Chapter One

THE SAYING OF ANTISTHENES &
THE ASKESIS OF THE EARLY GREEK CYNICS

J'ai toujours distingué, en effet, dans le discours, le dire et le dit. Que le dire doive comporter un dit est une nécessité du même ordre que celle qui impose une société, avec des lois, des institutions et des relations sociales. Mais le dire, c'est le fait que devant le visage je ne reste pas simplement là à le contempler, je lui réponds. Le dire est une manière de saluer autrui, mais saluer autrui, c'est déjà répondre de lui.

(E. Lévinas, Ethique et Infini, Paris: Fayard, 1982, pp. 92-93)

The valuelessness of life (die Werthlosigkeit des lebens) was grasped by the Cynics, but it wasn't yet applied against life.

(F. Nietzsche, Posthumous Fragments Summer 1882-Spring 1884, 7[222])

Introduction

In this part of the dissertation, I will be considering the early Greek Cynics, and particularly Antisthenes and Diogenes of Sinope. I will analyze Antisthenes' ethics and theory of language before studying the ethics of the early Greek Cynics. Rather than distinguishing between Antisthenes' ethics and theory of language as most earlier scholars have done, I will try to show how his theory of language

is a practical application or a strategy that has direct implication for his ethical project. Antisthenes' ethical project consisted of making of philosophy a way of living and acting rather than an elaboration of general theories involving concepts and universal considerations. This way of living entails a constant unlearning of conventional habits and a continuous effort towards self-sufficiency and the strengthening of one's character. In analyzing Antisthenes' theory of language, I will concentrate on his so-called "theory of unique enunciation." In order to link Antisthenes' theory of language with his ethics and his anti-conventional stance, I will study his approach to communication before briefly assessing relevant similarities and differences between certain positions of Antisthenes and those of some Skeptics, Sophists, Cyrenaics, and Megarians. I will finally use concrete examples, drawn from reports of Antisthenes' and Diogenes' life stories, to support the claim that Antisthenes' approach to communication is a practical strategy supporting his ethical outlook.

I will then present the Cynic way of life as exemplified by Diogenes of Sinope. I will describe how Diogenes and later Cynics rejected any approach that might have a theoretical framework and resorted instead to radical "direct action" mixed with derision and mockery. Their way of living becomes an *askesis* that aims at getting away from laws and social conventions, but also from honor, virtue, and the idea of "goodness" that Antisthenes was still attached to. Rather than having a set "measure" for their *askesis*—as Socrates was to Antisthenes—the Cynics wanted to become closer to beasts and to gods, something that is neither impossible nor possible to assess or concretize. While virtue cannot be unlearned for Antisthenes, there is no such virtue to be learned, and nothing, or very little, has any lasting effects for Diogenes and the later Cynics who rejected most of Antisthenes' positive practices—such as his attempts to salvage certain aspects of communication by regulating what in language should or shouldn't be used. What I will try to show is that practices such as *anaideia* and *parrhesia* were necessary for the Cynics in order to constantly distance and differentiate themselves from
others and from “honor,” “glory,” and other ingrained values and beliefs set by conventions. For them, possessions of all sorts need to be given up: not only material ones but also the so-called “spiritual” ones of the kind that Antisthenes proclaimed in Xenophon’s *Symposium*. The Cynic self-sufficiency doesn’t present an economy that saves or accounts for constructing anything. Socrates and Antisthenes questioned laws and conventions in order to build on a more solid ground, a ground that is practical and more “truthful.” While for Socrates, this ground may be based on knowledge, and for Antisthenes, it may be based on strength of character and firmness of the will, Diogenes and the later Cynics could not look for a firm ground nor could they want to solidly build anything, since the world is dominated by *tyche* and they have to learn to adapt to a process of constant change and transformation.

**About Antisthenes**

The child of an Athenian father and a Thracian mother, Antisthenes\(^2\) flourished around 420-370 B.C.E. He became a close friend and associate of Socrates after reportedly studying with Gorgias of Leontium (fl. 440 B.C.E. and visited Athens around 427 B.C.E.) and had many “sophist” friends, such as Prodicus and Hippias. Although wealthy enough not to worry about his livelihood, he professed extreme austerity—to the point where Socrates supposedly criticized him for showing off his torn cloak.\(^3\) Antisthenes is said to be one of the precursors, if not the founder, of ancient Greek Cynicism. The opinions about this issue vary: some consider him the founder of Cynicism, others claim that he has no relation whatsoever to Cynicism, while a majority of today’s scholarship finds clear indications

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\(^3\) Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 8 and Aelian, *Var. Hist.* IX, 35 (Caizzi 148A).
that Cynic doctrines had been largely influenced by some of his positions. Traditional scholarship, following Diogenes Laertius and Cicero,\(^4\) has considered Antisthenes to be the initiator of the Cynic way of living. While Zeller, Grote, Maier, Gomperz, Festugiére, and Rodier, continued to consider Antisthenes as the founder of Cynicism,\(^5\) Dudley—after Dupréel—tried to prove that Antisthenes had no “direct connexion” with the Cynics and found in the need to trace a Stoic lineage, or “succession,” going back to Socrates the reason why he was ascribed this role.\(^6\) Dudley is supported by the fact that Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Xenophon do not associate Antisthenes with the Cynics or with any major Cynic characteristics. Both Theophrastus and Aristotle were well aware of “Cynic” practices and one may speculate on why they neglected to point out any association between Antisthenes—and the “Antisthenians” (Antistheneioi)—and Diogenes of Sinope—or “the Dog.”\(^7\) Sayre also attempts to show, from a different angle, that Antisthenes had nothing to do with the Cynics, and joins Schwartz and Wilamowitz-Möllendorff in rejecting any connection of Antisthenes to the Cynics.\(^8\) Nowadays, following Joël and von Fritz, Giannantoni, Goulet-Cazé, and most recently Long, agree that Antisthenes

\(^4\) Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 2 and Cicero, De Orat. III, 17 (Caizzi 134B).

\(^5\) Check the bibliography for references.

\(^6\) Cf. Dudley, A History of Cynicism, pp. 1-5 and Eugène Dupréel, La Légende Socratique et les Sources de Platon, Bruxelles, 1922, pp. 372-386. Dupréel, finding support in Paul Tannery’s “Sur Diodore d’Aspendos” (in Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 1896, p. 176) and in Aeschines’ Telages and Cillias, tries to show that the Cynics were probably an off-shoot of a Pythagorean sect which could be traced to the Diodorus of Aspendos mentioned in Diogenes Laertius VI, 13 (and Athenaeus IV, 163E).


was not the founder of Cynicism but that he influenced Cynicism to a great extent. I subscribe to the view that Antisthenes has greatly influenced the Cynics and, whether we consider him as a precursor of the movement or not, there is an intricate connection between some of his epistemological, linguistic, and ethical stances and the standpoints of Diogenes of Sinope and later Cynics. To categorize Antisthenes and describe him in relation to a particular philosophical orientation would be a very difficult task since he had affinities with many of his contemporaries. He could very well be described as a Sophist (as Guthrie describes him) and one can detect many similarities with Prodicus and Protagoras. Some might call him a Megarian (as Gomperz does) and would have no problem showing some closeness between his positions and the (later) positions of Stilpo of Megara and of Diodorus Kronos, while others (such as Festugière) consider him a Parmenidean. Antisthenes’ positions are almost impossible to summarize under one heading; it might be worthwhile, in order to situate them, to analyze their interconnectedness with various Sophist and Socratic so-called “schools.”

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10 Cf. Livio Rossetti’s “la certitude subjective” in Positions de la Sophistique, Barbara Cassin (éd.), Paris: Vrin, 1986, pp. 195-209, where one form of the relativism of Protagoras is described in terms similar to how I will describe Antisthenes’ privileging of the “lived experience.” This article also discusses briefly the attribution of ousk estin antilegein to Prodicus. Rossetti uses the papyrus of Tura (attributed to Didymus) and the Dissi Logoi in support of his interpretations. For more on Protagoras’ and Prodicus’ theories on language, see below, pp. 42-44, and refer to Dupréel, Guthrie, Kerferd, and Untersteiner (see bibliography for references), but also to C. J. Classen, “The Study of language Amongst Socrates’ Contemporaries” in Sophistik, C. J. Classen (ed.), Darmstadt, 1976, and Timothy M. S. Baxter, The Cratylus: Plato’s Critique of Naming, Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 147-156.
Antisthenes' Ethics

Antisthenes looked at hardship or toil (ponos) as an intrinsic part of the world we live in and considered it a “good”—thus, his admiration for Heracles. Unlike Socratic virtue which depends on knowledge, Antisthenes believed in a virtue that is related to strength, force or power (ischis)—similar to Socrates’ strength of character—and that can only be attained through training or adapting to ponos. This virtue, Antisthenes affirms, resides in deeds and does not need a lot of words or a lot of learning; as a matter of fact, in order to reach it, one needs to “unlearn bad habits” through a training (askesis) based on deeds (erga) and not on words (logoi). This training consists in acquiring a certain strength, a strength that adapts to ponoi and escapes them by becoming familiar with, or habituated to, them—so they won’t bite. Once one acquires the strength necessary to confront any kind of ponos, one reaches the virtue that cannot be lost, the impregnable virtue that is a stronghold in itself and that alone can ensure happiness. This kind of “internal” stability and safety will characterize the apathia of the Cynics and their Stoic heirs.

In connection with Antisthenes’ view of virtue, it is important to point out that an extreme mistrust of pleasure led him to reject any goal or end (telos) related to happiness as pleasure seeking.

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11 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 2 and VI, 16, and 18.

12 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 11, 16 and 18, as well as Stobaeus, Anthol. II, 31, 68 (Caizzi 64).

13 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 11; Stobaeus, Anthol. II, 31, 34 (Caizzi 21B); Gnomol. Vat., 12 (Caizzi 86); and Antisthenes, Ajax; 7 (Caizzi 14).


15 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 11, 12, 13 and VI, 104-105; as well as Epiphanus, Adv. Haeres III, 26 (Caizzi 90).


