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The Cynic Philosophers: From Diogenes to Julian.

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“‘Know yourself’ and ‘Deface the currency’”: two Pythian proverbs. And the latter means, scorn common opinion and value truth over the moral coin of the masses’ (29).

The ancient cynics represent an often forgotten legacy of ancient Greek philosophy, and more specifically ancient Greek political philosophy. For the ancient cynics may be thought of as the precursors of the radical tradition in political thought, joining Heraclitus in this regard. The material collected in this book spans the period from Antisthenes (445-365 B.C.), to Julian (331-363 A.D.). It includes a brief biography of each of the cynics, including those who are not included in the collection, but who have contributed to the cynic legacy. The biographies also include those who may be termed sympathetic to some or all of the cynic doctrines. So, the collection adopts a broad view of just who is and is not a cynic.

Here, the most interesting is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. This may seem to be a controversial claim. Yet there are more than a few passages from the New Testament that can be used to support this view. Indeed, Jesus does indeed ‘Deface the currency’, although his attitude toward tradition is highly complex. That caveat aside, the Gospel does indeed present a set of teachings that is critical of the use of power by those who ‘lord it over others’, and contains a radical rejection of status as something to be valued. There is also perhaps the most famous statement on coins: the one where Jesus says, while looking at a coin, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’—thereby redefining the relationship between the spiritual and the political spheres. The editor also notes the important historical note that Nazareth was a center of cynic activity at the time of Jesus. This is an interesting footnote to the Hebraic tradition in political thought—Hebraic radicalism. It also opens the door to another side of other spiritual leaders. For example, it could be said that Eastern teachers have just such scorn for the banality of everyday opinion. This can serve as an interesting point of discussion for those interested in comparative religion.

The cynic call to ‘Deface the currency’ also has an historical and biographical meaning in the case of Diogenes. The editor tells us that Diogenes had to flee his homeland because, on a trip to Delphi, he mistook Apollo’s suggestion to change the laws as meaning, instead, that he should change the coinage. For this he took flight from his city. These and other pieces of parenthetical information are offered in the initial paragraphs that introduce each thinker. Some are thought-provoking, such as a comment about the cynic Bion, where the editor notes the similarity in sentiment between Bion and some of the epigrams of Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human* (72). The point is somewhat controversial because some philosophers would reject outright a comparison between such divergent epochs in history. Others, however, and perhaps most famously Nietzsche, have written and philosophized from precisely the opposite viewpoint.

The cynics famously drew their support from earlier figures, and most especially those found in Homer. Two major characters introduced by Homer, Odysseus and Telamonian Ajax, were considered by the cynics to be archetypical. Readers are perhaps familiar with the story that after their victory in the Trojan War, the Greek leaders set out to decide whether Odysseus or Ajax deserved the prize of Achilles' sacred armour. It is in this context that Antisthenes recounts the speeches of Odysseus and Ajax. Here, the two ways of the cynic philosophy are given full exposition. Odysseus, famous for his craftiness, guile and rhetorical acumen, is contrasted with Ajax. The latter's manner of speech is direct, even to the point of being confrontational. He accuses Odysseus of being little more than a temple robber, and attacks the very process by which the decision will be made. The theme of direct speech is a common theme among the cynics, and is antithetical to another lofty hero known for his subtlety of argumentation. This aspect of political thought is common today in many works dubbed 'postmodern'. Today's agonistic political theorists have many fellow travelers in this text.

The contrast that is drawn with Plato involves the best known of the ancient cynics, Diogenes. One of the more interesting exchanges involved an occasion when Plato hosted some guests, and this story is recounted by the editor in the chapter on Diogenes which has a section entitled, 'relations with Plato'. Diogenes made a point of walking over Plato's carpet with the retort that he was 'walking over Plato's pride', to which Plato replied, 'Yes, with pride of another sort, Diogenes'. Viewed from today's vantage point, this small vignette captures a tension within political theory. Critics of normative political thought and discourse have frequently noted that it is susceptible to using moral arguments to ground politics, without however, being sufficiently critical of its own moral biases.

One area of concern to editors and translators of ancient works such as this one, is the problem of authorship, and the related issue of attribution. Briefly put, much of the work of ancient authors has been lost through destruction and the passage of time. As a result, what we do have of many authors is fragmentary and, in some cases, untrustworthy. The way that *Cynic Philosophers* addresses this issue is to qualify, by the use of symbols and commentary, exactly where the readings are questionable. In other cases though, the secondary sources from which we have derived the existing texts, are themselves of some contestation. As with the debate over who wrote the Gospels, it is closer to the mark to talk about influence and about how faithful to the original teachings the secondary sources are. Here the key question is: how well does any particular author and their text reflect what we do know about the ancient figure? *The Cynic Philosophers* does a good job of highlighting contested areas and authors.

The Cynic Philosophers is a work that should be useful as an undergraduate text for introductory courses in political thought, and for theme-based seminars. The section on Plato also helps to shed light on the conservatism of Plato's philosophy as something that concerned his contemporaries in philosophy, as well as his more literary critics, both old and new.

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