloof from these debates. Although they certainly claimed to have the support of reason, they took relatively little interest in argument as such. Action, rather than words, was the abiding interest of the Cynic.

The Agenda of the Schools

Aristotle observes in the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 2002) that everyone wants the good life, but people are unable to agree on what it is. Some think of it in terms of pleasure, others in terms of wealth, others in terms of prestige, and so on. He spends the rest of the book saying what he thinks it is and why, and how to go about securing it. It was one of Aristotle's great strengths that he was able to get to the heart of problems, and his way of looking at ethics made a major contribution to shaping the agenda of Hellenistic philosophy. He also founded his own school, the Lyceum, which, like Plato's Academy, had a long and distinguished history.

Even when they did not so do formally themselves, it was generally possible to divide the teachings of the schools into three sections; "logic", "physics" and "ethics". I place these terms in inverted commas here and throughout the book as a reminder that the ancient usage of these terms was significantly different from the modern one. "Logic" included what we would today identify as both logic and epistemology. It was concerned not only with the rules for correct thinking, but also with the problem of what we can know and how we can come to know it. The subject matter of "physics" was the nature of the world in which we live, and that included human nature. The approach taken was as much metaphysical as empirical, and often more so. Finally there was "ethics", which was concerned with the question of how to live. Although there was never a fixed order, "ethics" often appeared last in the list. This was not meant to indicate that it was the least significant part of philosophy, but rather represented the fact that it was its culmination. The point of "logic" and "physics" was to provide the foundations for tackling the problems posed by "ethics".

In moving to consider the agenda of the schools in more specific terms, it is necessary to confront the problem of translation. Although some of the primary texts are in Latin, most are in Greek, and the technical Latin vocabulary was intended to be a translation of the Greek one. As a consequence, the problem of translation mainly revolves around producing acceptable modern equivalents for a handful of key ancient Greek terms. Unfortunately, some of the most important ones turn out to be the most difficult.

When I mentioned, at the beginning of this section, that Aristotle made some observations concerning the good life, "the good life" is a translation of the Greek *eudaimonia*. This word literally means "good daemon", a daemon being a kind of personal spirit. Aristotle did not mean it in this literal sense, but in the sense of good fortune, or, as I have put it, the good life. Some prefer to render it as "happiness", or "true happiness", or "flourishing". Some give up on the problem and leave it untranslated as "eudaimonia". Although this is to some

extent understandable, “*eudaimonia*” is a Greek word, not a translation of one, and so it is not particularly helpful. I shall use “the good life”, although one strength of “happiness” as a translation is that it captures the subjective dimension of *eudaimonia*. It indicated not only that a life was well-lived, but also that there was a profound contentment accompanying that fact.

Worse is to follow. Many translators of primary texts and authors of secondary ones use the term “virtue”. As I believe Nietzsche wryly observed, a word that once meant “virility” has now come to suggest “chastity”. “Virtue” comes from the Latin *virtus*, which originally meant “manliness”. The Romans used it as a translation of the Greek *arete*. *Arete* also originally meant “manliness”, but also had broader connotations of nobility. In time, the term came to mean a more general kind of personal excellence, seen as the fulfilment of a positive human potential. Aristotle talks about not only moral excellence but also intellectual excellence as species of *arete*. The modern understanding of “virtue” seems too far removed from this to render *arete* properly in most contexts. “Excellence” may sound more awkward, but it is more appropriate while remaining concise, and it can be qualified where necessary.

Rather less problematic is another key term, *ataraxia*. This is usually quite reasonably rendered as “tranquillity”, and that is the translation that will be used here. However, it is important to be aware that the Greek word begins with the negative prefix “*a-*”, and there is a sense that tranquillity is a kind of liberation from the things that prevent it. People have to struggle to *become* tranquil and *ataraxia* is an achievement rather than simply an optional natural state.

Other terms will be discussed as and when necessary, but enough has been shown to indicate how necessary it is to tread carefully with problems of translation. *Eudaimonia*, *arete* and *ataraxia* are key terms in Hellenistic philosophy, and much hinges on them and on the relationships between them. If they are translated badly, then confusion and misunderstanding follow. Unfortunately, as I have hinted above, matters of translation are rarely resolved consistently, neatly and accurately at the same time.