Not that he loathed pleasure, but he was attacking the danger that comes with considering pleasure an end in itself, for this usually brings with it a misleading satisfaction, a blinding illusion or immodesty (tuphos) that would take away from the realization that toil and hardship were an integral part of human life.\(^\text{18}\) Antisthenes was not against all kinds of pleasure, for he was for those kinds of pleasure which one does not have to regret and for those that come after hardship and toil (ponos) and not before.\(^\text{19}\) He did not reject satisfying one’s desires, but he rejected the making of desires and their satisfaction the goal and end of life, for he didn’t want to accept the primordial importance given to them when they are actually but a momentary relief from life’s hardships. For example, he would advocate, for men like himself, getting sexual satisfaction from unattractive women. On the one hand, this would result in a pleasure that one needs not repent of, since it is difficult to get attached to an unattractive women and to become dependent on her. On the other hand, an unattractive woman will have less needs and will be less demanding than an attractive woman, for she will be grateful and satisfied with very little, and one could adapt easily to the hardships involved in keeping such a simple relationship.\(^\text{20}\) Thus an economy of pleasure where simplicity is primordial seems to be what Antisthenes is after. He is not advocating the abolition of pleasure, but the circumscribing of pleasure within certain limits that guarantee a level of “independency” or “non-dependency” that is intricately related to the autarkia necessary for virtue or “strength” (ischus).\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{18}\) Cf. Clemens Alex., Strom. II, 21, 130, 7 (Caizzi 97A), Diogenes Laertius, VI, 8; and Caizzi’s “Τῦφος Contributo alla storia di un concetto” in Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung, pp. 273-285.

\(^\text{19}\) Cf. Athenaeus XII, 513A (Caizzi 110) and Stobaeus, Anthol. III, 29, 65 (Caizzi 113).

\(^\text{20}\) Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 3 and Xenophon, Banquet IV, 38-39.

\(^\text{21}\) Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 11.
This ἰσχύς has been interpreted as related to “strength of character” or to “strength of the will” and has been described as one of the major contributions of Antisthenes to ethics and to philosophical ways of living. To be able to undergo hardship strengthens one’s will, and makes one more “self-sufficient” (αὐταρκή) and thus closer to a certain “freedom from” that exemplifies the virtuous person. This strength of the will depends on becoming an impregnable fortress, which means that one needs to re-consider one’s relation to others in society. For Antisthenes claims that one is not free if one fears the others and he even discourage reading, since one becomes corrupted by other people’s opinions. But the others are not only the particular others that one encounters on a daily basis. Societal laws and conventions are also the domain of these “others,” and these conventional regulations are not applicable to the virtuous person who lives according to virtue alone. The virtuous person does not need to conform to what society wants from everyone equally.

Philosophy for Antisthenes, then, is a way of life, and not a discourse on general concepts or notions. It is “an affair of deeds” and an ongoing process of trying to become self-sufficient. Philosophy’s task is not to teach generalizations about what is and what isn’t good, or what is and what


23 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 10 and 11; also cf. Audrey N. M. Rich, “the Cynic conception of ἰσχύς” in Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung, pp. 233-239.

24 Cf. Stobaeus, Anthol. III, 8, 14 (Caizzi 119).

25 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 103.

26 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 11. Also cf. Aristode, Politics 1284a 5-20.
isn’t just, but to open practical pathways to living. Thus, the most essential part of education is “unlearning bad habits”—or unlearning habits acquired through convention. Self-sufficiency as described by him aims at reducing needs and desires and to limit oneself to facing the world, with all its hardship and toil, in a heroic manner. This heroic manner is closer to Heracles’ way than to Oedipus’: there is nothing tragic about it, but it consists of strength of character and of standing up to tyrants, real and imagined. What is called or considered good and what is called or considered bad was instituted from societal conventions (doxa) and thus is purely arbitrary. What is conventional is not natural, but accepted as such, and what is needed is to unlearn the conventional to get closer to what could be called natural. The question of physis for Antisthenes is about what has been invented, imposed, generalized, and accepted and what remains open and in many ways closer to nature: the limits set by conventional morality, and by social regulations, take away from the unlimited horizon that, alone, could be called natural. It is also a question of property and ownership as exemplified in Xenophon’s Banquet: what one owns, what one possesses, is related to the question of what one depends on. One is rich if one has enough to live without needing anybody or anything, and if one is ready to confront the ponoi of the world without fear of losing material or emotional “possessions.” Physis is the state where one only possesses what one is, one’s way of living and relating to the world, not the material things that one depends on. This state requires a self-sufficiency that is satisfied with little, and does not desire to acquire any material wealth or any social standing. One cannot carry all of one’s material belongings if one needs to jump off a sinking ship, and one cannot control one’s reputation in the face of misfortunes. Material possessions, like social standing, set limits, conventionally, on what is unlimited.

naturally, and can be taken away easily, since they depend on ἰχθύς and on the others. That is why the wise person does not need to own anything, since all the goods of the others are his/hers: the wise person does not live according to convention, but according to nature, and nature does not set limits and constraints on what belongs to one or another—except in what relates to one’s physical and mental capacities. What is natural is what one can carry along, with oneself, within oneself. That is why it is ischus that the wise person aims for and not some material goods or temporary pleasures.

Antisthenes’ Theory of Language

Antisthenes’ theory of language 29 may be a strategy supporting his ethical outlook. In what follows, I will try to show that his criticism of universal categorization and general conceptualization is intricately related to his consideration of people and events as singular, different and irreducible to generalities. To undermine communication would be one possible strategy of applying this outlook in a practical way.

Antisthenes’ Theory of Unique Enunciation

Antisthenes’ “theory of unique enunciation” affirms that every enunciation is unique and that

28 Cf. Xenophon, Banquet IV, 34-45 and Diogenes Laertius, VI, 6 and 11.

29 The earliest direct references for Antisthenes’ theory of language are references in Aristotle’s texts, particularly the Metaphysics [1024 b32 (Caizzi 47A); 1043 b23 (Caizzi 44A)], and Top. κατ [104 b20 (Caizzi 47C)], as well as various commentaries of these texts by Alexander of Aphrodisias [In Arist. Met. 1024 b26 (Caizzi 47B) and 1043 b23 (Caizzi 44B); In Arist. Top. 101 b39 (Caizzi 46), 104 a8 and 104 b19 (Caizzi 47C)]. Other references can be found in Proclus [In Plat. Crat. XXXVII (Caizzi 49)], in Simplicius [In Arist. Cat. 8 b25 (Caizzi 50A and 50B)], in Ammonius [In Porph. Isag. p. 40, 6 (Caizzi 50C)] and of course in Diogenes Laertius [VI, 3 (Caizzi 45) and IX, 53 (Caizzi 48)]. Numerous scholars (Dupréel, Festugière, Gomperz, Groote, and Joël, just to cite a few) have speculated on indirect references to Antisthenes’ theory of language in Plato’s work, particularly in the Euthydemus (283e-284a; 285d-286c; and 286c-d), the Cratylus (385b-386a and 429c-430a), the Sophist (251a-252c) and the Theaetetus (201e-202b; and 205c). Schleiermacher conjectures that the Cratylus was in great part directed against Antisthenes, while Zeller thinks that Plato is referring to Antisthenes in Parmenides 132b. Also cf. A. Brancacci, Oiketos Logos: la filosofia del linguaggio di Antistene, Naples: Bibliopolis, 1990; A. J. Festugière, “Antisthénica,” pp. 283-314; H. D. Rankin, Antisthenes Sokratikos, Amsterdam: Adolf Hakkert, 1986; Centre de Recherche Philologique, Université de Lille III (Blaise, Chertki, Crubellier, Daughtie, Heesquet, Lernould, Monet, Wieczorek), “Sophistique et Cynisme” in Positions de la Sophistique, pp. 117-147; and Louis Ucciani, Ironie et dérision, Paris: Diffusion les Belles Lettres, 1993, pp. 143-197.
it cannot be contradicted. The English word “enunciation” probably doesn’t carry the same connotations as the French word “enonciation,” which is Festugière’s translation of “logos” in Aristotle’s *Met.* 1024 b 26 – 1025 a. Although I am not questioning the translation of *logos* by “account” (Ross’ replacement of “conception” in the 1928 edition, over the 1908 original), or “formula” (as preferred by Gillespie)—or elsewhere “statement” or “assertion” (as used by Dooley and Hicks)—, I prefer to use this transliteration here in order to stay closer to “articulation” and to the physical act of utterance. After all, one of the main tenets of Antisthenes’ theory of knowledge is his rejection of abstract universals and general categorization and his privileging of acts and deeds over formulation and conceptualization.

No matter how much Sayre wants to prove that the “Antisthenes-Plato” feud is “fictitious” and that it was invented in the third century C.E., it is obvious that the literature going back to Aristotle shows that many of Antisthenes’ positions can be considered anti-Platonic. Antisthenes criticized the idealistic philosophy of Plato and his theory of forms, by saying, for example: “I see the horse, but I do not see the horse-ness.” What Antisthenes can see is the individual horse, the particular horse that one can be specific about, and not some abstract notion of “horse-ness.” This concept of “horseness,” like that of “humanity,” is too general and cannot be described or explained practically. Having studied rhetoric with Gorgias, Antisthenes understood the power of words, and for him, general concepts and universals are “empty talk”—something he accused Plato of doing all the time. Since philosophy for

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31 Cf. Sayre in *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung*, pp. 84-85.


33 Cf. *Gnomol. Vat.* 13 and 12 (Caizzi 153 and 86) as well as Diogenes Laertius, VI, 26 where Diogenes of Sinope is accusing Plato of talking without end (*aperantologon*). The whole series of anecdotes involving Diogenes and Plato could also be related to Antisthenes. Not only do we have some of these stories attributed to Antisthenes
Antisthenes is a way of life that has to do with deeds—rather than words—\(^{34}\), the primordial importance of the lived experience opposes discourses charged with general (thus empty) concepts. Antisthenes looks down on rhetoric, which is what one needs in order to live with humans; but if one wants to live with gods, one needs to learn philosophy, or live the way of virtue and strength of the will.\(^{35}\) Antisthenes’ theory of language shares his ethics’ desire for the palpable and empirical, while at the same time privileging what is specific and particular. By affirming that every name, utterance, or enunciation (logos) designates something unique and particular, and thus cannot be contradicted, he was trying to establish a simplicity and directness that will not take away from the singularity of each situation nor lose the specificity of the lived experience in a web of linguistic constructions that build on associations moving away from the particular to the general.

Antisthenes’ stance is that every enunciation or utterance is a singular existent, and one should not privilege the signification of the enunciation but its singularity. This theory was complemented by the claim that one cannot predicate since the only thing one can say of A is that A is A. At the same time, Antisthenes affirms that one can describe an existing thing, by comparing it to other things, the distinction between description and predication being that the first, unlike the second, is based on comparing concrete and existing things to other concrete and existing things—such as tin to silver. These two positions will not be seen as contradictory if they are supposed to apply to two different realms or domains of life. I will try to argue that Antisthenes is making a distinction between a realm of existence, which is always true by nature (phusei), and a realm of convention (nomos) where truth and

\(^{34}\) Cf. footnote \#13 above.

falsity are arbitrarily attributed to things through conventional means of communication.

