

Excerpts from Diogenes the Cynic (c. 412- c. 323 B.C.E.)

Plato was discoursing on his theory of ideas and, pointing to the cups on the table before him, said while there are many cups in the world, there is only one 'idea' of a cup, and this cupness precedes the existence of all particular cups.

"I can see the cup on the table," interrupted Diogenes, "but I can't see the 'cupness'."

"That's because you have the eyes to see the cup," said Plato, "but", tapping his head with his forefinger, "you don't have the intellect with which to comprehend 'cupness'."

Diogenes walked up to the table, examined a cup and, looking inside, asked, "Is it empty?"

Plato nodded.

"Where is the 'emptiness' which precedes this empty cup?" asked Diogenes.

Plato allowed himself a few moments to collect his thoughts, but Diogenes reached over and, tapping Plato's head with his finger, said "I think you will find here is the 'emptiness'."

Diogenes was once asked what he thought of Socrates. "A madman," he replied.

Later, Plato was asked what he thought of Diogenes. "A Socrates gone mad," he replied.

Diogenes ridiculed Plato for being long-winded.

Some strangers to Athens once asked Diogenes if he would point out to them the great philosopher [meaning Plato]. Diogenes looked around and then led them to the most deserted part of the city and, gesturing to the empty air as one would in formal introduction, said, "May I present to you the great philosopher Plato."

Diogenes was once invited to dinner by a wealthy man. During the evening, one of the guests became so outraged by Diogenes' general behaviour that he began to throw bones at him, calling him a "dog." Whereupon Diogenes got up, went to the guest, cocked up his leg and urinated on him.

Often when he was begging, Diogenes would be spat on by the people who passed him. Diogenes would ignore this and simply wipe his face with his sleeve. When ridiculed for his passive behaviour, Diogenes said, "Since men endure being wetted by the sea in order to net a mere herring, should I not endure being sprinkled to net my dinner?"

Diogenes was asked why he always begged. "To teach people," replied Diogenes. "Oh yes, and what do you teach?" people would ask him scornfully. "Generosity." he replied.

Diogenes was once asked why he took money from people. "To show them how they ought to spend their money," he replied.

Diogenes was asked, "Tell me, to what do you attribute your great poverty?"

"Hard work," he replied.

"And what advice can you offer the rich?"

"Avoid all the good things in life."

"Why?"

"Because money costs too much. A rich man is far poorer than a poor man."

"How can that be?"

"Because poverty is the only thing money can't buy."

Whenever people complimented Diogenes, he would slap himself hard across the face and in self-reproach would cry, "Shame! I must have done something terribly wicked!"

On one bright, clear day, Diogenes was walking up and down the market place, holding a lighted lantern high in front of him and peering around as if searching for something. When people gaped and asked him what he was doing, he replied, "I am looking for an honest man."

"It's my fate to steal," pleaded the man who had been caught red-handed by Diogenes.

"Then it is also your fate to be beaten," said Diogenes, hitting him across the head with his staff.

A heckler in the crowd shouted out, "My mind is not made like that, I can't be bothered with philosophy."

"Why do you bother to live," Diogenes retorted, "if you can't be bothered to live properly?"

Diogenes was asked, "What is the difference between life and death?"

"No difference."

"Well then, why do you remain in this life?"

"Because there is no difference."

(Excerpted from: <http://members.optushome.com.au/davidquinn000/Diogenes%20Folder/Diogenes.html>)