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The Culture of Education. Ancient Cynicism and "the scandal of the truth"

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Without pretending to side with ancient Cynicism - as if escape from contemporary intellectual culture were that easy - I call attention in what follows to the tensions that can be drawn between the culture of education (ranging from education as a systematic activity to the values, conduct and self-understanding of educated people) and the radically opposed exploits of Cynic philosophy[1]. In constructing this summary account of ancient Cynicism, I draw from the considerable scholarship that emerged in the last three decades[2], but most of all, frame this analysis by engagement with the work of two philosophers - Michel Foucault and to a lesser extent Peter Sloterdijk - who were, each in their own way, unusually attentive, and receptive to the deviant, devious intent of ancient Cynicism[3]. As both Foucault and Sloterdijk explore, the basic hostility of Cynic philosophy to the culture of the educated and the operations of the intellect, make it difficult to interpret. This paper outlines several lines of divergence between the philosophy of the Cynic and the culture of the educated (as this tradition is understood in the West) at its self-told inception in ancient Greece.

There is a much more straightforward and less challenging interpretation of Cynic educational philosophy than the one offered here. To outline this alternative, I turn for a moment to Donald Dudley's influential study of ancient Cynicism, which remains a key reference point for much recent scholarship. It offers a rare, though very brief consideration of "Cynic educational theory"[4]. As Dudley explains, an understanding of the educational implications of Cynic philosophy may be acquired by studying the most

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[1] Due to the comparative brevity of the academic paper, I leave much out of this account. For a more extensive treatment see: A. Allen, *Cynicism*, MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2019; *The Cynical Educator*, Mayfly, Leicester, UK 2017. The latter book discusses much else besides, attempting a genealogy of the educational good as discussed in "*The End of Education: Nietzsche, Foucault, Genealogy*", in «Philosophical Inquiry in Education» vol. 25 (2018), n. 1.

[2] Including: R. B. Branham and M.O. Goulet-Gazé, *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996; D. Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 2007; L. Shea, *The Cync Enlightenment: Diogenes in the Salon*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2010.

[3] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, trans. G. Burchell Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011 [1984]; P. Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. M. Eldred University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2001 [1983].

[4] This phrase is misleading, since Cynicism was a practical rather than theoretical philosophy. D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism: From Diogenes to the 6th Century AD*, Methuen, London 1937, pp. 87-89.

obviously educational activities of the most famous Cynic, Diogenes, born around 412 B.C.E.. Dudley focuses on Diogenes' purported role as a household tutor, which appears as a brief anecdote in Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, a collection that was put together a good few centuries later[5]. Though Dudley argues earlier in his book that the story of Diogenes' capture by pirates and subsequent purchase by Xeniades of Corinth (whose sons he would apparently teach) is "an invention"[6], he nonetheless takes this story to encapsulate Cynic educational philosophy. Dudley presents Diogenes as an ideal pedagogue in this account, with Diogenes paying close attention in his role as Xeniades' slave/teacher to the moral formation of his pupils[7]. The educational programme attributed to Diogenes is, as Dudley interprets, a «compound of various existing systems, interpreted in a Cynic spirit». Here, «ordinary Greek elementary education…[ranging from athletic training to learning passages by heart] forms its backbone, augmented by features derived from Sparta (hunting) and from the Persian system […] (shooting with the bow, riding)»[8]. The emphasis in this anecdote is upon the formation of self-sufficient individuals who will go about (to quote the original source) «silent, and not looking about them in the streets»[9]. If Diogenes' involvement in producing quiet, orderly pupils does not sound odd enough, we are told that Diogenes' pupils apparently held him «in great regard»[10]. This depiction of a Cynic education seems decidedly out of kilter when compared with the more scandalous, confrontational anecdotes of Diogenes found elsewhere in Laertius's collection. As a compiler of anecdotes Laertius was content to collect contradictory accounts and place them alongside one another, making no attempt to arbitrate between them. Given these considerations, it is worth pondering the educational implications of Cynic philosophy more generally, rather than pick out, prioritise and interpret occasional and more direct mentions of education in, for example, the anecdotes collected by Laertius. Such an approach - one that reads beyond

[5] See D. Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers Volume 2*, (a cura di) J. Henderson, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1931, 6.30-6.31.

[6] D.R. Dudley, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[7] ivi, p. 87.

[8] ivi, p. 88.

[9] D. Laertius, *op. cit.,* 6.31

[10] *Ibidem.*

the story of Diogenes as a household tutor and interprets education itself in broader terms - informs my reading in what follows[11].

Cynicism as sham philosophy

Though little of early Cynic writing survives including nothing by Diogenes, some ancient sources do report titles of works that have since been lost to history. These Cynic outputs were said to be rather unconventional, either parodying conventional modes of writing or subverting convention by adopting non-literary forms such as the diatribe. If Diogenes did write - and not all ancient sources confirm this[12] - his attitude to writing is suggested by the following anecdote: To Hegesias, who asked Diogenes to lend him one of his writings, Diogenes replied; "You are a simpleton Hegesias; you do not choose painted figs, but real ones; and yet you pass over the true training and would apply yourself to written rules"[13]. Like many other ancient philosophies, Cynic teachings were passed on chiefly through an oral tradition and taken up as a way of life.[14] Unlike most other philosophies, a subsequent Cynic school was never established, one that might have codified Cynic principles and established a canon. And where other philosophies were only made available to an elect, Cynicism was not exclusive nor was it concerned to police its margins. Cynics were known for their outward behaviour, for how they expressed themselves in public, rather than for the distinct and clearly stated teachings of a philosophy in the more conventional sense. The Cynic had scant regard for the formal lectures and exalted language of established philosophy. Diogenes did his best to introduce doubt as to whether he even merited the title "philosopher", inviting others to consider him a fraud.[15] Cynicism of this sort is always on the point of dismissal as "sham philosophy", measuring its success, perhaps, by the extent it remains marginal from the point of view of its more respectable cousins.

