



Antisthenes the Cynic Diogenese Laertius

1. Antisthenes, the son of Antisthenes, was an Athenian. It was said, however, that he was not of pure Attic blood. Hence his reply to one who taunted him with this: "The mother of the gods too is a Phrygian." For his mother was supposed to have been a Thracian. Hence it was that, when he had distinguished himself in the battle of Tanagra,[3] he gave Socrates occasion to remark that, if both his parents had been Athenians, he would not have turned out so brave. He himself showed his contempt for the airs which the Athenians gave themselves on the strength of being sprung from the soil by the remark that this did not make them any better born than snails or wingless locusts.

2. To begin with, he became a pupil of Gorgias the rhetorician, and hence the rhetorical style that he introduces in his dialogues, and especially in his Truth and in his Exhortations. According to Hermippus he intended at the public gathering for the Isthmian games to discourse on the faults and merits of Athenians, Thebans and Lacedaemonians, but begged to be excused when he saw throngs arriving from those cities.

Later on, however, he came into touch with Socrates, and derived so much benefit from him that he used to advise his own disciples to become fellow-pupils with him of Socrates. He lived in the Peiraeus, and every day would tramp the five miles to Athens in order to hear Socrates. From Socrates he learned his hardihood, emulating his disregard of feeling, and thus he inaugurated the Cynic way of life. He demonstrated that pain is a good thing by instancing the great Heracles and Cyrus, drawing the one example from the Greek world and the other from the barbarians.

3. He was the first to define statement (or assertion) by saying that a statement is that which sets forth what a thing was or is. He used repeatedly to say, "I'd rather be mad than feel pleasure," and "We ought to make love to such women as will feel a proper gratitude." When a lad from Pontus was about to attend his lectures, and asked him what he required, the answer was, "Come with a new book, a new pen, and new tablets, if you have a mind to" (implying the need of brains as well).[4] When someone inquired what sort of wife he ought to marry, he said, "If she's beautiful, you'll not have her to yourself; if she's ugly, you'll pay for it dearly." Being told that Plato was abusing him, he remarked, "It is a royal privilege to do good and be ill spoken of."

4. When he was being initiated into the Orphic mysteries, the priest said that those admitted into these rites would be partakers of many good things in Hades. "Why then," said he, "don't you die?" Being reproached because his parents were not both free-born, "Nor were they both wrestlers," quoth he, "but yet I am a wrestler." To the question why he had but few disciples he replied, "Because I use a silver rod to eject them." When he was asked why he was so bitter in reproving his pupils he replied, "Physicians are just the same with their patients." One day upon seeing an adulterer running for his life he exclaimed, "Poor wretch, what peril you might have escaped at the price of an obol." He used to say, as we learn from Hecato in his Anecdotes, that it is better to fall in with crows than with flatterers; for in the one case you are devoured when dead, in the other case while alive.

5. Being asked what was the height of human bliss, he replied, "To die happy." When a friend complained to him that he had lost his notes, "You should have inscribed them," said he, "on your mind instead of on paper." As iron is eaten away by rust, so, said he, the envious

are consumed by their own passion. Those who would fain be immortal must, he declared, live piously and justly. States, said he, are doomed when they are unable to distinguish good men from bad. Once, when he was applauded by rascals, he remarked, "I am horribly afraid I have done something wrong."

When brothers agree, no fortress is so strong as their common life, he said. The right outfit for a voyage, he said, is such as, even if you are shipwrecked, will go through the water with you.

6. One day when he was censured for keeping company with evil men, the reply he made was, "Well, physicians are in attendance on their patients without getting the fever themselves." "It is strange," said he, "that we weed out the darnel from the corn and the unfit in war, but do not excuse evil men from the service of the state." When he was asked what advantage had accrued to him from philosophy, his answer was, "The ability to hold converse with myself." Some one having called upon him over the wine for a song, he replied, "Then you must accompany me on the pipe." When Diogenes begged a coat of him, he bade him fold his cloak around him double.

7. Being asked what learning is the most necessary, he replied, "How to get rid of having anything to unlearn." And he advised that when men are slandered, they should endure it more courageously than if they were pelted with stones.

And he used to taunt Plato with being conceited. At all events when in a procession he spied a spirited charger he said, turning to Plato, "It seems to me that you would have made just such a proud, showy steed." This because Plato was constantly praising horseflesh. And one day he visited Plato, who was ill, and seeing the basin into which Plato had vomited, remarked, "The bile I see, but not the pride."