**Definition and Time**

It is obvious that, from a starting point of anti-universalism, Antisthenes would not support a "definition" that signifies a Platonic form or an Aristotelian essence. The reference in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1024b32-34 presents Antisthenes as rejecting any definition for a description or explanation in terms of comparison. One cannot define "what a thing is," however one can say what a thing "is like." What Antisthenes is affirming is the singularity of things as their mode of existence, and that cannot be subsumed under an essential "being" of any sort, but is rather linked to what exists at a particular "real" (for him, the absolutely singular is the real, as Zeller says) moment. According to Diogenes Laertius, Antisthenes presented "definition" as what a thing was and is or continues to be. If we consider what a thing is and will be, that would entail a continuity, an essential transposition that Antisthenes has denied throughout. No wonder definition is deemed impossible under that light. How could one define something as what it was and is, when one knows that a thing is unique as part of the lived experience of the moment. An apple is an apple, and will always be called that but only when it has to deal with a specific apple, a particular apple that involves a time notion that is concrete. What needs to be addressed is rather the question of "time."

If definitions cannot seize an essence, but could only attempt to describe what something (particular) resembles, then how could Antisthenes allegedly define definition? The question of time

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36 Many scholars consider ontology and the question of being at the basis of Antisthenes’ theory of language. Of these, Festugière and the researchers of the Centre de Recherche Philologique, Université de Lille III, contend that Antisthenes was Parmenidean (orEleatic) in his affirmation of being as unique, where being is existence (or rather existent) and does not have any essence (*ousia*), and where the unicity of being in question, at least for Festugière, is based on the existent’s identity with itself. The difficulty in this kind of analysis lies in the interpretation of particularity or singularity in terms of oneness. After all, that every existent is unique does not mean that its being is one. Being itself is reduced to existence since it cannot carry the abstract notion of essentiality. Cf. “Antisthenica,” pp. 303, 311, and 314; and “Sophistique et Cynisme,” pp. 122-125.

37 Cf. D.L., VI, 3.
is central to understanding the relevance of the first "definition" of *logos* attributed to Antisthenes by Diogenes Laertius. The practical that Antisthenes is interested in calls for a kind of immediacy that is close to that attributed to Aristippus and to the Cyrenaics, but there is a major and insurmountable difference between these two views. While the Cyrenaics' approach to time involves a present with no memory nor hope, with no past nor future, this approach does privilege a present that is associated with a *telos* involving pleasure. Living for pleasure, even momentary pleasure, is living for what may or may not be acquired, since pleasure depends on "others" and creates desires that are deluded. Antisthenes rejects both utility and goal, both past and future, but not for a present filled with or haunted by pleasure. The immediacy that Antisthenes is interested in does not carry with it the weight of expectations and the dependency on something yet to come. This immediacy is a present unlearning the past every step of the way, constantly working on the "now" as the threshold of virtue, where virtue is the process by which not a goal is attained, but where the self-assurance and self-sufficiency necessary for the strong will and the determined character that can confront the *ponoi* of the world are developed. Even this virtue cannot be defined but compared to that of Socrates, for example. What is the relevance of having a shipment of salted fish at sea, and to talk about it as if it was real, when one cannot buy flour with it at the market? If expectations and projections are not real, and one is constantly unlearning the bad habits of the past, what is one left with? A present that is momentary and always in the


39 Cf. pp. 27-31 above.

40 Cf. D.L. VI, 9: "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 [Antisthenes] 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!" (tr. Hicks).

making but that carries with it a past that is to be unlearned. In the meanwhile, the moment is unique and cannot be preserved, neither as a promise (like that of the young man from Pontus) nor as a memory (for one shouldn’t carry with oneself the weight and responsibilities of the past which are dependencies and unnecessary luggage on the path towards strength and virtue). In that sense, how would a definition that describes what a thing is or was, or what continues to be as Paquet puts it, fit into this outlook? A thing is or was, at the moment of the lived experience. Definition is still as described earlier, but the time is put in context. The future is nowhere in sight, the past is omnipresent but not as something continuous—as a matter of fact it could be claimed otherwise, that it is discontinuous [except for what relates to virtue, for virtue does not deal with existents, and strength of character cannot be lost]. It is the question of the moment, the singular present that presents itself or presented itself at a particular moment. The definition in question is not a definition but a description of the moment the thing was or is. If a definition has eternity ascribed to it, or if it carries with it an expectation or a projection of a sort of continuity embedded in some “essence,” this definition is impossible.

Predication and Contradiction

Aristotle’s reference to Antisthenes in *Metaphysics* 1024b32-34 presents the *oikeios logos* as the proper utterance that uniquely describes something. Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his commentary of this passage, clarifies further by stating that “each of the things that exist is described only by its own *oikeios logos*, and that there is one *logos* for each thing, namely the one proper to it.” The starting point for Antisthenes seem to be that every *logos* is unique and there can be no relation between one *logos* and

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42 This is close to Diodorus Kronos’ notion of time, at least in what relates to motion: he would allow for “it has moved” but would not accept “it is moving” (Sextus Empiricus’ *Adv. Math.* X, 85-133). This part of the chapter will briefly discuss Antisthenes and the Megarians.

another, such as predication. It is difficult not to take Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias seriously when they talk of Antisthenes claiming that to one predicate corresponds one subject. One may wonder though whether Alexander is not using his own logic—where signification is not put into question—to make sense of Antisthenes’ claims. Let us stop for a second: “οἰκείον is the name that belongs most fitly and accurately to something; or as an adjective it describes that which especially belongs or is appropriate to something.” 44 What if Antisthenes was not talking of the adjective, what if he wasn’t talking of any predicate or attribute to the “proper” or “particular” logos in question? Proclus’ comment on Antisthenes’ theory, in his analysis of Plato’s Cratylus, attacks Antisthenes by name for asserting that every logos tells the truth. 45 Those confronting Antisthenes attest that he does not distinguish between “what is” and “what is being talked about.” 46 Maybe he is affirming that every logos tells the truth or is true, but he does not say that every logos represents the truth or represents anything period. Did Antisthenes question “representation” as one would understand the term nowadays? Epictetus attributed certain Stoic themes to Antisthenes in his Discourses of which the belief that phantasai are all one properly owns. 47 But it is obvious that Epictetus is using Antisthenes to promote his own themes, since nothing else in the few fragments we have of him would support such an interpretation. 48 Antisthenes seems to be affirming an oikeios logos that does not concord to the existing thing through a theory of truth of any sort but, since in society one needs to communicate about existing things, the most appropriate action would be to describe these existing things by comparing them to other existing

44 Cf. Rankin, Antisthenes Sokratikos, p. 35.


46 Cf. Rankin, Antisthenes Sokratikos, p. 34.

47 The use of the term phantasai is attributed to Antisthenes only by Epictetus and for his own purposes. Cf. Epictetus, Discourses III, xxiv, 67-70 (Caizzi 118).

things. What belongs to things are only their unique existence, and the oikeios logos is most proper when it uniquely belongs to this existence. If a logos attempts to simply designate something concrete at a particular time, and this logos is not foreign or alien (allotrios) to the experience of the thing in question, it is the most proper to it. A predicate, as a quality or attribute, designates something through communicative means, using conceptual linguistic frameworks that have no direct relation to the lived experience involving the thing in question, and thus is a separate and unique existence by itself that can only be attributed properly to its own lived experience. That is why contradiction and predication are impossible. The enunciation, as an existent, is an utterance that cannot have truth or falsity attributed to it. Falsity and truth come into the picture only when an enunciation is considered as a signifier and is no longer a singular existent as such—but rather a sign or a symbol that carries a meaning associated with other existents, real or imagined.

Existence and Communication

Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias seem to associate oikeios logos with a certain kind of belonging that concords to existing things. But Antisthenes is distinguishing between existing things and the utterances associated with these things. Existing things are unique and always true, for the only property they have is that existence. Utterances also are unique and true as existents, but once these utterances are used in a communicative situation, where they are supposed to express something about things, or act as meaningful propositions, they should be approached differently and from a more practical—or strategic—perspective. The Proclus commentary mentioned above criticizes Antisthenes for claiming that to tell something is to tell the truth, since Antisthenes doesn’t seem to take into consideration the fact—unquestionable for Proclus—that someone can also tell the false. This confirms what we have argued above, that truth for Antisthenes is to be considered in relation to existence and to existing things, but this existence has to be concrete and singular. This domain of existence is one
where, by nature, all things exist as unique and singular, and where no properties are attributed to things except this existence. But furthermore, Proclus criticizes Antisthenes for not allowing that someone always talks about something. To talk about something, to allow for signification and meaning of words and propositions, is part of another domain, the domain of convention, where language and communication shape what we call true and false, good or bad. Although Antisthenes fought universals for taking away from the lived experience, he seems to acknowledge the necessity of a limited usage of words for practical communication with others. He would make of all speech designating something concrete, simple, and present, and would not allow for universals or general descriptions that are not specific enough to the situation at hand. Let us take a closer look at Antisthenes' approach to communication and consider the positions of some of his contemporaries that may complement his own positions.

**Antisthenes' Approach to Communication**

Communication is the practical application of language, and Antisthenes' main concern with language lies in its practicality. For him, the value of meaning or sense is not set in "truth" or in the "concordance" of word to thing, but in the particularity of the lived experience itself. But even if a *logos*, as existent, corresponds to a lived experienced that is privileged, the part of the "meaning" or "signification" ascribed to it—that may be communicated—is always already embedded in a conventional understanding. The theory of unique enunciation, described above, seems to relate to language "naturally." By nature (*phusei*), words as utterances are existents. There are no relations between words (contradiction, predication) or between words and things (correspondence, truth and falsity) outside of convention (*nomos*). The distinction that we are making between "nature" and

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“convention” seems to correspond obliquely to a distinction between a “natural world” that is unlimited (an *apeiron* of a sort, that is neither ontological nor epistemological but lies at the basis of *praxis*) and a “conventional world” where dealing with others (morals, communication, generalizations, etc.) not only limits the unlimited but always takes away from the singularity and practicality of lived situations and replaces it with a *tuphos* (based on evading *ponoi* and on hiding behind constructed realities dealing with possessions, desires, etc.) that has nothing to do with the natural world which one could call “reality.”