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[11] In this reading, I also position myself against the argument that Cynic philosophy sought to "democratise" education, by basing its activity on an «open admissions policy», as it moved the site of philosophical training from the enclaves of «classical philosophical schools to the street» (K. Kennedy, *Cynic Rhetoric: The ethics and tactics of resistance,* «Rhetoric Review», vol. 18 (1999), n. 1, p. 29.) Although there is undoubtedly truth in this claim, for Cynicism did address a broader audience, in doing so it nonetheless submitted both education and philosophy to Cynic derision.

[12] R. Bracht Branham and M.O. Goulet-Gazé, *Introduction* in R. Bracht Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Gazé (a cura di), *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1996, p. 8.

[13] D. Laertius, *op. cit.*, 6.48.

[14] P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Blackwell, Oxford 1987 [1995]; P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Harvard, Cambridge, MA 2004 [1995].

[15] See D. Mazella, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-42.

Cynicism still manages to confound those who would like to rescue it for, or make sense of it in terms of respectable philosophy. It had no fixed *dogmata* and seems to have operated without a defined "end" or "philosophical goal" otherwise known as its *telos*. This sets it apart from other more obviously teleological philosophies such as Stoicism and Epicureanism. Consequently, some have struggled include Cynicism within the philosophical canon[16], whereas others have admitted Cynicism only by articulating an intellectual framework on its behalf, associating it with fundamental commitments to freedom, self-mastery, happiness, virtue, cosmopolitanism, and nature[17]. A countervailing view suggests that the most famous tenets of Cynic philosophy «grew out of a continual process of ad hoc improvisation»[18]. There were no fundamentals or pre-givens. Cynicism could only take form in practice. That is the position adopted in this paper where, according to this reading, key Cynic ideas and methods were only identified retrospectively. This process would reify Cynicism, rendering it inert as it marginalized the rebellious impulse, the situated and crafty playfulness, the devious improvisation that had distinguished it from all other philosophies. Only once these practices had been secured, interpreted and codified could they become the hallmark, the inflexible imprint of Cynic tradition. The construction of a Cynic tradition was, in effect, the death of Cynicism.

Against Plato's conception of the philosopher as «a spectator of time and eternity», one might say that Diogenes «was the philosopher of contingency, of life in the barrel»[19]. But even this statement offers too much by way of definition, as if the telos of Cynic philosophy were a life of that sort. According to one version of the story, Diogenes of Sinope only ended up living on the street out of necessity. He was not native to Athens but arrived from the borders of the Greek world as an exile, banished from his home city, a wandering migrant who would make himself increasingly unwelcome in his host community. Diogenes is famous for setting up home in a storage jar, but he did so at first only because the little house he had hoped for could not be arranged in time[20]. The barrel - in which he would not just live but roll about - gains significance later, as the site

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[16] Martha Nussbaum, for example, engages in a brief discussion of Diogenes, who she quickly decides, offers a "flawed" example of the Socratic tradition with its focus on the "inner life of virtue and thought", and who has, for that reason, little to contribute to liberal humanism or philosophy more generally: «It is hard to know whether to grant Diogenes the title "philosopher" at all, given his apparent preference for a kind of street theatre over Socratic questioning» (M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1997, pp. 57-58.).

[17] For a summary of these positions see R.B. Branham and M.O. Goulet-Gazé, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.

[18] R.B. Bracht Branham, *Defacing the Currency: Diogenes' Rhetoric and the Invention of Cynicism*, in R.B. Bracht Branham and M.O. Goulet-Gazé (a cura di), *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, op. cit., p. 87.

[19] ivi, pp. 88-89.

[20] D. Laertius, *op. cit.*, 6.22-23.

of his more deviant, devious Cynicism: experimental, unprincipled, and doggedly subversive.

Undercutting convention

Since Cynic philosophy was improvised, contingent, and did not begin with a dogma or declaration of what it valued most, its development and developing form was a function of its context. Those still searching for definition, for some clear, canonical statement concerning the nature and intent of Cynicism might, then, opt for the opposite approach, and define Cynic philosophy by what it opposed. But here, again, Cynicism wrong-foots its interpreters; Cynicism was not reactive in any straightforward sense. A Cynic does not simply oppose, and define Cynic philosophy in reaction to, what is valued or given esteem. Despite appearances, Cynics had nothing against the pursuit of virtue, for example. Which is to say, they had no *principled* philosophical objections to virtue as such. Their contempt was heaped on the idea that virtue must be based on canonical principles and should be cultivated in a rarefied atmosphere. For this they would famously be accused of attempting a "shortcut to virtue", for undermining a set of pedagogic assumptions that underpin Western philosophy and its educational and religious legacies. As Seneca (first century Roman statesman and tutor to the emperor) put it, «virtue only comes to a character which has been thoroughly schooled and trained and brought to a pitch of perfection by unremitting practice»[21]. Virtue is the possession of the wise, well versed and well off, where the exclusivity of virtue, Seneca writes, is «the best thing about her». There is, he continues, «about wisdom [and the virtue it cultivates] a nobility and magnificence in the fact that she […] is not a blessing given to all and sundry»[22]. Without defining the Cynic attitude by its negation, this foundational conceit of the educated person was clearly worth challenging from a Cynic point of view.

