Cynical Lessons

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Contents

"There were always men who practiced this philosophy. For it seems to be in some ways a universal philosophy, and the most natural."

– Julian the Apostate

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Some months ago, I discovered a series of books on ancient philosophies produced by the University of California Press, with lovely details of Baroque paintings reproduced on the covers. The titles read: *Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neoplatonism, Ancient Scepticism … Cynics*. That last title immediately drew my attention: *Cynics* and not *Cynicism*. It turned out that *Cynics* makes explicit reference to anarchist ideas in a way that is both intelligent and important to at least some of us. (I will return to this intersection).

The choice of the title *Cynics* for William Desmond's contribution was probably only meant to avoid confusion, but it also suggests a way to read the book so as to learn not merely *of* the Cynics but *from* them. Why is it not called *Cynicism*? True, from one point of view it is perfectly easy to say that there is Cynicism because we can list tenets held in common by Cynics. Textbooks, encyclopedias and dictionaries do this: in any of them we can learn that these people favored what Desmond calls "carefree living in the present"[1]; and that, to accomplish it, they practiced a generalized rejection of social customs (Desmond catalogs this rejection in delightful detail: it includes customs concerning clothing, housing, diet, sex and marriage, slavery, work …) in the direction of a simplification of life.[2] (This was somewhat more confusingly referred to as living in accord with nature).

But already in the ancient world, Diogenes Laertius, author of the great gossip-book of ancient philosophers, commented: "we will go on to append the doctrines which they held in common — if, that is, we decide that Cynicism is really a philosophy, and not, as some maintain, just a way of life."[3] One of the perpetual question marks hanging next to the Cynics' status as philosophers is their common rejection of intellectual confusion. The term *typhos* (smoke, vapor) rightly emphasized by Desmond sums this up nicely. It was used, he writes, "to denote the delirium of popular ideas and conventions" (244). *Typhos* also included the "technical language" of philosophers: "the best cure" for it "is to speak simply" (127).

In any case, there is also certainly something called *cynicism*. Desmond consciously capitalizes the word when it is a matter of the school, and leaves it uncapitalized when it is a matter of what could be called the ambient attitude of a place and time — something people definitely live, but in no way choose or wish for. Something like that seems to be what Deleuze and Guattari were after in their recurring references to a special relation between capitalism and cynicism in the *Anti-*

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[1] *Cynics*, 65. All further references in the essay.

[2] An account of this simplification as a de-culturing, perhaps de-civilizing process, perhaps more palatable to some, can be found in Nietzsche: "The Cynic knows the connection between the more highly cultivated man's stronger and more numerous pains, and his profuse needs; therefore he understands that manifold opinions about beauty, propriety, seemliness, and delight must give rise to very rich sources of pleasure, but also to sources of discontent. In accordance with this insight, the Cynic educates himself retrogressively by giving up many of these opinions and withdrawing from the demands of culture. In that way, he achieves a feeling of freedom and of strengthening …" *Human, All Too Human* § 275.

[3] *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers,* VI. 103.

Oedipus: cynicism as the correlate of modern bad conscience, "accompanied by a strange piety."[4] Cynicism, for them, is not so much the ideology of capitalism, as it is a congeries of behaviors and attitudes secreted by the capitalist socius, the apparent apathy that is ever becoming real, but never for all that passing into a reasoned or passionate way of life. It is rather the default lifestyle of those for whom a way of life (in any interesting sense of the phrase) is impossible.[5]

In light of this, I propose that perhaps the most interesting perspective is to say that there is no Cynicism, that there is cynicism, and that there are (or at least were) Cynics, as individuals.

Whereas the usual philosophical guidebook (and, worse, the usual philosophical conversation) starts with the Great Question "what is …", I propose instead the question "who is …" Who is a Cynic? This question never disappears: even when we find great commonalities between different Cynics, we are still dealing with its familiar variant: "Who is the real Cynic?" We know that Cynics first appeared in the Greece of Socrates and Plato, and that there were Cynics well into Christian times. How do we know this? As with other ancient schools, its inventors, creators of a way of life, wrote nothing, or their writings are lost. We know of them through what is now called doxography: collections of sayings and opinions. Desmond recompiles and rearranges the doxographies charmingly, proving the point that if it is philosophy as a way of life that we are interested in, perhaps a few anecdotes about a singular character are as valuable as a short treatise or a letter to a friend. (I recall here Nietzsche's gnomic proposition: "It is possible to present the image of a man in three anecdotes"[6]).