The fact that *logoi* do not correspond to the “reality” of things does not make communication impossible but rather misleading. For if the lived experience cannot be communicated, it cannot be so in its singularity but it always is—to whatever limited extent—in its conventional understanding. Keeping the abyss between word and thing is part of being closer to a “nature” that is never defined but always described as a distancing from norms and conventions. But in society, since convention requires some kind of communication, the most strategic way of dealing practically with the issue is to circumscribe the possibilities of reducing the singularity of the lived experience. For Antisthenes, this strategy will entail requiring specificity and limited usage of terms—rather than opening up for the later *parrhesia* of the Cynics. To circumscribe the use of words and communication to the barest minimum would fit into the economy of simplicity that Antisthenes advocated for pleasure. But furthermore, Antisthenes is attempting to undermine communication, by making it limited to direct references or present *designata*, as will be depicted through the reported anecdotes analyzed below. What Antisthenes is aiming at is to eliminate conceptual abstractness and to cripple “communication” as an illusory mean of expressing the lived experience and one of the main tools of generating *tuphos*. His approach is rather a strategy of containment that affects the practical use of language in everyday’s life and is intricately related to his ethical outlook.
Antisthenes and the Pyrrhonian Skeptics

Antisthenes’ approach to “signification” or “meaning” is related to conventional understanding and thus has nothing to do with epistemological or ontological speculations dealing with “representation” or with theories of truth. The issue of the “reality” of things is not addressed by Antisthenes in the same way Pyrrhonian Skeptics addressed it, for example. While Pyrrho might have privileged the “lived experience” in relation to a phenomenal reality, where the only “reality” is that of the phenomena or of appearances, Antisthenes doesn’t even acknowledge the distinction between “appearance” and “reality,” for he would base such a distinction on tuphos and on general conceptualization. That is why his approach could be described as “pragmatic” (affirming the reality of pragmata), as long as this entails the rejection of any analysis of the nature, essence, or meaning of pragma outside of conventional communication. The question of definition for Antisthenes is totally conventional, and if he ascribes “description” or “designation” to it, it is mainly out of necessity in a conventional setting. That is why his approach to communication is “strategic.” The Pyrrhonian Skeptic’s approach could be interpreted epistemologically (e.g., Brunschwig)—as affirming that for human beings all things (pragmata), which include human sensations and judgments, appear equally indifferent (adiaphora), immeasurable (astagmata), and undecidable (anepekrita)—or metaphysically (e.g., Conche and Mates)—as affirming that things themselves, including sensations and judgments, are indifferent (adiaphora), immeasurable (astagmata), and undecidable (anepekrita).50 These interpretations

confirm that the only acceptable “reality” or “truth” is embedded in an aporetic51 “nature” of either sensations and judgments or the world, leaving things in suspense and making of the Pyrrhonian Skeptic’s kriterion for action an indifference (adiaphora) that does not want to contest the norms and traditions of the time.52 Even if we were to reject the epistemological and metaphysical interpretations of Pyrrhonian Skepticism and find similarities between Antisthenes’ and Pyrrho’s practical approach to living,53 one cannot ignore that Antisthenes’ stance is inherently anti-conventional. This is where the major difference may lie between Antisthenes, and especially later Cynics, and Pyrrhonian Skeptics. For while Antisthenes believed in some kind of virtue that could be reached by adapting to poni and acquiring isticus, the later Cynics will not even allow for that. With their askesis and rejection of limits and social constraints, they will become totally opposed to a Pyrrhonian-like acceptance of things as they are—where the on mallon is applied to action.

Antisthenes and the Sophists

The specificity in the use of words that Antisthenes opts for and advocates, although influenced by the orthoepeia of a Protagoras or a Prodicus, is not used to facilitate communication or to convince people and build irrefutable arguments. It is not the power of language that is at issue here but rather its powerlessness. Nor does the problem of “correctness of names” concern Antisthenes54. Rather


53 For example, cf. Marcel Conche, Pyrrhon ou l’apparence, p. 94 and p. 138.

54 As it concerned Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias, and Antiphon. Cf. Plato’s Cratylus, Enthydemus 277e, and Hippias Major 285b. Antisthenes’ assertion that the scrutiny of names (onomaton episkepsi) was the basis of learning, although reported in Epictetus’ Discourses I, 17, 10-14 (Caizzi 38), could find support in Diogenes Laertius’ attribution of the books On education, or on names and On the use of names: a controversial work to Antisthenes. The “scrutiny” in question seems to be controversial or confrontational and not a serious study of an etymological character.
than wondering whether names are conventionally or naturally attributed to things, he resolves that, naturally, all enunciations are unique existents that cannot be predicated. Thus things do not correspond to words, because naturally, words are things, and it is only through/from convention that one can consider the “meaning” or “signification” of words—thus the need to keep the abyss between the word and the thing open, between the presentation and the object represented unresolved. This position might be closer to that of Democritus than to that of Protagoras, of Prodicus, or of Gorgias.

Democritus considered language a product of convention and rejected any natural relation between names (onoma) and things denoted (pragma). Since names cannot properly have any intrinsic meaning, Democritus kept on inventing and coining new words. Protagoras, on the other hand, shared with Prodicus a belief in, and a fascination with, choice of precisely correct words or “appropriateness of expression” (orthoepeia). Both Protagoras and Prodicus believed that one could, through varying methodologies, arrive at a precise meaning of words. Protagoras searched for “the most accurate knowledge of the meaning of each particular word, since possession of such knowledge was the only sure means by which a speaker could avoid unnecessary ambiguities.” His method was to attain clear and precise expressions that cannot be attacked and thus could be safely used in convincing people. This method entailed strategies such as evading metaphors, ignoring or highlighting the context of words, and questioning the relation between grammatical and natural genders. Prodicus followed Protagoras, without adhering to the latter’s phenomenalism. He developed a method that sets two words against each other and tries to indicate their points of difference and similarity. This method

55 Cf. particularly Diels Kranz, B XXVI.
57 Ibid., p. 231.
58 Cf. Ibid., pp. 224–226; Plato’s Protagoras, esp. 338 e and Phaedrus, esp. 266d; and Aristotle’s Rhetoric 1407 b6.
(called "synonymik" by Meyer and "synonymique" by Dumont) aims at a certain clarity of expression that relates to Prodicus' disposition to "truth" which is not purely linguistic and is not only concerned with natural meanings of words. Prodicus' theory of language concords with his theory of virtue and both are based on his rejection of "seduction" and affirmation of a "truth-value" that lies in the person's character.\(^59\) This brings him closer to Antisthenes' positions, in the sense that he was attempting to teach a virtue related to character formation, and may explain the attribution of οὐκ ἐστιν ἀντίλογοι to him as well as the "rapprochement" of his theories to those of Antisthenes.\(^60\)

Gorgias used language in order to appeal to intellect and emotion, and he used rhetoric and the irresistible powers of figures or tropes as tools of persuasion. He never considered that language might contain truth about things, for truth about things may never be conveyed by words.\(^61\) It may very well be because of a belief in this in-communicability of things that Gorgias attempted to defend multiple aspects of various arguments accentuating the importance of language in this search for "justice." If Gorgias was putting into question the possibility of communicating anything related to real things (pragmata) in order to present language—discourse or communication—as the only "reality" that humans share,\(^62\) Antisthenes would be clearly disagreeing with his reported master. While agreeing with Gorgias' premise, Antisthenes would reject any primacy ascribed to language or communication that would make


\(^{62}\) Cf., for example, Dupréel, Les Sophistes, pp. 65-69.
of conventionality the basis of human "reality." It is in the varying experiences of ponos, in the unlimited shapes of an askesis leading away from nomos towards some kind of an imaginary physis—always presented negatively—that Antisthenes wants to localize an irreducible human "reality" and not within the limiting and constraining borders of conventional means of communication.\(^{63}\)

Antisthenes and the Cyrenaics

Antisthenes’ affirmation that no singular “meaning”—of and as a lived experience—is communicable is close to Gorgias’ positions, but it doesn’t carry the trust in language that Gorgias had. It is closer to the Cyrenaics’ theory of pathe, attributed to Aristippus and developed later by Hegesias, which claims that sensations are unique and could not be communicated.\(^{64}\) The Cyrenaics’ theory of pathe highlights the proper (idion) or non-shared (ou koinon) character of sensations or affects (pathos).\(^{65}\)

As presented by Sextus Empiricus, in particular, this theory is based on the impossibility for the singular person to communicate the nature of one’s pathos (or phenomenon in Sextus’ terminology) or to experience

\(^{63}\) Gorgias’s relativism is quasi ontological, not necessarily cultural but embedded in language. It is based on a “nothingness” that seeks equal refutation in order to keep itself in balance, and thus he rejects the possibility of reducing difference but associates that difference with language. Language is that ontological terrain where difference is created and put into play. For Antisthenes, difference is always already irreducible: not to culture or a particular tradition, laws or societal mores, nor to language where difference could be embedded. Difference is both at the cultural level and at the particular (singular) level: knowledge cannot breach the difference and reduce the alterity, nor can the command of language help. Antisthenes' discourse is not concerned with control or practical command: it is a constant practice of re-affirming the difference at the level of singularities, and of engaging in a way of life where ponos is all over the place, mainly because of the rejection of subsuming difference. Singularity rather than generality is the aim, and if general knowledge is considered “practical” what Antisthenes is calling for is another kind of praxis that doesn’t need to be reductive or breach differences. Although this praxis cannot rely on communication, it could allow for simple communication where references are always concrete and singular.


another person’s pathe. Not only one cannot communicate one’s experience or affect, but one can never know, feel, or even relate to how another person may experience an affect, an emotion, or a sensation—even if this affect may result from “shared” conditions or causes. What is affirmed here is the primacy of “sensation” or “affect,” and the singularity of the experience that cannot be understood or communicated. One can talk of a situation or a condition that may create an affect, but one can never compare affects themselves, since they are inaccessible to communication and are only “real” or “true” as singularly experienced—for there is no way to affirm or deny whether events or things are “real” or “true.” Sensations or affects are always unique and non-communicable through words or any other means of communication. This is what Hegesias built on to affirm a certain insignificance of existence and an adiaphora that doesn’t even distinguish between life and death, pleasure or pain. It could be argued that Hegesias pushed Antisthenes’ views on ponos to the limit, affirming that all life is suffering (and that tyche always disappoints). His attack on opposites could be inspired, if not directly influenced, by Antisthenes. What is almost certain though is that Antisthenes, in a way very similar to that of the Cyrenaics, believed that “meaning” (of and as a lived experience), like feelings, emotions, ideas, or understanding of particular situations, cannot be communicated.