The Cynic was not straightforwardly anti-culture, either. And here it is worth sounding a broader note of caution to avoid simplifying the object of Cynic counter-cultural critique. Insofar as street Cynics later opposed the *paideia,* or learned culture of a Roman philosopher-emperor such as Julian (operating now as a street philosophy or philosophy of the mob; a movement that extended throughout the Roman Empire), they confronted with a cultural phenomenon that was complex and ambiguous in its operations. As Peter Brown argues, *paideia* should not be understood simply as a system of exclusion by which the Roman nobility and political elite asserted their "exalted" status as bearers of culture and refinement. If that were the case, the task for Cynics would be relatively straightforward, where all Cynic philosophy would need to do is reveal *paideia* as an artifice, a set of arbitrary cultural values by which the nobility exalts itself on false pretence. Cynics could then attack *paideia* as an agent of cultural

[21] Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. R. Campbell, Penguin, London 2004, pp. 176-7.

[22] Ivi, p. 162.

oppression. But as a marker of nobility and system of decorum, *paideia* did not just exalt the powerful. In Brown's analysis, «it controlled them by ritualizing their responses and by bridling their raw nature through measured gestures»[23]. Its rituals helped organize the violence of imperial power, submitting it to convention, rendering it predictable. Its protocols operated against «a tide of horror that lapped close to the feet of educated persons»[24]. Consequently, or so one might conclude, the Cynic task cannot be to destroy the pretensions of culture and leave it there, since that would open the way to unbridled power. Cynicism, from this point of view, is not just anti-culture; it attempts a more exacting critique of the systems of power that culture is imbricated with and supportive of.

The hostility to intellectual culture found in Cynic philosophy should also not be essentialised, as if Cynics were just a bunch of anti-intellectuals with an axe to grind. Cynics were not hostile to attempts to understand the world in which they lived and died. They were merely suspicious of the common prejudice that the world is best understood by adopting the conventions of rationality endorsed by a particular philosophical school (or in contemporary terms, the idea that the intellect must adhere to a particular discipline, method, or mode of writing and speech). As a philosopher of contingency, the Cynic is said to live without certainties and does not mourn their absence. The Cynic's life could be described as an experiment, determined to perturb and explore the boundaries of ordinary existence. For Diogenes, this experiment often takes the form of a hostile engagement, one that issues from the street if not the loins, where the philosopher sends out provocations, examines the retorts provoked by them, and comes to understand the limits these retorts reflect. The challenge is to improvise a way of life that can sustain itself alongside and outside these limits. By rejecting the consolations and comfortable illusions of intellectual culture, by risking social marginalisation, alienation and political retribution, by actively seeking destitution and physical hardship, the Cynic discovered the world through a series of practical confrontations with it.

Fearless speech

Fearless speech, otherwise known as *parrhesia*, has become a recurring theme in accounts of Cynic philosophy—it is prominent in Foucault's interpretation[25]. As a Cynic theme it draws attention to the specific bravery of the Cynic philosopher who speaks freely, though the term applies to others too, most famously Socrates who conducted free speech as dialogue. The term recurs throughout Greek and Roman literature, describing a mode of interaction that free men might engage in (where, due to their

[23] P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI 1992, p. 56.

[24] ivi, p. 52.

[25] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*; *Fearless Speech*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2001.

oppressed status, women, slaves, aliens and children were debarred from taking part in parrhesiastic exchanges). Though parrhesia clearly took different forms in antiquity, Cynicism stretched its basic definition in terms of who might partake in parrhesia, whilst pushing this mode of speech towards its limit point, a point at which free speech ceases to be tolerated, and dialogue is replaced by violent reprisal. Since freedom to practice parrhesia was generally associated with «the rights of a citizen (in a democratic state) or the privileges of an aristocrat», it is argued that Diogenes' claim to parrhesia, issuing as it did from «the bottom of the social hierarchy - as an impoverished noncitizen'- was a bold manoeuvre». Parrhesia was remodelled by removing it from an elite originating context governed by conventions of decorum, and by putting it to use within a setting that refused these restraints and should not have been practicing parrhesia in the first place[26].

Cynicism distorted the basic rules of parrhesia in other respects too. Parrhesia depended on an agreement between interlocutors to bear the other's free speech without reprisal. Cynic philosophy stretched this agreement to breaking point. In basing its use of parrhesia so heavily on the form of an insult (rather than the form of an uncomfortable truth that the parrhesiast is trying, valiantly to put across), the Cynic parrhesiast plays «at the very limits of the parrhesiastic contract», as Foucault puts it[27]. Unlike Socrates - who in many respects represents the Western educator in its ideal form[28] - a Cynic such as Diogenes of Sinope would not be so courteous as to engage in respectful dialogue where mutual interaction depends at least on a pretence of mutual regard. Diogenes' speech poured forth heedless of whether or not one consented to its onslaught. Whilst Socrates risked the irritation if not anger of his companions by persuading them through dialogue, trickery and irony of their ignorance, of not knowing what they claimed to know, the Cynic risks the vengeance of his auditors more openly, berating them to reject and despise everything they accept to be true and proper. Whereas the Socratic teacher «plays with his interlocutors ignorance» in order to generate a thirst for wisdom, so as to cause them to apply themselves more earnestly and thoroughly to their education; Diogenes seeks to hurt their *pride*[29]. Dialogue is replaced by diatribe and insult, or it is suspended altogether, whereupon the Cynic exhibits him or herself shamelessly before a public, causing deliberate offence.