8. He used to recommend the Athenians to vote that asses are horses. When they deemed this absurd, his reply was, "But yet generals are found among you who had had no training, but were merely elected." "Many men praise you," said one. "Why, what wrong have I done?" was his rejoinder. When he turned the torn part of his cloak so that it came into view, Socrates no sooner saw this than he said, "I spy your love of fame peeping through your cloak." Phnias in his work on the Socratics tells us how some one asked him what he must do to be good and noble, and he replied, "You must learn from those who know that the faults you have are to be avoided." When some one extolled luxury his reply was, "May the sons of your enemies live in luxury."

9. To the youth who was posing fantastically as an artist's model he put this question, "Tell me, if the bronze could speak, on what, think you, would it pride itself most?" "On its beauty," was the reply. "Then," said he, "are you not ashamed of delighting in the very same quality as an inanimate object?" When a young man from Pontus promised to treat him with great consideration as soon as his boat with its freight of salt fish should arrive, he took him and an empty wallet to a flour-dealer's, got it filled, and was going away. When the woman asked for the money, "The young man will pay," said he, "when his boatload of salt fish arrives."

Antisthenes is held responsible for the exile of Anytus and the execution of Meletus.

10. For he fell in with some youths from Pontus whom the fame of Socrates had brought to Athens, and he led them off to Anytus, whom he ironically declared to be wiser than Socrates; whereupon (it is said) those about him with much indignation drove Anytus out of the city. If he saw a woman anywhere decked out with ornaments, he would hasten to her house and bid her husband bring out his horse and arms, and then, if the man possessed them, let his extravagance alone, for (he said) the man could with these defend himself; but, if he had none, he would bid him strip off the finery.

Favourite themes with him were the following. He would prove that virtue can be taught; that nobility belongs to none other than the virtuous.

11. And he held virtue to be sufficient in itself to ensure happiness, since it needed nothing else except the strength of a Socrates. And he maintained that virtue is an affair of deeds and does not need a store of words or learning; that the wise man is self-sufficing, for all the goods of others are his; that ill repute is a good thing and much the same as pain; that the wise man will be guided in his public acts not by the established laws but by the law of virtue; that he will

also marry in order to have children from union with the handsomest women; furthermore that he will not disdain to love, for only the wise man knows who are worthy to be loved.

12. Diocles records the following sayings of his: To the wise man nothing is foreign or impracticable. A good man deserves to be loved. Men of worth are friends. Make allies of men who are at once brave and just. Virtue is a weapon that cannot be taken away. It is better to be with a handful of good men fighting against all the bad, than with hosts of bad men against a handful of good men. Pay attention to your enemies, for they are the first to discover your mistakes. Esteem an honest man above a kinsman. Virtue is the same for women as for men. Good actions are fair and evil actions foul. Count all wickedness foreign and alien.

13. Wisdom is a most sure stronghold which never crumbles away nor is betrayed. Walls of defence must be constructed in our own impregnable reasonings. He used to converse in the gymnasium of Cynosarges (White hound) at no great distance from the gates, and some think that the Cynic school derived its name from Cynosarges. Antisthenes himself too was nicknamed a hound pure and simple. And he was the first, Diocles tells us, to double his cloak and be content with that one garment and to take up a staff and a wallet. Neanthes too asserts that he was the first to double his mantle. Sosicrates, however, in the third book of his Successions of Philosophers says this was first done by Diodorus of Aspendus, who also let his beard grow and used a staff and a wallet.

14. Of all the Socratics Antisthenes alone is praised by Theopompus, who says he had consummate skill and could by means of agreeable discourse win over whomsoever he pleased. And this is clear from his writings and from Xenophon's Banquet. It would seem that the most manly section of the Stoic School owed its origin to him. Hence Athenaeus the epigrammatist writes thus of them:

You experts in Stoic story, you who commit to sacred pages most excellent doctrines - that virtue alone is the good of the soul: for virtue alone saves man's life and cities. But that Muse^[1] that is one of the daughters of Memory approves the pampering of the flesh, which other men have chosen for their aim.

15. Antisthenes gave the impulse to the indifference of Diogenes, the continence of Crates, and the hardihood of Zeno, himself laying the foundations of their state. Xenophon calls him the most agreeable of men in conversation and the most temperate in everything else.

Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. 2. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1925.

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