**Antisthenes and the Megarians**

For Antisthenes, enunciation is unique and cannot be communicated but what of this “enunciation” is unique? One may speculate on the “intentional” aspect, especially since Antisthenes’ privileging of ischus allows for the consideration of the particular “will” as an important aspect of his ethics. Some of Antisthenes’ positions are very close to those of Diodorus Kronos and of Stilpo of


67 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, II, 94-95.

68 Cf. footnote #22 above.
Megara. Diodorus’ Master argument dealing with time and possibility affirmed that one could consider only events that happened and not events that are happening, and that it is impossible for an event to happen differently from how it has happened. Potentiality in that sense is reduced to possibility, and possibility doesn’t carry a present but only a past (what is actual or rather what has already been actualized) which can be transposed as future (as what will be actualized). But what is most relevant to this discussion are Diodorus’ affirmations about the meaning of words. He affirms that no word is meaningless (with no specific meaning ascribed to it) or ambiguous (with many meanings possibly attributed to it), since each word has always one particular meaning and that is the one the speaker is aware of. He thus highlights intentionality in the process of signification, and puts the particularity of meaning in the singular intention which cannot be falsified by the word, or the interpretation of the word, since the identity of the intention will not be affected by it. This argument could very well be used in support of Antisthenes’ theory of unique enunciation and how every enunciation is a unique existent, proper to itself. If the “oikeios logos” is oikeios because of the singular intention that is unique and cannot be communicated, Antisthenes’ theory is safe and sound and is based on some kind of phenomenological approach before the letter. Diodorus could easily be considered as carrying out the theories of Antisthenes to their logical outcome, even though the latter may have a different approach to communication. Besides the fact that Stilpo of Megara71 was greatly influenced by Cynicism, his


positions on language were directly connected to those of Antisthenes. He went beyond the affirmation attributed to Antisthenes that the only thing one could predicate of A is A, by stating that no predication at all is possible—not even predicating A to A. Stilpo’s rejection of universals pushed him to reject the significance of names, even conventionally, on the basis that although things change, names are always the same, and a word such as “vegetable” could not indicate all the vegetables that have been around for thousands of years. The same applies when one talks of “Man”: no particular individual could be meant by that word, for what would make it designate one man and not another, or how would one know that it is this man rather than that other who is indicated by it? Although Antisthenes would have accepted the thrust of Stilpo’s argument, he opted for a practical approach to communication, and that is why he tried to limit the use of words in the context of direct referentiality or specific designation, as the examples below will show. Stilpo could also be considered as someone who carried on Antisthenes’ critique of language from which later Cynics actually distanced themselves in order to immerse themselves in the less “serious” practices of derision and mockery.

Communication as Strategy

If Antisthenes didn’t deny the necessity of communication per se, which would have been the logical outcome of Stilpo’s positions, he did try to make of communication something that always relates to the lived experience while, at the same time, undermining it by reducing its role to the strictest sense of “designating.” It is important to circumvent and circumscribe what language can do and to make sure that one uses definite and concrete forms of communication—if one may still call that “communication.” For Antisthenes, communication will have to be reduced to the bare minimum in order to be practical, efficient, and expedient, and it will have to be limited to direct referentiality in

72 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, II, 119.
order to evade empty concepts and general (mis)understanding. While naturally, the word can never reduce the thing as the thing will never be signified by the word, one needs, conventionally, to refer to designated things, objects, events, and put them in context through description or comparison. Humanity, an empty concept, is not what one should talk about. Only an individual human, in a particular time and place, could be talked about, but as something designated and pinpointed. This strategy would be the best compromise between rejecting “communication” altogether and believing that communication works and that meanings conveyed by words represent the truth or the reality of the matter.

Undermining communication becomes a strategy that would make of the use of communication limited and constrained to specific situations where exact meanings are never at issue but specific references or designata are what is at stake. Grote, speculating on how Aristotle would respond to Antisthenes’ theory of language commented as follows:

While shutting out falsehood and contradiction, it [Antisthenes’ theory] would also shut out the great body of useful truth, and would divest language of its usefulness as a means of communication.\(^{73}\)

Rather than living in the *tuphos* of words that come to signify many things and make life abstract, pleasurable, and sweet, communication is constrained to the bare essentials and conceptualization is rejected outright, as is art and other sublimated projections. What is one left with? An *askesis* that attempts to reach virtue.\(^{74}\) Let us look more closely into the life stories attributed to Diogenes of Sinope and to Antisthenes which would support this kind of approach.

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\(^{74}\) This of course will be transformed by the later Cynics who consider *parrhesia* and *anaideia* as intrinsic parts of this *askesis* since virtue itself becomes irrelevant to them and strength of character becomes more than an acquired set of traits: a performative way of approaching the world and a certain comfort that dips into irony, sarcasm, and derision.
The dagger story

The most appropriate story for our purpose is the report about Diogenes of Sinope handing Antisthenes a dagger. Diogenes Laertius reports that as Antisthenes was complaining about his suffering, saying: “who could relieve me from these pains?,” Diogenes handed him a dagger, and said: “this.” Antisthenes replied: “I said from my pains, not from life.”75 Being specific about what one is talking about is the best recourse in order to circumscribe communication. All language is conventional, the point is not to develop an alternative way of relating that wouldn’t be conventional, nor to affirm that signification is always subjective, but rather to relate to the signified as directly as possible. The signifier here is not put into question, since it is used in a conventional way, but this use or usage is supposed to be limited to the direct reference in question. The direct reference was the actual pains that Antisthenes was experiencing, and the issue was to eliminate these designated pains. To end one’s life would end these pains but only indirectly, and through associations and projections that take away from the circumscribed situation at hand. Antisthenes did not ask how to end one’s life, to which an appropriate answer would be the handing of the dagger. It is building on these pains, associating with them unbearable suffering, imagining an abstract outcome that replaces the specificity of “pains” with the generality of “life”—with the assumption that life is not worth living—that Antisthenes is attacking. And that process of abstracting, associating, and generalizing built in conventional communication, is what he is trying, in part, to undermine through this strategy of containment.

The dried figs story

Many of the stories attributed to Antisthenes have also been attributed to Diogenes. Other stories, although not attributed directly to Antisthenes, could be used in support of Antisthenes’ theory

75 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 18-19 (Hicks’ translation).
since they reveal a structural similarity with those attributed to him. Diogenes is reported to be eating dried figs when he encountered Plato. Diogenes told Plato that he could take some of what he was eating, and the latter took a few and ate them. Diogenes said then: “I told you to take them and not to eat them.” Diogenes could have asked Plato to take some dried figs, and he could have then asked him to give them back or to give them to someone else. The fact that Plato associated the situation of Diogenes eating and offering him something to eat with a conventional understanding that Diogenes was inviting him to eat as well is what is at stake here. The conventional inherent to Plato’s action was not put into question and was accepted and acted upon blindly. The strategy of Diogenes in this anecdote—most probably as stand-in for Antisthenes—is to undermine the conventional that is at the basis of most communication and try to put these conventional pre-suppositions at check in every communicative situation. Specificity plays a reductive role where each particular instance contributes to the undermining of communication and the destruction of the ease by which concepts, associations, and other conventional indirect commands could creep into communicative situations. No abstract connection should be allowed in this view of communication, only direct and specific references, and all this in order to evade (mis)understanding based on speculation. One could speak of evading “understanding” here because conventionality is not located at the level of the words but at the level of associations and connections between a variety of significations and meanings, direct or indirect. Reducing communication to specific “ask and give” or “question and answer” would fit in this scheme.

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76 Cf. footnote #33 above. One may also conjecture that anecdotes involving Diogenes and Plato may have been a projection or continuation of the reported Antisthenes-Plato feud involving a transposition of the major differences between them.

77 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 25 (Hicks’ translation).

78 Cf. Diogenes Laertius VI, 26, where a second slightly different version of the dried figs story is recounted. Diogenes asks for some dried figs and Plato sends him a whole jar full, prompting Diogenes to tell Plato: “So, it seems, you neither give as you are asked nor answer as you are questioned” (Hicks tr.)—just before the text interjects his calling Plato a “big mouth,” or someone who talks without end or without measure (aperantolagon).
of de-mystification, if one may say so. This will reduce the content of communicative exchanges to the superficial and leaves the lived experience locked in. The resistance to language and communication is in a way keeping these two from claiming to represent (truly or not), but also, to take away from the *tuphos* created by them—with all the baggage carried along with signification, through conventional presuppositions and the like. Grote may have been right in assessing that Antisthenes’ theory would destroy any usefulness of, or trust in, communication, and that might be what Antisthenes was aiming for.

**The motion story**

Another story attributed to both Antisthenes and Diogenes is the one where they react to the Eleatic affirmation that motion is impossible by getting up and walking.\(^{79}\) To talk of motion without a specific reference exemplifies to what extent humans could become deluded with general notions and concepts. To walk is to situate the conversation that was going nowhere—talking of motion in general with nothing specific designated as the reference for it.

**The plucked fowl story**

Last, but not least, a report states that, in response to Plato’s definition of Man as “an animal, biped and featherless,” Diogenes plucked a fowl and let it loose proclaiming: “Here’s Plato’s man.”\(^{80}\) Not only does this exemplify a critique of definition, but it is a proof that unless words referred to are specifically designated one is in a lot of trouble. The words used in Plato’s definition could designate a plucked fowl as well as a man. They are not specific enough, first, but they also are too general since they aim at defining and not describing or comparing. Once again, the resistance to generalizations that

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80 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 40 (Hicks’ translation).
erase the singularity of things and events is what explains the behavior of Diogenes—or of Antisthenes.

Antisthenes’ attempt to make limited usage of language, where the use of universals or empty concepts (i.e., concepts that do not have limited and direct references) is circumscribed, is supposed to undermine convention and what is conventionally embedded in communication. As long as communication refers to something specifically designated the conventional command over communication is undermined.