The Cynic speaks fearlessly only after becoming, or so as to become free of attachments. The Cynic must attempt to become free of duties that function as constraints. Foremost amongst these constraints are the operations of the conscience, which, as Foucault argues, is a tool of self-government that was perfected during the long interval of Christendom and bequeathed on modernity to become the key means by

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[26] R.B. Bracht Branham, *Diogenes"Rhetoric and the Invention of Cynicism*, art. cit., p. 97.

[27] M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, op. cit., p. 127.

[28] A. Allen, *The Cynical Educator*, op. cit., pp. 19-21.

[29] M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, op. cit., p. 126.

which its modern and late-modern inheritors are constrained[30]. Again, a word of caution is necessary. To suggest that the Cynic seeks to become free of these chattels might give the impression that the perfect Cynic would be a kind of sociopath; bold, disinhibited, free of remorse, this character would be at liberty to pursue his or her philosophy of deviance without hindrance. Cynic philosophy was, however, far more intricated in, and appreciative of the social norms it sets out to question than this depiction of the Cynic as a kind of sociopath would allow. The Cynic is committed to their complex, internal unravelling. Cynic philosophy was not modelled on the idea of straightforward escape as if it were a matter of breaking loose, stepping outside, or turning one's back on convention. Escapees always carry more baggage than they realise.

Impoverishment and dependence

The problem of escape is further deepened by the practice of Cynic impoverishment. This activity demonstrated that the pursuit of freedom, of a life free of attachments, can have paradoxical effects. The Cynic begins by stripping down existence, getting rid of anything that might be considered superfluous, casting off material goods that would tie the Cynic down through his or her dependence on them. In a notorious anecdote, Diogenes even threw away his wooden cup, which was said to be one of his last belongings. Having observed a boy drink from his hollowed hand, Diogenes found his cup to be yet another unnecessary burden[31]. As Foucault interprets, the Cynic of this more radical persuasion was «always looking for possible further destitution». Cynic poverty was a «dissatisfied poverty which strives to get back to the ground of the absolutely indispensable». It was «an indefinite poverty endlessly at work on itself»[32]. This deliberate and progressive impoverishment committed the Cynic to a life of dirt and dishevelment, affording an independence of sorts - liberation from the trappings of wealth and civilized society - though, and here's the rub, the very pursuit of impoverishment also tied the Cynic to his (or her) materially advantaged superiors. It imposed a vicious dependence of its own, since the Cynic becomes increasingly reliant on the alms of others. The stigma entailed in such a relation of charitable dependence should not be underestimated in a Greek and Roman context where personal honour ranked so highly as a virtue amongst "free" men. To court dishonour in such a way would be a radical test of the Cynic's resolve to live a different life. It would ensure the Cynic pursuit of poverty was more than a romantic affectation. The true Cynic, the Cynic in pursuit of a philosophy of deviance, deliberately seeks the shame of penury and hopes to survive it. Presumably those who overcome the worst humiliation will achieve

[30] See especially M. Foucault *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley, Penguin, London 1998 [1976].

[31] Diogenes, *Diogenes the Cynic: Sayings and Anecdotes*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 10-11.

[32] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 258.

the most thorough purging of all false codes of conduct and notions of decency. The route to independence, rather oddly then, is through the Cynic's insufferable dependence on the charity of others. To enhance the effect, the Cynic must learn to be resolutely ungrateful when given alms and be indifferent to those who cast judgement. One portrait depicts Demetrius, a first century Cynic from Corinth, refusing money from the Roman Emperor. «If he wanted to tempt me, he should have offered me the whole Empire», the Cynic responds[33].

The Cynic body

Cynicism deliberately upset the conventions of philosophy and the pedagogical relationships it depended upon. To this might be added the further suggestion, itself a little scandalous, that Cynics brought the underpinning aggression of Western education to the surface by basing its own educational relationships on the form of an insult. As it did so it placed the body firmly at the centre of its teaching practice. As an educational activity, and by contrast to the stiff austerity of Platonism, Cynic philosophy is rooted in the experience of the body which it embraces as essentially ungovernable. The body betrays us precisely when we wish it would submit. Contrast this with Plato's dialogue, the *Phaedo*, in which the body is conceptualised as a distracting source of «loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything». So long as we remain adversely affected by it, Plato continues, «there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be Truth»[34]. For the Cynic, the body operates very differently, in relation to a radically altered understanding of truth and how it is to be produced. Cynic truth appears as a product of scandal, as a "scandal of the truth", an event that is mediated by the body and its emissions[35]. This scandal helps question educational regimes that submit to restrictive conceptions of Truth or wisdom based on a promise of realization and fulfilment that is forever withheld. It notes how this educational promise is itself attached to a demand, a call to domesticate the body in anticipation, and by way of preparation for a promise that is never delivered. By explicit contrast, where the unrestrained, immediate, and laughable presence of Cynic truth

[33] Ivi, p. 194.