Any school of philosophy hoping to attract any kind of following had to offer people something they wanted, something they could identify with the good life. In the Hellenistic age, this “something” was often tranquillity. Much of the philosophising of the period was devoted to discovering why people do not normally enjoy tranquillity, and then devising ways of delivering it. Schools had to do more than simply help people to *understand* life’s problems; they also had to help them *solve* them. As such, in modern terms, they may be thought of as therapeutic as much as academic in their concerns. And as with modern therapies, they could differ in their opinions on both the sickness and the cure.

To the extent to which the schools’ agendas were dictated by considerations of tranquillity, they were essentially negative in nature. That is to say, the

fundamental challenge involved in achieving tranquillity was that of avoiding or eradicating the obstacles encountered in the pursuit of it. However, there was also a more positive side to what they had to offer, and this was substantially encapsulated in the ideals or models represented by their respective founders. Stoics aspired to be like Zeno, Epicureans like Epicurus, Sceptics like Pyrrho and Cynics like Diogenes. Although these were all rightly regarded as exceptional individuals, they had nevertheless been only flesh and blood. The ideals they embodied were clearly achievable since they themselves had achieved them. It was their position as human role models, however elevated, that prevented the schools from descending into mere personality cults. In principle, if not in practice, anyone could become another Zeno, Epicurus, Pyrrho or Diogenes. The teachings of each were designed to help others become like them, and their own lives were the most graphic demonstrations of the value and potential of those teachings. It is difficult to underestimate the significance of this dimension of the schools. Those who joined them sought to transform themselves not into some abstract ideal but into new versions of their very concrete founders. Although the term was not restricted in its application to the philosophical sphere, the title of “sage” was often used by the followers of a school to identify the founder’s special status. Although historical figures, they also seem to have taken on something of a legendary character over time. Others might follow them, both chronologically and philosophically, but they were never able to match the charisma of the founders.

In part, this reflected a respect for tradition that was a far stronger element in the culture of the Hellenistic age than it is in the modern world. Indeed, a belief in progress might be regarded as one of the defining characteristics of the modern age, and this gives looking forward precedence over looking back. By contrast, the Hellenistic age was a more nostalgic one, and Greeks and Romans alike were inclined to locate their golden ages in the past rather than in the future. This fed a conservatism in the schools, although it was more pronounced in some than in others. The successors to a tradition saw it as their job to uphold it as best they could. While this did not preclude change, it did mean that change was often presented in the form of new commentaries on traditional texts, or as “revivals” of “original” teachings. In this way, the technical authority of the founders could be maintained even while their ideas were being subjected to substantial revision. If it was a fiction, it was a convenient and relatively harmless one.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to give something of the flavour of Hellenistic philosophy. Accordingly, it has been more concerned with generalities than with

specifics. However, since there is relatively little that can be said that applies with equal validity to all of the schools of the period, or even to the ones selected here for special attention, it is now necessary to consider Cynicism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Scepticism in more detail. Like the ancients, I shall treat “ethics” as the most important branch of their philosophies and so pay most attention to that part of what they taught. Much of what they had to say about “logic” and “physics” will be ignored because much of it is of interest only to the specialist or antiquarian. While “logic” and “physics” were an integral part of their philosophies, I take the view that, for example, it is and was entirely possible to be a Stoic without believing that the universe is periodically destroyed by fire. Furthermore, because the schools claimed to have the support of reason, a contemporary Stoic would have to rely on a modern scientific understanding of the world rather than a discredited ancient one.

CHAPTER THREE

CYNICISM

History

Cynicism is in many ways the most difficult and least typical of the schools. However, because it was the first of the four to emerge, and because it certainly had a significant influence on the origins of another one, namely Stoicism, there is a clear logic in beginning with it. Unfortunately, the origins of Cynicism itself are less than clear and there have long been arguments as to who should be regarded as its true founder. Fortunately, there are only two candidates usually put forward for this honour and the claims of both can be considered.

Antisthenes was probably born in Athens some time around 450 BC. Although he lived in Athens, he was apparently not an Athenian citizen, and this is usually said to be because his mother was a slave from Thrace. There was a place in Athens called Cynosarges where non-citizens often met, and some take this to have had a bearing on the origin of the word “Cynic”. Antisthenes became a friend of Socrates and then became a teacher of philosophy himself, although probably not until after Socrates died in 399 BC. There seems to have been a measure of rivalry, often far from friendly, between him and Plato. He is said to have written a great deal, although virtually nothing survives. It is not known when he died, but a date of some time around 360 BC is often given and regarded as plausible.