**Conclusions about Antisthenes**

This strategy is not only related to an ethical concern with a philosophical way of living but it also pertains to a certain political disposition. For Antisthenes' *askesis* and his *ischus* and *ataphia* are not means of adapting to the *polis*, as is the case with the Sophists, but they present a singular way of living that takes into consideration the circumstances of particular individuals. Let us remember that, as a son of a reportedly Thracian mother, he must have stood out as a foreigner—as many stories report. It is not the *polis* that is his concern as much as the adaptation to particular circumstances and the dealing with generalizations about foreigners. The questions of belonging, of the proper (*oikeios*), and of the alien (*allotrios*), are politically relevant. Why would Antisthenes contest the generality and universality of words or concepts? He wants to keep the “real” singular, palpable, and direct. Since all language is conventional, it is better to use it in a limited way that would not bring about the privileging of concepts that describe a lump of people and events, taking away their singularity. His experience as an alien in Athenian society may have given him the impetus to reflect on the question of difference, his as well as others’, and to choose not to accept conventions that he found to be arbitrary. He also did not want to find justification for conventions in universals or to make “universal” aspects of living what everyone

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81 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 1.

should conform to. He affirmed a certain belonging that was not rooted in a particular society but in a singular askesis, always immersed in a social setting, that attempts to contest the conventional imposed on it. The askesis in question, while contesting the conventional, works on developing a self-sufficiency that makes of one's character, or rather one's force of character, the only environment where one’s difference can affirm itself and flourish. This is what could be called “natural” for Antisthenes—and especially for later Cynics—, for what he always affirmed as “natural” is not a teleological and determinable state but a negative approach to convention and a detachment from generally accepted customs and traditions. This approach makes one comfortable with the groundlessness and the lack of foundation of any convention—signs of the disintegration of the city-state and the social imaginary associated with it. Rather than opting for the dominant response to the vacuum created by the collapse of old values—what will be called the scientific or technological discourse of the Sophists, of Plato, and of Aristotle—, Antisthenes refused to project unto the transcendental and the universal to find solutions for political and ethical problems. He found refuge in a certain way of living, a certain ethics that was contesting the reduction of difference and singularity that both the old conventional outlook and the newly emerging universal outlook necessitated.
About Diogenes of Sinope

It is Diogenes of Sinope83 (fl. 340 B.C.E.) who shaped Cynicism as a particular way of living as will be described in this part of the chapter. He reportedly fled his native country because of his involvement in “falsifying [or defacing] the currency” (paracharattein to nomisma).84 The metaphor is very appropriate for the word nomismo could mean “coinage” (what is accepted, what is regarded) and is closely connected to nomos, “law” or what is conventionally accepted as the norm. For Diogenes will make of his life a continual process of “defacing the currency” or rejecting the conventional norms that people lived by. After leaving Sinope, he lived in Athens for a while where he supposedly became acquainted with Antisthenes and/or Antisthenes’ teachings, and he remained an exiled throughout his life, wandering and visiting various cities, including Corinth and possibly Syracuse. He tried to live an independent life, having minimal possessions, needs, and desires, but also practicing an unusual freedom in speech and in action. He wasn’t afraid of any powers and didn’t respect any laws—except for Chance or Fortune (tyche).

The Philosophy of Diogenes

Most of what we know about Diogenes comes to us in an anecdotal form or through reports distorted by later Stoic and Christian influences. We do however know that he followed up on Antisthenes’ Socratic approach to philosophy as a way of living and acting rather than an occupation with ideas and concepts. Like Antisthenes, he was opposed to general conceptualization and attacked


Plato's idealistic theories as well as other theoretical approaches to understanding the world but he went even further than his reported master. Besides developing his anti-teleological stance and applying it to all aspects of living, he presented philosophy as an *askesis* concerned with undermining conventional norms and beliefs and with adapting oneself to circumstances in order to empower oneself and to be ready for anything. Physical exercises would prepare one to endure the *ponoi* that Antisthenes was so concerned about, but Diogenes privileged the practices of *parrhesia* and *anaideia* that constantly de-condition and prepare the Cynic to confront what conventionally dwells within. A process of liberation from what is conventional, from acquired traits that are accepted blindly by most people, drives the Cynicism of Diogenes: “honor,” “shame,” “hope,” and “fear,” just to cite a few examples, became practical enemies of the Cynics—up until Demonax in the second century C.E. since these permeate all aspects of living in society, and need to be dealt with through constant practices of de-conditioning. The practices of *anaideia* and *parrhesia* are what keep the Cynics from accepting “honor” or “shame” as something that regulates their behavior and drives their actions. The anti-teleological stance that encourages people to desist when they are near to completing projects or to start new ones is part of a combat against “hope” that is entrenched in a future driven by the conventional understanding of honor or shame. And rejecting property, possessions, material and emotional comfort depending on others, is associated with fighting the “fear” embedded in how one relates to the world.

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85 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 24, 39, 40, and 53, where Diogenes attacks Plato’s theory of Forms: “As Plato was conversing about Ideas and using the nouns “tablehood” and “cuphood,” he [Diogenes] said, “Table and cup I see; but your tablehood and cuphood, Plato, I can nowise see”” (Hicks’ translation).


87 Cf. D.L., VI, 29: “He would praise those who were about to marry and refrained, those who intending to go [on] a voyage never set sail, those who thinking to engage in politics do no such thing, those also who purposing to rear a family do not do so, and those who make ready to live with potentates, yet never come near them after all” (Hicks’ translation).
through societal laws. Philosophy becomes a constant wandering and a continual habituation to distancing oneself from others and to detaching oneself from material and emotional attachments. This way of living becomes a solution to societal problems different from those offered through scientific and technological means, or through belief systems and transcendental projections. For the Cynics, all systematic and conceptual projections that take away from life need to be confronted, not seriously though, since one cannot be entrapped in one’s illusions (tuphoi), but rather through derision, mockery, and play. The goal, if there is one for the Cynic, is not to build a society of friends but to destroy what is unacceptable, not in a reactive and serious manner, but in a nonchalant way where everything is derided and mocked, as tyche derides and mocks everyone. Although various scholars argue that the end or goal (telos) of life for Cynicism is to live according to nature (physi) or to reach happiness through freedom, self-sufficiency, or other means, I am arguing that Cynicism was an anti-teleological movement that aimed at making of life a process of de-conditioning and of distancing and differentiating oneself from others. This philosophical way of living no longer aimed at reaching “virtue” positively, but called for certain values that characterized the process of adapting to the circumstances and confronting tyche, realizing a “freedom from” that put the Cynics closer to gods and dogs.

88 Honor and shame are related to the “fear” of losing one’s social standing, or reputation, which Diogenes and the Cynics attacked virulently. Cf. Goulet-Cazé, L’ascèse cynique, pp. 17-20, esp. notes 2, 3, 4, and 7. Diogenes associates “fear” with transcendent entities, such as the gods, but also, and especially, tyche and nomos.

89 Cf., for example, Grote, Plato and other companions of Sokrates; Goulet-Cazé, L’ascèse cynique; and von Fritz, “Antistene e Diogene” in Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung.

90 The term “values” is not used here in its normative sense. What I am calling “values” have never been proclaimed as such by Diogenes, for example. These are rather traits that are incidental to the course of the Cynic askeis, extracted and privileged in this interpretation, and called “values” arbitrarily.
Cynic Values

The Cynic values as exemplified by Diogenes—and later on by Crates of Thebes (ca 360-280 B.C.E.)—\(^{91}\) could be summed up under a few interconnected headings such as *autarkeia*, *apatheia*, *anaideia*, *parrhesia*, and *askesis*.

*Autarkeia*

*Autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, or self-dependency, does not imply that one could live without anything but that the Cynic is habituated not to need anything and to try to live with the minimal possible. *Autarkeia* alone can give some kind of security in a world governed by *tyche* since it consists of depending as much as possible on oneself. To depend on oneself means to find comfort in the world without having to rely on the circumstances. Whether these circumstances are governed by *tyche* or by societal norms and conventions, the Cynic needs to learn and practice how to become independent from them. The “others” in society, their laws and judgments, their needs and desires, are as treacherous—if not more so—as the circumstances governed by *tyche*. In order to depend more on oneself, one needs to get rid of as many attachments as possible: this includes property, possessions, and desires for any kind of goods and pleasurable emotions that depend on *tyche* and the others. Whatever one owns, possesses, or desires to acquire, requires protection and safeguarding; since it is not possible to predict what may happen, one will be constantly concerned and worried about a future that leaves one powerless in the face of misfortunes. The same applies to desires, pleasures, or emotions that depend on others, for these also cannot be predicted. As a matter of fact, to satisfy these needs and desires not only is not within one’s reach, but may also be impossible. Thus Diogenes would get rid of possessions that are not necessary: he disposed of a cup he used to carry on him when he saw a child

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using his hands to drink water;\textsuperscript{92} he also wished to be able to satisfy his hunger by rubbing his stomach in the same way he satisfies his sexual needs.\textsuperscript{93} The question of self-sufficiency for the Cynics is not related to a Christian-like morality that sanctifies poverty. It is rather part of the process of becoming “prepared for every fortune”\textsuperscript{94} and of “adapting oneself to circumstances.”\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{Apatheia}

\textit{Apatheia}, indifference, or impassibility, is not getting rid of sensations or emotions but being able to distance oneself and to be as detached from, and non-dependent on, sensations and emotions as possible. Emotions that have no harmful effect on \textit{autarkheia} are not a problem for the Cynic and do not need to be evaded. In a way, it is \textit{autarkheia} that requires the Cynic to evade emotions and sensations when they depend on the “others” and on \textit{tyche}. As mentioned earlier, the “others,” the rules and acknowledgments of the others that form the basis for \textit{nomos}, are as unreliable and treacherous as \textit{tyche}. Desires and attachments that are usually associated with society are limitless and in many ways difficult or impossible to realize, but they depend on factors imposed on humans through social conditioning. That is why it is necessary to learn everything over, to practice continuously against these ingrained desires and needs and to try to build on the desire and needs of independence and self-sufficiency through an \textit{askesis} involving \textit{anaideia} and \textit{parrheia}. The Cynic should be ready for anything and should not be shaken by emotional reactions, thus the need to disengage from, without actually eliminating, emotions. The Cynic feels and has emotions, but these do not control her/his life. It is not the case

\textsuperscript{92} Cf. D.L., VI, 37.

\textsuperscript{93} Cf. D.L., VI, 46. Democritus, who mentions in DK B CXXVII that masturbation procures the same pleasure as lovemaking, was probably referring to some kind of self-sufficiency close to the one Diogenes is concerned with here.

\textsuperscript{94} Cf. D.L., VI, 63 (Hicks’ translation).