[34] Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. H. Tredennick & H. Tarrant, Penguin, London 1993, p. 66b-c. It is worth noting that this dualism between the soul of the philosopher (which is inclined to reason) and his body (which operates as a source of material distraction), gave way, as Lloyd argues, to a «more complex location of the rational» in Plato's later work, where non-rational forces are placed «not outside a soul which is of itself entirely rational, but within the soul as a source of inner conflict» (G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male ' & 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, Routledge, London 1993, p. 7. However, the contrast with the Cynic placement of the body nonetheless stands.

[35] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit. p. 174ff.

appears, «the very body of the truth is made visible»[36]. Cynic truth appears in a style of life that undermines the abstract seriousness of conventional Truth, with its claims to improvement, and its persistent deferrals.

Cynic truth is indexed to the Cynic body which bears witness to reality, bringing to question the value of so-called higher things and the demands they make upon us. Where Plato sought to «define the soul's being in its radical separation» from the life of the body, the Cynic operated in the opposite direction, seeking to reduce «life to itself, to what it is in truth». As Foucault interprets, this basic truth was revealed through the very act of living as a Cynic, where the Cynic was not simply casting aside his or her last possessions (with the exception of the famous cloak and staff). Rather, all pointless conventions and all superfluous opinions' were to be given up, in a «general stripping of existence»[37].

In each case, as Foucault argues, the "true life" takes a different meaning. For Plato it is associated with the life that is simple, the life that does not conceal its intentions, is straight, undeviating and oriented to a higher order. This philosophical life is set against the life of those still «prey to the multiplicity of [their] desires, appetites, and impulses»[38]. The true life is evaluated by its adherence to rules of good conduct (that Plato and his inheritors outline), but more than this, by its overall (apparent) unity. It is the life that remains unchanged in the face of adversity[39]. This higher existence is achieved by those few who have the strength and discipline to maintain a secure and stable identity amid corruption and upheaval. It is the life of an incipient educated elite, of those who justify their elevation above the uneducated, uncultivated masses in near cosmic terms. As such, it becomes the object of desire of philosopher emperors and statesmen such as Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Julian. With adjustment it will form the underpinning assumption of a nineteenth century liberal education and its masculine ideal, the liberal "gentleman", which, shorn of its more obvious elitism, still influences us to this day in the guise of the educated person who espouses virtues of moderation and constancy from positions of relative comfort.

This was a considerable edifice to oppose, and remains so, even in its watered-down, contemporary secular manifestation; namely, the poise and character of the educated person who values people of "substance", taste and cultivated intellect above those without. For the Cynic, the "true life" operates completely differently. It is the dog's life. Diogenes was known as the "dog" and responded in kind, according to a popular anecdote: «At a dinner some people were tossing bones to him as though he were a dog». So Diogenes «rid himself of them by pissing on them»[40]. Diogenes remained true to his

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[36] Ivi, p. 173.

[37] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, op. cit., p. 171.

[38] Ivi, p. 222.

[39] *Ibidem.*

[40] Diogenes, op. cit., p. 25.

philosophy in this sense, doing in public what others would conceal, acting without modesty or shame. He extended, if not radicalised Plato's injunction to be unflagging in ones' commitment to truth and remain unchanged in the face of adversity. By acting the part of the dog Diogenes inverted the humiliation intended for him. He embraced his caricature; injuring the dignity of those he pissed on.

A public scandal

From the perspective of civilized society, dogs should be toilet trained. They must be subjected to the will of their master as they learn to master themselves, taking control of their own emissions. For the Greek philosopher, mastery always begins at home. Here the "true life" is interpreted as a *sovereign life* in which the philosopher achieves, or at least works towards self-mastery. This life is "sovereign" insofar as it attempts a high degree of self-control, submitting the faculties of mind and body to the will of the intellect. No part of the philosopher's self thus imagined should escape the discipline and composure of a well-governed mind.

This kind of self-possession is not only the high ideal to which Plato's philosopher king aspires. It is also the Roman Stoic dream of a figure such as Seneca. According to this distinctly masculine conception of philosophy, it is believed that the sovereign life will be beneficial to others[41]. Indeed, the generosity of the sovereign life is constructed as if it were an obligatory, necessary component of that existence. The philosopher provides students and friends alike with assistance and direction, extending the same care of self (a form of diligent self-denial) that resulted in the philosopher's self-mastery, to the care of the student or friend. There will be wider benefits too, since the philosopher's life offers a lesson that is of greater, if not universal significance. The splendour and brilliance of the sovereign life, the life of complete self-mastery, «adorns humankind»[42] from this point of view, and educates it too, having an influence so profoundly far reaching it continues long after the philosopher's exemplary life has ended.

Such ideas have maintained their dominance; they recur, for instance, in the nineteenth-century revival of liberal education, and at a lower level, in the development of popular schooling that was based in part on the notion that teachers would act like secular priests, serving as moral exemplars to be emulated by the offspring of the poor[43]. Such ideas may also be found in the argument for a modern humanities curriculum,

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[41] For a critique of the patriarchal constitution of Western philosophy see A. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, Polity, Cambridge UK 1995. See also Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*. op. cit.

[42] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 272.

[43] See B. Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 1978; I. Hunter, *Rethinking the school: Subjectivity, bureaucracy, criticism*, St Martin's Press, New York 1994; I. Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education*, Macmillan, London 1988.

which claims that people of culture and refinement are necessary to bear society through periods of fragmentation, where no era has faced so much difficulty as the modern period.[44] It remains the case that «the security of the humanities within institutions of higher education in particular rests on the continuing assumption that they are intrinsically supportive of "civilization" - that is, of the Establishment»[45]. It is not necessary to be a Cynic to point out the longstanding discrepancy between this ideal and the reality of educational practice. But the Cynic takes the argument further, gesturing to a rival mode of existence that runs counter to the beneficent humanism of a liberal education.