Antisthenes attracted a number of pupils around himself, but the only one known by name is Diogenes of Sinope. Unfortunately, opinions are divided as to whether Diogenes ever met Antisthenes at all, let alone became his pupil. There was a fashion in ancient histories of philosophy to construct successions or lineages. Some suspect that making Diogenes (who was certainly a Cynic) a pupil of Antisthenes may have been a way of forging a philosophical dynastic link between Cynicism and Socrates. In any event, it is Diogenes who is the second candidate for being regarded as the founder of Cynicism. But the competition is to some extent a meaningless one since even if the two never met there are sufficient similarities between what we know about them to treat them as sharing similar views. And since Cynicism never took on any of the formal structures that characterised some of the other schools, the idea of a formal founder is in many ways an empty one.

Diogenes was born in around 400 BC. His father ran the mint in Sinope, a port on the south coast of the Black Sea (near the modern Turkish town of Sinop). It is said that Diogenes had to leave when it was discovered that he and/or his father had committed an offence concerning the currency. It is unclear exactly what the offence was, but it seems to have involved either counterfeiting or defacing the currency in some way. It was at this time, perhaps around 360 BC, that Diogenes is meant to have met Antisthenes in Athens. Whether or not this happened, he seems to have spent some time in Athens before somehow becoming a slave and being taken to Corinth. According to those who regard Diogenes as the founder of Cynicism, the name derives from the nickname of “the dog” (*kyon* in Greek) that became attached to him due to his eccentric and animal-like lifestyle. However it came to be used as a label for the school, what is certain is that the literal meaning of “Cynic” is “dog-like”. Diogenes had a reputation for anti-social behaviour and tradition has it that for some years he made his home in a wine barrel. However, he was evidently regarded with some affection by the people of Corinth. It is said, probably incorrectly, that he died on the same day as Alexander the Great in 323 BC. A memorial with a statue of a dog was erected in his honour over the place said to be his grave.

Diogenes attracted a number of pupils. The best-known and most important of these was Crates of Thebes. Crates had already given away much of his wealth before he met Diogenes, but Diogenes persuaded him to throw his remaining money into the sea. He later acquired the nickname of “the door-opener” from his habit of wandering into people’s houses, whether invited or not. Although the purpose of his visit was often to lecture those within on the error of their ways, he seems to have generally been a welcome guest and enjoyed considerable popularity. He acquired a number of pupils, one of whom was Zeno of Citium who went on to become the founder of Stoicism. Another was a young woman called Hipparchia who fell in love with Crates despite his extremely unprepossessing appearance and insisted on marrying him. They scandalised their contemporaries by frequently going about wearing little or no clothing and engaging in sexual activities in public places. One of the results of this was a son, Pasicles, who was brought up as a Cynic.

Another pupil of Crates was Menippus of Gadara. Relatively little is known about him, but much later, in the second century AD, the satirist Lucian of Samosata wrote a number of works in which he was the leading protagonist. Menippus himself may have been the author of a number of dialogues and letters. His close contemporary Bion of Borysthenes is said to have made important contributions to the development of the diatribe, a kind of literary harangue with which the Cynics became closely associated. However, the extent of Bion’s commitment to Cynicism is unclear and he seems to have attached

himself to a number of different schools at one time or another. Like Menippus, he spent part of his life in slavery.

Both Menippus and Bion died in around 250 BC, and the history of Cynicism becomes more difficult to trace for some time after this. Cercidas of Megalopolis, a politician and poet who died in 220 BC, was a younger contemporary, but opinions differ as to the depth of his connection with Cynicism. Another poet, and one whose connections with Cynicism are considerably clearer, was Meleager of Gadara who was writing his satires and epigrams in the earlier part of the first century BC.

By the first century AD, Cynicism had made significant inroads into Rome. As was noted in chapter one, both Diogenes the Sophist and Heras suffered for their boldness in publicly criticising the actions of the ruling elite. In this they were anticipated by an older contemporary, Demetrius. Originally from Corinth, Demetrius moved to Rome where he became a friend of Seneca, who greatly admired his courage. He was subsequently banished from the city on at least one occasion, but his personal bearing seems to have done much to raise the profile and reputation of Cynicism in Rome.