\textsuperscript{95} Cf. D.L., VI, 22 (Hicks’ translation).
with the Cynics that Reason or Logic should keep emotions in check (this could apply to the Stoics), nor should one try to experience sensations and emotions to their fullest extent (as Cyrenaics and Epicureans may say). It is not a calculative reasoning or a quantitative economy that is at stake here but a qualitative approach that resists the dependency on emotions or sensations that are associated with *tyche* or with "others."

**Anaideia**

*Anaideia*, the freedom to do anything, is part of the process of getting to *autarkeia* and *apatheia*. *Anaideia* represents the Cynic practice of acting freely, i.e. without being concerned with the (social) consequences. When one acts and reacts in unacceptable ways, one is not only "falsifying the currency" of others but also the currency one still has. It is through *anaideia* that one learns to distance oneself from the judgments of others and from the effects of factors set by norms and customs. Diogenes ate and masturbated in public, and Crates and Hipparchia fornicated in public, in order to unlearn how to feel ashamed and, at the same time, to distance themselves from others.96 Thus, every transgressive action is not a show trying to impress others but an exercise of de-conditioning and of liberating oneself from the opinion of the others that one carries within—appearing through shame and humiliation or, reactively, through a pleasure in hurting or shocking others. To de-condition oneself means to learn how to accept one's proclaimed difference from society. By practicing acts that are conventionally condemned, the Cynic is affirming him/herself by distancing her/himself from others and negating the positive affirmation of one's social and cultural identity. This negative process embedded in the Cynic's way of living may be interpreted as a (non-)identity that is affirmed negatively. To distance oneself from others only affirms the difference that the Cynic creates and re-creates constantly; but this difference

has little positive components to it and is built on a negative relation towards others, without necessarily becoming an affirmation of one's "self"—outside of the process of liberation in question here.

**Parrhesia**

Parrhesia, the blunt honesty and freedom of speech so valued by Diogenes and later Cynics, is an attempt not to control or measure speech, and not to be limited to what is socially acceptable. It requires "courage"—what confronts ἔχειν according to Diogenes—and trains the Cynics not to "fear" others and their reactions. Numerous stories report how Diogenes and Crates confronted kings and other powerful authorities and told the truth to their face. That "truth," of course, is not a positive one but whatever is not restrained by conventional norms and does not obey the laws of ἐтикέττα (respect, honor, shame, etc.). Unlike the Stoics' parrhesia, the Cynic freedom of speech is irreverent, disrespectful, and sarcastic. Sarcasm and derision, as exemplified by practices of parrhesia, try to take away from the seriousness of situations and to undermine the hierarchical relations between people. Self-respect is also undermined, as one is risking one's life sometimes to get the point across. What is that point? To deny the importance of the others without proclaiming one's importance, and to reject the conventionally accepted rules of engagement with others where human beings become entities, lots, or properties with circumscribed limits and defined parameters. By transgressing, in words as in actions, the limits of what is subject to the judgment of others, the Cynics are approaching a self-sufficiency in that domain, along with the self-sufficiency relevant to the course of events—or ἔχειν. They attempt to find comfort in what they are doing, in the process of not depending on others and on the world but

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97 Cf. D.L., VI, 69, where Diogenes affirms that *parrhesia* is "the most beautiful thing in the world" (Hicks' translation).


only on themselves—where “self” is not defined positively but as what is becoming independent of so many things.

\*Askesis* 

*Askesis*, the practice and exercise, the “way toward,” is what counts the most for the Cynics and not “happiness,” the “virtuous life,” the “will,” or either *autarkeia* or *apatheia*. One cannot stop on the way; one cannot reach anything as a Cynic. One continues on working and on trying to become as self-sufficient as possible until the time comes where one needs to go, to let go, to stop the work. The *ponos* which entails reaching *autarkeia* and *apatheia* is not only limited to *anaideia* and *parrhesia*, for there are also other kinds of habituation, other kinds of unlearning—such as the physical preparation to the conditions of the environment along with various intellectual and sentimental preparations. For Diogenes, it seems that physical exercise is as important—if not more important—as the psychological or cultural exercises described above in relation to hope, fear, shame, and honor. The fact that he used to roll over hot sand in the summer and hold on to statues covered with snow in the winter, or walk on snow barefoot, is explained as an exercise or habituation to hardships associated with physical endurance. But when he goes out begging of a statue, and says that he is accustoming himself for being rejected, he is definitely working on the psychological or anti-cultural training mentioned in association with *anaideia* and *parrhesia*. It seems that there are at least two kinds of training involved here: one physical, related to the circumstances controlled by *lyche*, and another psychological, related

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102 Cf. D.L., VI, 23 and 34.

103 Cf. D.L., VI, 49.
to circumstances associated with societal conventions and dealing with others. But that does not mean that the *askesis* can be limited to a few "kinds" of training: being the way to adapt to the circumstances, it cannot be reduced to a few categories or to a linearly progressing evolutionary path—since the various circumstances are governed by *tyche* and not by some rational or determinable order as will be mentioned below.\(^{104}\) It is important to accentuate here a major difference between Antisthenes and Diogenes. While Antisthenes considered that acquired traits can be unlearned as long as they do not relate to virtue, Diogenes claimed that everything can be unlearned, and it is training, not virtue, that is the most important thing in life according to him.\(^{105}\) This subscribes to an approach that accepts that socialization (or inculturation) makes one "what one is" and that by de-conditioning oneself, one is resisting the conventional conditioning without necessarily having any "natural" background or anything that goes beyond convention.\(^{106}\) *Askesis* is the unlearning, through actions, words, and various other ways of de-conditioning, to depend less and less on what is associated with *nomos* and to try to follow a path that takes away from a final goal or a determined *telos*—something the Cynics rejected along with any kind of transcendence. With the Cynics, the distinction between *physi* and *nomos* inherited from the pre-Socratics, particularly Democritus and the Sophists, takes on a different shape: they considered the world to be governed by *tyche* or Chance, and this is what they wanted to get used to and to prepare themselves to confront. *Tytche* is a blind force that could change all circumstances and reverse any

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\(^{104}\) Cf. Louis Ucciani, *Ironic et Dénision*, p. 226: "L’ascèse comme stratégie du *punctum* ne se donne pas comme une unité de comportement. Elle subit l’éclatement que lui imposent les multiples émergences du réel. En tant que confrontation elle n’est pas non plus d’une structure simple."

\(^{105}\) Cf. D. L., VI, 71: "Nothing in life, however, he maintained, has any chance of succeeding without strenuous practice [askesis]; and this is capable of overcoming anything" (Hicks’ translation). This quote is followed directly by an allusion to the primacy of *physi* over *nomos*. See Goulet-Cazé’s *L’ascèse cynique*, esp. pp. 195-227, for a detailed commentary of this passage and a discussion of "la double ascèse" and the "nomos-physi" distinction.

\(^{106}\) Cf. Stobaeus, *Anthol.* II, 31, 87, and Dio Chrys., *Orations* IV, 29-31, where Diogenes approaches education as a training, a conditioning, or a formation, through hardships imposed early on in childhood.
conditions. Conventions set as inflexible and arbitrary laws are not "natural" since they cannot adapt to the changing circumstances that tychē governs. Let us explore further how tychē, physis, and nomos fit into the Cynic way of living.

Nomos, Physis and Tychē

The Cynic way of living, highlighted by these values, seems to be one of the first anti-teleological ways of living—which approaches in a totally different manner what has been considered to be "human." The Cynics are not living to attain a goal, an end that is important in itself. What is important for them is the "process" of living. They are no longer living for their family, for their city-state, for fame and glory, etc. They are living because they are practicing to live in such a way that would make them better. This "better" is not conventionally accepted though, but is related to a freedom from conventions, a freedom that would bring them closer to—without ever attaining—a god-like existence, an existence free of worries, struggles, and suffering about insignificant things. What is important is the way one becomes more and more self-sufficient, more and more distant and different from the rest of the people. And this becoming is based on unlearning various acquired habits, on liberating oneself from the chains of customs and conventions, and on destroying in oneself "hopes," "fears," and other restraining emotions.

The Cynics were no longer valuing strength of character, at least not in the same way Antisthenes was. They attempted to approach life from an ironic and sarcastic point of view. They derided everything valued by other people, especially the norms and conventions that were the rules of engagement between the peoples of their time. Derision and mockery are important aspects of adapting to circumstances and finding comfort in one's surroundings.¹⁰⁷ But while criticizing human laws, the

¹⁰⁷ Parody, satire, irony, and derision have been highlighted and discussed in relation to the Cynics by authors such as R. Bracht Branham, "Diogenes' Rhetoric and the Invention of Cynicism" in Le Cynisme ancien et ses prolongements, pp. 445-473, and Louis Ucciani, Ironie et Dérision, op. cit. I cannot agree with Branham's claim that
Cynics did not turn to divine or transcendent laws. They acknowledged the arbitrariness of any laws, and made of their way of living a refusal of anything that may be set as law. It is not the “individual” that they were prioritizing or a new set of values that certain “wise” individuals can subscribe to. Their way of living was built on the “destruction” of acquired sets of beliefs but they didn’t attempt to replace the old sets of beliefs with new ones. The so-called “natural” that they advocated is not defined or circumscribed except negatively as an anti-conventional stance.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Democritus influenced many Sophists and Socratics, and particularly Pyrrho of Elis and Antisthenes and the later Cynics. A few studies that tried to analyze this relation were not developed enough and only introduced the question. One must admit that it is no easy task to analyze the numerous fragments of Democritus, especially since many of them present contradictory aspects—supporting philological claims rejecting the attribution of many of the “ethical” fragments to Democritus. Many of the fragments of Democritus are reminiscent of Antisthenes’ positions, in particular those dealing with virtue, and how it is by deeds and not through speech that virtue is realized and assessed, and those dealing with poverty and richness, as discussed by the

Cynicism attempted “to make freedom a central value, and freedom of speech in particular” (p. 472). I do agree with Branham’s description of the rejection of work, production, and reproduction, where even the human race and its perpetuation is rejected (pp. 463-464, esp. note 38)—in ways similar to how Sadean characters will fantasize about destroying the world—but I link this rejection to an “ethics of destruction,” an arkeis privileging a negative way of approaching the world, destroying set beliefs and conventions without finding comfort in any activity but the acts of destruction associated with the continuous adaptation to life’s circumstances. Furthermore, this ethics privileges a “freedom of action” (anaideia) that cannot be reduced to “exhibitionistic or performative use of the body” (p. 468) and that is more “ideologically subversive” (p. 466) than the acts of being a “joker” or a “freak” (pp. 470-471).