In behavior and intent, The Cynics we know of were "missionary" (as Pierre Hadot has put it).[7] Their rejection of customs seems to have had an essentially performative, confrontational aspect. Desmond illustrates this as follows:

> … the ancient Cynic could be stereotyped as a wild man who stood on the corner piercing passers-by with his glances, passing remarks to all and sundry, but reserving his bitterest scorn for the elites who parade by in purple and chariots, living unnatural lives, and trampling on the natural equality of man. (187)

Such confrontations in public places were one way in which the Cynic way of life was communicated. How does one become a Cynic? By example, obviously; by means of a model. Now, this anecdote tells of a more intimate communication:

> Metrocles had been studying with Theophrastus, the successor to Aristotle and head of the Lyceum, a taxonomist and classificatory thinker with a specialty in botany. Once while declaiming Metrocles farted audibly and was so ashamed that he shut himself off from public view and thought of starving himself to death. But Crates

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[4] *Anti-Oedipus,* 225.

[5] Question: does awareness matter in all this? Those who become aware of ambient cynicism and how it has affected or shaped their social personas: could they be on the way to becoming Cynics? It cannot be so simple. Deleuze and Guattari's reference to "a strange piety" invites us to consider contemporary cynicism as the cynicism of the credulous. I do not have much of a taste for discussing capitalism as such, but it would be interesting to consider modern cynics in Deleuze and Guattari's sense as those descended, though not without a series of sociocultural mutations, from those Hume called the superstitious. Precisely with this difference: modern cynics are superstitious, and they know it, and they are resigned to it.

[6] *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* 25.

[7] *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* 108. The Cynic faces the crowd and "scold[s] to his heart's content," as Nietzsche puts it (*Human, All Too Human,* § 275.)

visited him, fed him with lupin-beans, and advanced various arguments to convince him that his action was not wrong or unnatural, and had been for the best in fact. Then Crates capped his exhortation with a great fart of his own. "From that day on Metrocles started to listen to Crates' discourses and became a capable man in philosophy."[8] (28)

This intimate aspect is not emphasized in Desmond's book, perhaps for lack of evidence. One could go a long ways in the direction of answering the question "Who can be a Cynic?" by considering the status of customs and laws from the perspective of how people have become capable of subverting them. I do not mean conferring a special status on transgression as a social or philosophical category, but rather becoming curious about who it is that grasps the instability of mores, conventions, laws and so on, and how they become capable of selectively ignoring them.

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Consider then this couple: unusual public behavior / anecdote documenting the same. As Desmond points out, a typical *chreia* or anecdote related an action followed by a witty, insightful, or bluntly truthful utterance. It would seem that the anecdote was simultaneously a spoken rhetorical device and a genre of literature, both in close relation to what is best about gossip. There were many compilations of such anecdotes in the ancient world. It is not hard to imagine that these anthologies were compiled so as to amuse the curious; but they could also have brought about, at a distance and thanks to a certain sort of reading, the transmission of a model that public harangues and private obscenities can communicate face to face, body to body. I mean the imitation of unusual behaviors, and, more importantly, a stimulation to invent new ones relevant to one's own life. This literary transmission of the Cynic life has surely happened many times and in many ways.

Long after the first generations came lengthier written texts either advocating the Cynical way of life or at least presenting it in a favorable light. But by then the writers' commitment to the way of life was in question. It is one version of the question "Who is the real Cynic?" Desmond discusses, though does not promote, a common distinction between original "hard" Cynics (Diogenes, Crates, Hipparchia) who lived the life and derivative "soft" Cynics, who, fascinated by it, merely wrote about it (Lucian, Dio Chrysostom). It is, of course, as a distant echo of this supposed merely literary presence of the school that the term "cynic" reappears as an ordinary noun, and eventually as a pejorative term, bringing the question "who?" full circle from punctual designation to anonymous epithet.

One example of the richness of this question's persistence in the literary transmission of Cynicism is Lucian's *The Death of Peregrinus*. Desmond mentions it briefly; I will take it up in some detail. In this satire we learn of the life and spectacular death of the "ill-starred" Peregrinus the Cynic.[9] As the satire opens, Theagenes, a fearful, crying Cynic (?) gives a hoary speech in praise of Peregrinus; then a nameless, laughing man mounts the same platform to tell the truth. (This man is not identified as a Cynic). He dismisses Theagnes' praise as well as his tears. Instead he

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[8] The last sentence is cited from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*, VI.