A colourful figure from this period was Dio of Prusa, often known by his nickname of Chrysostom (“golden-mouthed”) which he received on account of his eloquence. He became a teacher of rhetoric in Rome before being banished from Italy on account of being caught up in political intrigues in AD 82. He took up the life of a wandering teacher for a number of years, in the course of which he seems to have become a Cynic almost by accident. His significance is due to the fact that during this period and later, when he returned to favour, he wrote a number of works that still survive and in many of which he articulates Cynic teachings and values.

Younger than both Demetrius and Dio was Demonax. He came from Cyprus but spent many years in Athens where Lucian of Samosata was one of his pupils. Lucian later wrote about his life, which ended when he starved himself to death in AD 170 at a very advanced age. Lucian also wrote about Peregrinus Proteus, who committed suicide in AD 165 by jumping onto a funeral pyre at the Olympic Games. He had previously led a largely itinerant existence that involved having to extricate himself from one tight squeeze after another. Opinions were and remain divided as to whether Peregrinus was really a Cynic, and Lucian himself clearly believed him to be a fraud. But this is in large part because by the second century AD it was becoming increasingly difficult to say who was a Cynic and who was not. One of the problems was that the Cynics had developed a kind of uniform, consisting of a cloak, a leather satchel and a staff. It was therefore possible to pretend to be a Cynic by dressing like one. This uniform seems to have dated back to the earliest days of Cynicism. Some attribute it to Antisthenes, others to Diogenes. The cloak could be worn during

the day and used as a blanket by night while the satchel was used mainly for carrying food. It is said that at one time Diogenes had carried a cup and a bowl around with him as well, but threw them away when he decided they went beyond what he really needed. However, in later years he took to using a staff to walk with, and this also became part of the uniform. He may also have used it to beat people with when he wished to make an emphatic point.

The problem of identifying who really was and who was not a Cynic can also be seen in the case of Oenomaus. He also came from Gadara, a town near the Sea of Galilee, and it may be noted that a number of Cynics were connected with this place. For some reason there appears to have been a strong tradition of Cynicism there that persisted for a long time, although exactly in what shape or form is unclear. Oenomaus was probably born towards the end of the first century AD and wrote a book entitled *The Detection of Impostors* in which he criticised a number of aspects of paganism. Writing in the fourth century AD, the Emperor Julian denounced both it and Oenomaus, accusing him of falling far short of the standards set by Antisthenes, Diogenes and Crates. If Oenomaus really was a Cynic he may have been a degenerate one, and there comes a point at which a degenerate one scarcely deserves to be called one at all.

The general impression is that those who were not outright frauds were nevertheless progressively paler imitations of the original Cynics. As a consequence, Cynicism simply seems to fade into obscurity. Only the names of a few Cynics from the time after Julian (who died in AD 363) are known, and even then there are some doubts as to whether they were really Cynics at all. For example, Maximus Hero of Alexandria may have been one, but he may charitably be described as having held flexible views and in AD 380 he became a bishop. Another bishop, Gregory of Nazianzus, made a speech praising both Maximus in particular and Cynic values in general.

This may be connected with an interesting and perhaps surprising footnote to the history of Cynicism. There are many parallels between sayings to be found in the gospels and those associated with Cynics. Unlike most of their contemporaries, the Cynics took a positive view of poverty, and this finds many echoes in the New Testament. The extent to which Cynicism and Christianity actually influenced each other is unclear, but a degree of similarity seems indisputable. A possible source of contact between the two was Gadara, which lay well within the New Testament world. The speech made by Gregory of Nazianzus suggests that even if Cynicism had no direct influence on Jesus himself, nevertheless some early Christians came to recognise the Cynics as in some sense kindred spirits.

Teaching

Hegesias was a pupil of Diogenes and like him from Sinope. On one occasion Diogenes rebuked him for wanting to study Cynic writings when he had the living embodiment of Cynic teachings standing in front of him. There was always an element of anti-intellectualism in Cynicism, although some took it significantly further than others. Certainly the Cynics were the least interested in theory of all the schools. For this reason, there seems never to have been a formal institution connected with Cynicism since there was no formal body of doctrine that needed to be safeguarded and authoritatively passed on. On the other hand, there may have been places like Gadara where there was a tradition of Cynicism that persisted over many generations. The Cynics taught an outlook rather than a doctrine, and that outlook was best represented by the great Cynic figures of the past, especially Diogenes.