108 Cf. The articles of Zeph Stewart and Aldo Brancacci mentioned in footnote 27 above.
Antisthenes of the *Symposium*. Other Democritean fragments pave the way for the Cynics' *askesis*, *autarkeia*, *apatheia*, and *parrhesia*. But what is most relevant to us here is Democritus' famous distinction between the "world or domain of humans" and the "world or domain of the gods"—where the first is governed by Reason and the second is governed by Fortune. We have seen before how Antisthenes privileged the divine over the human world by siding with philosophy over rhetoric. But Diogenes and the Cynics made it a point to want to get closer to the domain of gods—which they have compared to that of animals. This world governed by *psyche* is what interests them and not the world of humans which they didn't believe could be governed by reason—but only by a convention that is arbitrary and groundless. The Cynics claimed that they were trying to imitate the life of gods—and since gods need nothing, those who are like them need very little—and of animals (dogs, for example)—who have very few needs and do not live under the constraints of the rigid laws of convention.

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109 Cf. Diels Kranz B LV, B LXXXII, B CLXXI, B CCLXXXIII (all fragments of Democritus referred to are from *Les Ecoles Présocratiques*, op. cit., pp. 401-590).

110 Cf. DK B CCXLII.

111 Cf. DK B CCXLVI.

112 Cf. DK B CCLXXIV, B CXC.

113 Cf. DK B CCXXVI.

114 Cf. DK B CXVIII, B CXIX. The convention of Democritus could be considered as everything that belongs to the domain of humans. The domain of gods, governed by *psyche*, could correspond to the social-historical conditions, the englobing reality that is nothing but the pure necessity of contingency, where nothing teleological (i.e. human) is projected. The domain of humans is governed by convention, laws, and experience. This domain, affected by humans and by their creation or action (*praxis*), is englobed by the domain of the divine (*psyche*) but it is also englobing other sub-domains. Cf., in particular, DK B XXXIV.


116 Even this distinction between animals and humans could find support in Democritus' DK B CXCVIII and B XXXIV. Aristotle, in *Politics* 1253 a 25-30, seem to be referring to the Cynics when he says: "But he who is
Physis, for the Cynics, is what is concordant with the world of tyche. Thus, what is “natural” is what prepares for any and all circumstances, what becomes one with these circumstances. The nomos is what needs to be resisted, unlearned, changed by the askesis taking away from it towards a state where one is closer to dogs or gods. Dogs live a simple life where they are not grieved by changes of fortune and where they can adapt to any circumstances. They have very few needs and do not live under the constraints of conventional laws. Gods, on the other hand, are not mere spectators terrified by what tyche can take away from them: they are strong, full of energy, and are ready for all possibilities which they use to their advantage. The Cynics realized that one could not control life’s circumstances, and that one should learn to adapt to changing circumstances by living a life that is not permeated by “hope” and “fear”—as Demonax will write much later—but a life that is closer to some kind of a physis. This physis is not something sacred, as some original state that could be reached—a paradise lost as Goulet-Cazé and Gomperz claim—but rather an impossibility, an infinite deferral that sets the course of the askesis, this interminable process of liberation from various chains, various beliefs, various hopes, various fears, which will constantly be leading towards the chaotic and destructive world of tyche.

Tyche became an integral part of the Cynic way of approaching the world with Diogenes. The cult of tyche flourished in Athens, where a temple was being built for Athena Tyche around 335 B.C.E. To become a god or an animal is to go beyond the conventional world of humans and to belong to the other dimension, the dimension where one is no longer ruled by human conventions but by tyche alone.

Unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state” (Jowett’s trans.). Both Goulet-Cazé and Audrey Rich advance that Aristotle has the Cynics in mind in the aforementioned paragraph (cf., respectively, Le Cynisme Ancien et ses prolongements, p. 135, note 87, and Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung, p. 38, note 25).

117 Cf. L’aèse cynique, pp. 57-66, and Greek Thinkers, Volume II, pp. 140-152, respectively.

The Cynic can then get prepared for and confront *tyche* adequately, while at the same time, unlearning how to be human and making fun of humans and their *nomos*. While Democritus accepted the law as a necessary tool of living in the world\(^{119}\) and wanted to reject the transcendent aspects of beliefs—such as gods and idealistic interpretations of “reality”—his materialist attempt to understand the world through atoms and void and to deny the reality of things themselves is less radical than the rejection of the Cynics. For them, the disdain and sarcasm of their way of living does not even allow for such a claim to knowledge. They realized that Antisthenes’ virtue is still a conventional proclamation—and that any virtue is inevitably a “slave of *tyche*”\(^{120}\) and that nothing will come out of it except some strength of character that cannot adequately confront the world and adapt to it. In order to adapt to the circumstances, one needs to take things lightly and reject any serious and grounded belief in virtue. Furthermore, one needs to be playful and realize that oppositions themselves are conventional, even the distinction between a world of humans and that of gods, between what is conventional and what could be described as natural. Their practice of living is a practice of constantly rejecting any affirmation that positively sets a rule for conduct in life. The only thing they accepted is a process of liberation from what has been imposed on them. Their *askesis* consists of becoming as independent as possible, from both *nomos* and *tyche*, and to destroy whatever needs to be destroyed in them in order to get closer to the power of *tyche*. With every destruction of a norm, with every attack on convention, the

\(^{119}\) Cf. DK B XLVII, B CLXXIV, B CCXLVIII.

\(^{120}\) Cf. Goulet-Cazé, *l’ascèse cynique*, note 51, pp. 32-33, where the attribution of two lines of Dio Cassius XLVII, 49, to the *Heracleis* of Diogenes is contested because Diogenes rejects virtue as the slave of Fortune. The interpretation of the Cynic way of living adopted here concords with a Diogenes rejecting virtue—since it is determined either by *tyche* or by *nomos*. I disagree with Goulet-Cazé who rejects the attribution—even though restated by Plutarch in *De Superstitione* 1, 165 A—on the basis that it doesn’t concord well with the views of Diogenes.
Cynic is getting closer to the raw energy of *tyche*, the raw force of gods and *dolus*. This force\textsuperscript{121} and energy\textsuperscript{122} can allow the Cynic to relate comfortably to a world in flux, a world that is constantly changing and which cannot offer stability and tranquility. This ethical stance undermines the *stasis* or stability that is no longer really offered by the *polis*, by society and its conventions. The stability that the Cynics were looking for is one with the world of chaos, and has very little to do with the constructed and illusory stability of the *polis* and its *nomos*, built on anthropomorphic schemes and human projections. Stability for them comes with not expecting much of the world, but being prepared for, and comfortable with, anything. The Cynics attempt to live in a way that could easily adapt to the circumstances governed by *tyche*: they live a multiplicity of sensations, feelings, ideas, images, that cannot be reduced to the level of generality. As *tyche* is the irrational element in the universe, so is the Cynic, always escaping categorization and calculation, surviving as a blind and aimless force or energy, fulfilling a possible purpose not predictable in advance.\textsuperscript{123}

**Conclusions about the Cynic Way of Living**

The Cynics inaugurated a certain way of living that questioned the worthiness of living according to the laws and conventions of a so-called community. This resulted in a realization of their difference; rather than subsuming it, they opted to choose a way of living that was based on affirming this difference and on intensifying it. They did not elaborate on Antisthenes’ practical approach to communication, even though Diogenes may have started with similar positions and may have carried aspects of Antisthenes’ concern with practical and direct communication—since Diogenes wasn’t

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\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Goulet-Cazé, *L’ascèse cynique*, pp. 153-154, esp. note 51, where she acknowledges the importance of “force” and the need for destruction (“faire table rase”) in Diogenes’ philosophical outlook.

\textsuperscript{122} Cf. Von Fritz, “Antistene e Diogene” in *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung*, p. 68, where force and energy are associated with the concept of *eleutheria* which von Fritz considers to be the main concern of Diogenes throughout his life.

\textsuperscript{123} Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 4-6; *Metaphysics*, Z, 9 and K, 8; and *Eudemian Ethics*, VIII.
concerned with teaching, learning, or acquiring virtue. It was mainly a concern with living that obsessed the Cynics, and it wasn’t, as some pompous academics may say, the desire to get attention or to be iconoclastic that drove their actions. It was the impossibility of their identifying with the society around them that drove them and directed their action.

It is clear that parrhesia and anaideia are not simple tools of “attacking” society, of being the “clowns” and the irreverent reactionaries acting in despair vis-à-vis society. There is no hope as there is no despair in the Cynic outlook to life. The process of living they were engaged in was one of refusal but not of delusion: they refused the imposed order but they were not deluded enough to believe that what they were doing could actually change society or the peoples around them. They were resisting what has been imposed on them the only way they could: by deriding and mocking the others, and not by evangelizing and building an example as later Stoic and Christian constructs claimed—but in order to be able to be as comfortable as they can with the life they chose.

The fact is that they couldn’t accept the conventions imposed on them, and they tried to live in a way that allows them to liberate themselves from all conventional impositions. Through the proliferation of practices such as anaideia and parrhesia, they attempted to de-condition themselves by erasing the conventional values ingrained in them and by contesting all social institutions created by deluded human beings—guided by “fear” and/or “hope.” This process of de-conditioning, unlearning, and destruction, revealed a path towards a “freedom from” and an “independency” that became associated with their way of living. It is their askesis, the constant practice of distancing themselves from conventions and from others, the continual exercise of becoming like gods or dogs, that become the Cynic way of living and the only way they could comfortably relate to a world governed by tychē. Their
anti-social stand wasn’t an expressed war on humanity nor was it an attempt to humanize others.\textsuperscript{124} The Cynics found in their “ethics of destruction” a way of living that sets them on their path away from the restrictive prohibitions of the social institutions of \textit{nomos} as well as from the “hope” and “fear” associated with how human beings relate to \textit{physis} and/or to \textit{tyche}.

\textsuperscript{124} Crates, for example, resolved many communal problems and was able to bridge differences between many people, all the while not accepting the norms and conventions of his time and choosing to live a simple and unrestricted life. The question of community is not relevant to the Cynics, but nor is the question of “individuality”—perceived as opposed to the first. Many people conclude that the Cynics fought for individual ethics over communal ethics. But to acknowledge and realize the irreducible particularity of people, situations, and events, does not necessarily idolize the “individual”—as a matter of fact that would make another generality, another abstract construct that takes away from the singularity of people, situations, and events.