Like the true life, the idea of a sovereign existence is hijacked and undermined in a characteristic gesture of Cynic *détournement*. The very idea of sovereignty is inverted and dirtied. The Cynic also claims to be living a sovereign existence, to be a "king" amongst men, but adopts the mantle of a sovereign existence only to bring it down to earth. This philosopher has achieved "sovereign" self-composure rather differently. The Cynic chooses to pursue destitution, «pushing back the limits of what he [or she] can bear»[46] in order to develop a completely different way of relating to the world. This "sovereign" life still entails a duty to others, what a liberal-minded thinker might call, a duty of care. The Cynic life involves a dedication to others that operates without gratitude or recognition. The Cynic does not offer a beautiful example for others to emulate. The Cynic life does not adorn humankind. The Cynic existence is committed to a personal

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[44] See B. Knights, op. cit. For comparatively recent attempts at reviving, "updating" and giving new impetus to these ideas see A. Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011; M. Edmundson, *Why Teach? In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury, New York 2013; W. Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, The Free Press, New York 2014. Interestingly, in her defence of liberal education, Martha Nussbaum engages in a brief discussion and dismissal of Diogenes (see note above). Diogenes only gets a mention due to the irritating fact (from the perspective of this tradition) that he is widely credited for inventing the concept of the cosmopolitan or «citizen of the world [or cosmos]» that (via the Stoics) later liberal thinkers have come to celebrate as a cultural ideal (Nussbaum, op. cit., p. 56.). Diogenes apparently coined the word when he declared that he was a cosmopolitan (Laertius, op. cit., 6.63.), a statement that is paralleled by the absurd (because unrealisable) notion that the "only true commonwealth" is that «which is as wide as the universe» (ivi, 6.72.). It has been argued that since the cosmos has no citizens, Diogenes' neologism could be understood as a «witty rejection of actual citizenship [including world citizenship]… and an affirmation of the larger, apolitical allegiances of a Cynic», which refuse to be bounded by such arbitrary constraints (Bracht Branham, op. cit., p. 96.). The idea that one might be a citizen of the cosmos is patently absurd. Diogenes' neologism might be understood as a joke made at the expense of those who take citizenship seriously, those who extend their humanism to the most distant speck of dark matter hurtling through space. This includes all those who failed to understand the original jest and subsequently claim, in all seriousness, to uphold some cosmopolitan ideal, to be a citizen of the world.

[45] A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Duckworth, London 1986, p. xvi.

[46] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, op. cit., p. 278.

and public disfigurement of what is valued most in this idea, this notion of our common humanity. The Cynic still adopts the role of public benefactor, but Cynic generosity is self-consciously and deliberately harsh. In words attributed to Diogenes: «Other dogs bite their enemies, but I my friends, so as to save them»[47].

Aggressive teaching

With this conception of the Cynic in mind, Foucault describes the Cynic as an «aggressive benefactor, whose main instrument is, of course, the famous diatribe». The Cynic «speaks out and attacks»[48]. There is something deliberately, openly agonistic about Cynic philosophy, as Foucault points out. Nonetheless, portraying Cynic philosophy in this way - as a philosophy that benefits others by inflicting violence upon them - risks presenting Cynics as straightforward aggressors, though Diogenes would also charm others, flatter them even. This ability to switch between aggression and charm provides another example of Cynic flexibility. It offers further evidence of the militant suppleness of a way of life designed to negotiate and unpick social relations, confusing or wrong-footing the Cynic's interlocutor, encouraging pride and good feeling if only to «prepare the way for [and enhance the effect of] additional aggressive exchanges»[49] As Dio Chrysostom, a first century notable and rhetorician explains, Diogenes would use honeyed words, «just as nurses, after giving the children a whipping, tell them a story to comfort and please them»[50]. Undue focus on Cynic aggression also risks downplaying or distracting from the more easily disguised (because apparently benign) violence of other breeds of benefaction[51]. It implies by contrast that the generosity of other schools of ancient philosophy, where philosophers were conceived as physicians of the soul, was a generosity without aggression. And yet, the philosopher who gives kindly advice, who perhaps "adorns" humankind with the beautiful example of his presence, is also aggressive, I would argue, in promoting his version of the good. The Cynic is only unique for openly declaring his (or sometimes her) aggressive intent.

In its educational engagements, Cynicism embraces quite explicitly «the form of a battle»[52] or war, «with peaks of great aggressivity and moments of peaceful calm»[53]. For

[47] Diogenes, op.cit., p. 24.

[48] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 279.

[49] M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, cit., p. 131.

[50] D. Chrysostom cited in ivi, p. 130.

[51] A theme I explore in A. Allen, *The Cynical Educator,* cit., 2017. This builds on an argument that stems from *Benign Violence: Education in and beyond the Age of Reason*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2014.

[52] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 279.

[53] M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, cit. p. 130.

Platonists and Stoics, the battle is largely covered over with refinement, but it is a battle nonetheless. It takes form as a fight against the passions, vices, desires and false appetites, as a philosopher seeks «the victory of reason over his own appetites or his soul over his body»[54]. Some version of the philosopher's fight, along with its recommended destination, is then prescribed for others. Cloaked in refinement, this fight would come to dominate education as the necessary, justifiable battle that education performs every day for the hearts, minds, and futures of those it raises.