However, the Cynic outlook was based on certain principles and not just personal eccentricity or sheer bloody-mindedness so it is certainly correct to talk of a Cynic philosophy. On the other hand, the absence of any formal unifying institutional structure meant that it was often difficult to tell who was an orthodox Cynic, who was an unorthodox one, and who was not one at all. This in part explains the difficulty in deciding who was the founder of Cynicism. If Antisthenes *acted* like a Cynic, what more did he have to do in order to *be* a Cynic?

Although the Cynics did not develop a “physics” in the way that the other schools did, a conception of nature lay at the very heart of their philosophy. Crates is sometimes credited with inventing the slogan “Life in accordance with nature”, which was subsequently taken up by the Stoics but which the Cynics embraced in their own particular way. The distinction between what was natural and what was artificial or conventional was a subject of much philosophical debate during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The debate went far beyond being a purely technical one because the distinction could have practical implications, and these are perhaps most clearly seen in Cynicism. The Cynics attached a strong positive value to what was natural and a strong negative value to what was artificial or conventional. On the side of the artificial or conventional they placed laws, social customs and culture. In doing so, they identified themselves as radical outsiders and individualists. Whether or not the story about Diogenes and his father concerning the currency of Sinope is literally true, it became adopted as a powerful Cynic metaphor. Money is artificial and its value is conventional rather than natural. Consequently any offence against the currency is also an attack on conventional values. Because the original Greek word used to describe the particular offence Diogenes may have committed has a number of different possible meanings, it is not clear

exactly what he did. However, his supposed act formed the inspiration for what became another Cynic slogan and one that is usually translated as “Deface the currency!”

Because the Cynics did not seek to produce a systematic philosophical literature, it is not easy to reconstruct the line of argument that led them to the outlook they embraced. However, they seem to have assumed that the good life must have its roots in human nature. This was not an assumption unique to the Cynics, neither was it an unreasonable one. But the particular twist they gave it was based on their further assumption that artificiality was not only different from the natural but that it was also opposed to it, or anti-natural. People who sought the good life in the world of culture were not only looking in the wrong place, they were also looking in completely the opposite direction from where it was really to be found. The conventional was a distraction that drew people away from the natural. What was required was a return to nature.

It is important to understand just how radical the outlook of the Cynics was. Like most peoples, the ancient Greeks were proud of their own culture and convinced of its superiority. The Cynics taught that following the dictates of nature was itself superior to anything to be found in any artificial human culture. Indeed, the more developed or advanced a culture was, the further it was likely to be from “Life in accordance with nature”. The Cynics adopted a position that was fundamentally anti-social and the philosophy of Cynicism was one of rebellion, pushing people to live on the very edges of society if not actually outside it. The idea that it was possible to achieve the good life through a kind of self-imposed exile was an idea most people of the time would have found completely baffling.

From the fundamental anti-social orientation of Cynicism followed all the values and practices that characterised it. One of the central values it espoused was *autarchia*. Usually, and acceptably, translated as “self-sufficiency” or “independence”, it can also more literally mean “self-rule” or “self-mastery”. This value was not unique to Cynicism. However, different philosophical schools had different interpretations of what self-sufficiency amounted to or required. In particular they differed on the question of whether self-sufficiency could involve any kind of dependency on so-called “external goods” (such as friends and material comforts) or not. Because they were prepared to do without, and indeed rejected on principle, many of the things others valued and desired, the Cynic interpretation of self-sufficiency tended towards the stricter, more minimalist, end of the spectrum. Although, despite their name, the Cynics did not believe in living quite like dogs, nevertheless the examples of animals served to show how little was really needed in order to live a natural life. Indeed, it was said that Diogenes was inspired to lead the simple life after studying the behaviour of a mouse. Consequently the Cynics acquired a

reputation for asceticism, because they managed to do without many of the things other people regarded as necessities. However, there was more to this asceticism than simply giving things up. The Greek word *askesis*, from which “asceticism” derives, has the basic sense of training or discipline. If “ethics” was generally about character, then Cynic “ethics” was specifically about strength of character, and asceticism was the way in which this strength was developed. It was through strength of character that the Cynic was able to resist the many artificial temptations the social world had to offer. The good life was one that was lived in accordance with nature, and asceticism was the path that led to it. Through asceticism the will was strengthened so that the world could be faced with *apatheia*.