The Cynics also battled with passions and appetites, and in that respect were not so very distant from their philosopher-contemporaries, only this battle was extended to «customs, conventions, institutions, laws, and a whole condition of humanity». It was a battle against vices, but these were not approached as individual flaws, but «vices which afflict humankind as a whole, the vices of men», as Foucault puts it; vices «which take shape, rely upon, or are at the root of their customs, ways of doing things, laws, political organizations, or social conventions […] The Cynic battle is an explicit, intentional, and constant aggression directed at humanity in general, at humanity in its real life» - with humanity understood here as a fabrication, as something that can be reworked[55]. Like every other philosophy of its time, Cynicism seeks to transform moral attitudes, passions and appetites, but it does so by attacking the structures and conventions that these attitudes are symptomatic of. The Cynic sought to release humanity from its current attachments, where Cynic interventions grow in strength and reach to the extent they manage to cause outrage, bringing unthinking commitments to the surface, rendering them visible and open to adjustment.

Indecency, shame and humiliation

Diogenes was not lacking in the arts of sophistication. He had mastered that ancient display of urbanity known as the oration, though only to subvert it. It is claimed that after one particularly well-received public oration, at which «many stood about and listened to his words with great pleasure», Diogenes ceased «speaking, and squatting on the ground, performed an indecent act»[56]. Unsurprisingly, this caused great insult. One interpretation of what Diogenes was up to here is that he was authenticating his Cynicism by squatting before an audience. Surely, having debased himself in this way Diogenes had nothing more to gain from abiding by the falseness of public theatre and conventional rhetoric: «Because he has nothing to lose, he can tell the truth and,

[54] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 280.

[55] *Ibidem.*

[56] D. Chrysostom, *Discourses 1-11*, (a cura di) J. Henderson, trans. J. W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1932, Oration 8 §36.

therefore, may be worth listening to»[57]. This moment - something his audience failed to understand - was the point after which they should *begin* listening, rather than turn away. Having disgraced himself so completely, Diogenes had no reason to flatter or dupe them. His authority as Cynic philosopher relied upon the assurance this act gave his audience that Diogenes was not bound by any convention including those rules that govern social intercourse. Or so the argument goes.

The significance of this scatological episode is testified by the extent to which it has become one of the signature acts of Diogenes' philosophy. But there is a danger in giving it priority. There is a risk of reducing Cynicism to this single act, as if the key manoeuvre in any Cynic engagement is to first authenticate one's Cynicism by fidelity, by an act of shameless courage that places the Cynic centre-ground and beyond doubt. Working against this reductive tendency, there is another approach to understanding Cynicism, one that views it as a more tactical engagement, once more involving the kind of situated flexibility and inventiveness one might expect of a militant, non-dogmatic philosopher. This engagement begins with the context it seeks to subvert, and defines itself in combat against that context, paying far less attention to matters of fealty to Cynic tradition (which risk essentializing Cynicism and turning its gaze inwards). A slightly different interpretation, then, one that does not simply understand squatting before an audience as a gesture of self-authentication, is to point out that Diogenes not only excreted in public, he did so precisely when his audience was most enraptured. The deliberate timing of the act is key. Diogenes was not claiming to exist entirely outside the norms that governed social life since he had already shown how well he could abide by them (up until that point his audience had been enraptured). He was not ignorant of finer things, perhaps overcome by base impulses and unable to act otherwise. The problem that Diogenes presents is the fact he chooses to act in such a way, and does so *from a position of sophistication,* namely, from a position that had, up until that point, abided by shared norms of public conduct. One way of interpreting this scatological act then, is to understand it as an attack upon cultured refinement, a blast from below, by someone who is all-too-familiar with what he attacks.

Another way of approaching the problem of Diogenes' base behaviour (which included public masturbation) is to observe that if he had wished above all else to pursue the animal life, there is no reason why he should have chosen to do so in Athens. If his was a simple regression to the animalistic, it might have been pursued anywhere. What remains significant about Diogenes' example is that he remained in Athens, and not in any back alley, but prominently displayed in the *agora*. Diogenes situates himself in society as an agent of cultural transformation. Confronting the problem with characteristic candour, Sloterdijk argues: «Diogenes taught masturbation by practical example, as cultural progress, mind you, not as regression to the animalistic»[58]. Here Sloterdijk comes close to claiming that the shameless behaviour of the Cynic seeks to

[57] B. Branham, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

[58] P. Sloterdijk, *op.cit.*, p. 168.

demonstrate «that people as a rule are ashamed for the wrong reasons [for their bodily emissions, for example]…while they remain unmoved by their irrational and ugly practices, their greed, unfairness, cruelty, vanity, prejudice, and blindness»[59]. But Sloterdijk goes much further, arguing that for the Cynic, the very finest customs we live by, «including those dealing with shame», are "perverted". For this reason, the Cynic refuses to be «led by the nose by deeply engrained commandments regarding shame». Building on such deep-set suspicion, shameless behaviour sets out to test all social conformisms that uphold the operations of empire. Against the conceit of such unthinking conformism «Diogenes turns the tables. He literally shits on the perverted norms», to quote Sloterdijk again. Diogenes set «himself in opposition to the political training in virtue of all systems», where these systems depend on shame to secure their purchase[60].

As Foucault argues along somewhat similar lines, if the soul is to be educated, it must be convinced that somewhere, somehow its activities and inclinations are visible. Ancient philosophy inaugurated a cultural trajectory that would make the self, the individual, individuated subject appears transparent to its own introverted interrogations, sometimes adding an external agent (an idea that was clearly taken up by Christianity), where for a Stoic philosopher such as Epictetus, God dwells within us. Consequently, all impure thoughts and dirty actions sully that divine presence as much as they do the Stoic practitioner[61]. One must live in private as if nothing remains concealed, developing the necessary inhibitions and restraints. To challenge this framework of subjugation, the Cynic opts to radicalise the idea that nothing is concealed, by acting it out. The Cynic responds to the injunction that the true life is the life that has nothing to hide, by hiding nothing. The Cynic does everything in the open, having given up the security of a home or retreat to privacy. This removes or at least places in question the constraining influence of a conscience that is designed precisely for those private spaces that must be convinced of their culpability. Since these private spaces have become the residence of the conscience, this staging of life [by the Cynic] in its material and everyday reality under the real gaze of others, of everyone else, or at any rate of the greatest possible number of others»[62], can be understood as an attempt to render the moral order imposed by the conscience inoperable, or at least open to question.

Cynicism places shame and humiliation at the centre of its educational practice. As it does so it brings to expression the tendency of all educational relations to shame and humiliate those who are to be educated. Here, as with aggression, the ancient Cynics acted out and thereby drew attention to the inherent humiliations of educational experience, finding radical potential in naming what some might prefer to deny. Diogenes

[59] *Ibidem.*

[60] *Ibidem.*

[61] M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, cit., p. 253.

[62] *Ibidem.*

actively ridiculed those who would have him be their teacher, and thereby acted on and transformed the tendency of educational relations to shame and humiliate. According to one account, when someone expressed a wish to study philosophy with Diogenes, he «gave him a fish to carry and told him to follow in his footsteps». Ashamed, and perhaps a little perplexed, the man threw it away: «When Diogenes came across him some time later, Diogenes burst out laughing and said, "Our friendship was brought to an end by a fish"»![63] It seems what the would-be disciple failed to understand is that to practice Cynicism one undergoes repeated humiliation, where to carry the fish would be to act as if one were Diogenes' slave – an unbearable humiliation in Athenian society. As Sloterdijk argues, the Cynic has a taste for humiliation, understanding that shame is «the most intimate social fetter, which binds us, *before* all concrete rules of conscience, to universal standards of behaviour»[64]. As «a main factor in social conformism», shame operates as «the switch point where external controls are transformed into internal controls».[65] For that reason, shame and humiliation are at the centre of a Cynic revolt.

Coda

Diogenes accumulated disciples by accident and only retained them so long as they would not be shaken off. This foregrounded a very different understanding of the relationship between (a normally revered) philosopher-teacher and (a closely associated disciple). It testified to the presence of humiliation, rejection and aggression at the centre of the teaching relation. This reflected the treatment that Diogenes apparently received at the hands of Antisthenes, pupil of Socrates and proto-Cynic, who beat Diogenes with his staff for coming too close.[66] There were variations on the theme, where Crates—Diogenes pupil—famously converted Metrocles to Cynicism with a well-timed and kindly fart.[67] Hostile to conventional understandings of education, dismissive of hangers-on, Cynic teaching was not modelled on the life of study, but on the life of provocations and bowel movements. If it had a philosophy of education, this philosophy was improvised and scatological, designed to transgress our basic assumptions of what education should look and feel like. Cynicism, it seems, still has much to teach us.

Ansgar Allen

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[63] Diogenes, *op.cit.*, cit., p. 17.

[64] P. Sloterdijk, *op. cit.,* p. 168 (original emphasis).

[65] ivi, p. 168.

[66] D. Laertius, *op. cit.*, 6.21.

[67] ivi, 6.94.

The Culture of Education. Ancient Cynicism and "the scandal of the truth"

This paper extends Michel Foucault's analysis of ancient Cynicism to the critique of education. Foucault understands the Cynic scandal as an attempt to transgress the world of convention in favour of another life, a life that the Cynic begins to improvise. Since education helps orient our existence, it too must be scandalized from a Cynic point of view. This paper explores how Cynicism challenges a set of ideas and attachments central to education. Most notably: the role of the teacher as guide; the function of education in encouraging self-mastery and the pursuit of the 'true' life; the relation between education and the development of the conscience; the object, aims and methods of educational critique; and finally, most strikingly, the presence and refinement of aggression in educational relationships.

Keywords: Cynisism, *parrhesia*, cynic scandal, cynic experimentation, neoliberal education

Questo articolo estende l'analisi di Michel Foucault del Cinismo antico alla critica dell'educazione. Foucault interpreta lo scandalo Cinico come un tentativo per trasgredire il mondo delle convenzioni in cerca di un'altra vita, una vita che il Cinico persegue improvvisando. Poiché l'educazione orienta la nostra esistenza, essa stessa deve divenire oggetto di scandalo da una prospettiva cinica. Questo contributo mette in discussione un insieme di idee e presupposti centrali per l'educazione. Di cui i più notevoli riguardano: il ruolo del l'insegnante come educatore; la relazione tra educazione e la formazione della coscienza; l'oggetto, i fini e i metodi educatovi; e non da ultimo, straordinariamente, la presenza e la delicatezza dell'aggressione nella relazione educativa.

Parole chiave: cinismo, *parrhesia*, scandalo cinico, sperimentazione cinica, educazione neoliberale