Unfortunately, the obvious translation of *apatheia*, namely “apathy”, is not really appropriate. While technically it may have the same meaning, it now has too many connotations of boredom and dullness to fulfil the role adequately. There is no longer any sense that apathy is an achievement, whereas *apatheia* certainly was. Although (like *ataraxia*) *apatheia* is a negative term, in the context of Hellenistic philosophy it was something actively accomplished rather than lapsed into passively. Like *ataraxia*, it suggested a freedom from something rather than just its absence. The core sense of *pathe* (i.e. that which *a-patheia* was freedom from) is contained in our modern “sympathy” and “empathy”, where the “-pathy” element means “feeling”. However, it was also capable of bearing a stronger meaning, something more akin to “passion” and the Romans translated it as *perturbatio*, perturbation. Both “impassiveness” and “imperturbability” are possible translations of *apatheia*, and I shall use the second one here.

Imperturbability equipped the Cynic to deal with both the hardships of everyday life that stemmed from the decision to live in accordance with nature and the unexpected difficulties that life can always bring. To some extent, Cynics tackled what other people regarded as serious problems by refusing to take them seriously. This imperturbability in the face of life’s adversities overlapped with, or shaded into, courage, to which the Cynics attached considerable value. It was no coincidence that Heracles was looked upon as a Cynic hero. Indeed, the fact that a character called Sostratus, who lived in the wild on Mount Parnassus in the second century AD, was given the nickname of “Heracles” is sometimes taken as evidence that he was a Cynic.

However, some things really were necessities and no amount of imperturbability could hide that fact. A standard Cynic solution was to resort to begging in order to procure them. Apart from food, which they could carry in their leather satchels, they had few requirements. However, while begging from the society they rejected, they also actively criticised it. The Cynics developed a reputation for outspokenness, which they certainly regarded as a virtue if not an

actual duty. They acted as the consciences of the societies they lived on the fringes of, constantly calling on people, in so many different ways, to return to the life lived in accordance with nature. The Roman Cynics who harangued members of the imperial family were part of a long tradition. The diatribe was the literary expression of this aspect of Cynicism, pouring ridicule on a variety of targets, and the Cynics developed a strong tradition of satire. Although the production of satirical works was not restricted to followers of Cynicism, the two become closely associated such that writers of satires are sometimes assumed to have been Cynics in the absence of any evidence to the contrary.

The idea that the Cynics presented themselves as the voice of morality was something of a paradox, at least on the face of it, since they were also renowned for their shamelessness and, in the eyes of most people, their *immorality*. However, this reputation for shamelessness simply reflected the fact that the Cynics rejected any moral code based on convention. In doing so, and acting accordingly, they were inevitably judged to be immoral by those who adhered to such codes.

All the schools embraced values and beliefs that led those who followed their teachings to a particular way of life. However, it was in Cynicism that the teachings and a way of life came closest together to the extent to which, as Diogenes pointed out to Hegesias, someone living the Cynic life *was* the school's teachings. That makes it particularly appropriate to begin with Cynicism in considering how an ancient philosophy can form the basis of a way of life and how that life might be lived even today.

Everyday Life

It is a pity that the modern sense of what it means to be cynical is some way removed from what Cynicism stood for in the ancient world. The modern meanings of stoical, Epicurean and sceptical have all strayed from their original senses to some degree, but perhaps the history of language has been least kind to the Cynics out of the four philosophical schools being considered in this book. In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Oscar Wilde makes Lord Darlington say that a Cynic is "A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing", and this is not meant to be a compliment. In response it might be said that the ancient Cynics believed they knew the *real* value of everything, and that in most cases it amounted to nothing. The supercilious sneering cynic of today is a very poor descendant of the principled and bold critic of society of antiquity.

Because the Cynics were the least interested in developing a body of theoretical literature of all the schools, it is above all in what the Cynics *did* that insights into their philosophy can be found. The Cynic about whom we apparently know most is Diogenes of Sinope, since many anecdotes about his

life have been preserved for us in book 6 of the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius (Diogenes Laertius 1931). However, Diogenes Laertius was writing centuries after Diogenes of Sinope died and there are serious doubts as to how many of the anecdotes are genuine. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to assume that they were regarded as typical of how Cynics in general lived and behaved, even if they did not all actually originate in the life and behaviour of Diogenes of Sinope himself.

As explained in chapter one, I shall examine the way of life taught by each school by considering a number of specific topics: death, diet and health, work, recreation, and personal relationships. I shall begin with death, and there are three different accounts of the death of Diogenes. He is variously described as having died because of some kind of intestinal problem brought on by eating raw octopus, or because of complications that set in after being bitten by dogs, or because he took his own life by holding his breath. There seems to be no particular reason to prefer or believe one version over another, although the idea of a Cynic's death being caused by dogs seems almost too good to be true. However, what may be noted is that if the suicide story is the correct one, it is by no means unique within the Cynic tradition. As has already been noted, both Demonax and Peregrinus Proteus committed suicide, the latter in spectacular fashion. Much earlier both Metrocles, the brother of Hipparchia, and Menippus of Gadara had also taken their own lives.

There is no sense in any of these stories that any kind of shame or criticism attaches to the act of suicide itself, although Lucian did question the *motives* of Peregrinus. More than that, there is a story about the death of Antisthenes in which it is suggested that by declining to take his own life when he was in great pain he fell short of the courage that might be expected of a Cynic in such a situation. Whether or not the story is true, it is clear that a Cynic was expected to meet death with imperturbability and that suicide was an entirely acceptable option.

Exactly how the Cynics understood death is unclear. It seems likely they simply regarded it as the end of existence. Certainly it is unlikely they ever bothered to speculate much about it. Lucian (Lucian 1961) wrote an amusing story about Menippus of Gadara paying a visit to the underworld in which he met both Socrates and Diogenes, amongst many others, there, but it is unclear whether this actually or at all accurately reflects Cynic beliefs concerning an afterlife. Their emphasis was very much on life in this world. Diogenes seems to have been indifferent to the fate of his body after death. Again there is more than one account of his last wishes, but according to one he wanted his dead body to be eaten by wild animals, while according to another he wanted it to be thrown into the river.

There is little to indicate how Cynics responded to the deaths of others. In large part this is because, as will shortly be seen, Cynics tended to live largely solitary lives without close personal relationships of any kind. Even when they are known to have enjoyed close personal relationships, as in the case of Crates and Hipparchia, we hear nothing of how one responded to the death of the other. However, it is probably safe to assume that in keeping with what seems to have been their general outlook on death, their approach to grief was pragmatic and unsentimental. The deaths of others, however close, would merely be treated as another opportunity to display imperturbability. In the end, as the fate of all human beings, death was simply the final event in the life lived in accordance with nature.

From considerations of death, it is a relatively small step to the subject of diet and health. I should point out straightaway that I have chosen this as a composite category of convenience. The schools themselves did not necessarily think of them together, although the connection between diet and health was widely appreciated in the ancient world. The convenience element lies in the fact that some schools had more to say on one than on the other. Putting them together means that it is possible to present a topic on which each school had a reasonable amount to say.

It is apparent that the Cynics' main concern about food was securing enough of it to stay alive. Their belief in self-sufficiency and life in accordance with nature manifested itself in a preference for the simple existence, and this extended to their normal diet. Although, when begging, what the Cynics ate depended upon what they were given, the plain was generally preferred to the elaborate. Pulses, figs and onions featured in a typical Cynic diet, and there was a tradition that they sometimes ate raw meat (as in one of the accounts of how Diogenes died), but the extent to which they did this is unclear. There are also suggestions that the Cynics did not disapprove of cannibalism, because they saw the taboo against it as conventional rather than natural in origin. However, there is no evidence that they ever actually practised it. Diogenes may have adhered to the principle that "You are what you eat." It is said that he was asked why athletes were so stupid, and his reply attributes the fact to the amount of meat they ate. One possible interpretation of his answer is that people who eat dumb animals become dumb themselves. That diet has an effect on character might be suggested by another saying attributed to Diogenes: "It is not amongst men who live on bread that you will find tyrants but among those who eat costly dinners" (Julian 1913, p. 53). Remarks attributed to Crates suggest that modest eating, which could include periods of fasting, was an important element of Cynic asceticism, and he was such an advocate of plain living that he wrote a hymn about it. This all points towards a simple diet being at least beneficial to someone seeking to lead the Cynic life even if it was not a positive requirement.