[9] Lucian, "The Death of Peregrinus," in *Selected Dialogues,* 74.

offers his laughter, and another perspective on Peregrinus. He details, among other things, how Peregrinus started life as a good-for-nothing, becoming a parricide in exile after strangling his own father for no reason other than the inconvenience of caring for an old man. In exile Peregrinus eventually transformed himself, managing to become a well-respected Christian leader. As such, he was imprisoned, and received all of their support. Once freed, he betrayed the Christians. Setting off again, he became a Cynic and trained in ascetic exercises. These were the *ponoi*, practices Cynics would use to loosen the bonds of custom: Peregrinus shaved half his head, smeared his face with mud, masturbated in public, beat and was beaten with a fennel cane, etc. Eventually his love of glory and attention led him to his famous self-immolation, the event that Lucian ruthlessly mocks as a failed apotheosis. Having publically announced it years in advance, Peregrinus killed himself by jumping into an enormous pyre before countless witnesses at the Olympic festival. This was purportedly done to show others that they need not fear death. Lucian, now present as the narrator, places himself, laughing, at the scene of the pyre, describing Peregrinus and Theagenes as pitiful actors. Lucian is not only unimpressed: he calls the witnesses "idiots," and retires. In the scenes of the aftermath, Lucian converses with curious passers-by and latecomers, answering their idle questions with preposterous and contradictory exaggerations.

It seems that, for Lucian, to say one is a Cynic, even to have trained in the ascetic exercises, means nothing special if in the present one continues to demonstrate vanity. And nothing could be more vain than capitalizing on one's own suicide by announcing it years in advance. Here Lucian, who never called himself a Cynic, shows himself capable of wearing that mask in his satire. He addresses an interlocutor:

> ... I can hear you crying out, as you well might: "Oh, the stupidity! Oh, the thirst for renown! Oh — ", all the other things we tend to say about them. Well, you can say all this at a distance and much more safely; but I said it right by the fire, and even before that in a large crowd of listeners. Some of these became angry, the ones who were impressed by the old man's lunacy; but there were others who laughed at him too. Yet I can tell you I was nearly torn to pieces by the Cynics... [10]

The entire story revolves around the question: "who?" Lucian's Peregrinus cynically moves from low-life to moral Christian to ascetic Cynic to vainglorious blowhard. Is this progression Cynical? Or is Lucian's laughter more of a Cynic effect, however he may have lived?

Desmond, for his part, suggests that much of Lucian's satire may be a "hatchet job," such as the account of the parricide, for example. Considering this takes us one turn further into the maze of the question: "who?" What if it is Lucian, the writer, who is the vainglorious one, envious of Peregrinus' performance, its practical philosophy? What if, for example, Peregrinus had an excellent reason to take his own life, and opted to use his death to teach a final lesson, one the results of which he could not live to see? Could that not be the opposite of vanity? For me this ambiguity manifests a tension between way of life and philosophy, or, again, between living according to nature and a missionary urge to harangue others to do the same.[10]

Lucian calls Peregrinus an actor, his suicide a "performance." Discussing the history of the well-worn metaphor of the world as theater, the philologist Ernst Robert Curtius traces it back to comments in Plato's *Laws* about humans as puppets of the gods, or to a phrase in his *Philebus*

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[10] A fascinating discussion of these sorts of reversals, based on a famous anecdote involving Diogenes the Cynic and Alexander the Great, appears in Part 4, "Friar," of Michel Serres' *Detachment*.

about the "tragedy and comedy of life." But then he notes: "In the popular lectures on philosophy ('diatribes') of the Cynics, the comparison of man to an actor became a much-used cliché."[11] This story of origins only becomes interesting when we read between the lines in Curtius, noticing that it must have been the Cynics who began using this metaphor without reference to the divine, and perhaps not as a metaphor at all. Simply put: everyone is an actor. Desmond writes: "if the self is substantial and secure in itself, then, like a good actor, it can put on and off many masks, playing many roles without dissipating or compromising itself, just as a good actor can appear in many guises while remaining the same person beneath" (182).[12] Indeed, the reception of this idea, metaphor or not, which Curtius traces from the Romans through the Middle Ages to Shakespeare, Baltasar Gracián, and Calderón, may be studied along at least two axes: who takes the world-theater to be a divine place? Who does not? And: who says is there is anything behind the actor's masks? Who does not? About Lucian and Peregrinus, Desmond writes:

> Peregrinus was rightly named Proteus because he was as adaptable and many-masked as the Old Man of the Sea. He took many shapes and professed not to be changed by any. Lucian scoffs, but Peregrinus' own intention in his last "role" as a latter-day Hercules may have been to demonstrate that external flames and a melting body cannot harm "the god within." (182)

That would be the case for saying that there is someone behind the mask. Something like Lucian's laughter would be the case for saying that there is not, or that what is behind the mask is another mask, or that it does not really matter... Now we might have begun to understand what is vital in the couple behavior/anecdote. It it is a tension, an intimate challenge, a kind of existential dare, that can only be resolved or transformed in one's own life and body.

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I have mentioned the list of titles in the series: *Stoicism*, *Epicureanism*, *Neoplatonism*, *Ancient Scepticism ... Cynics*. When I gazed upon the gathered books I felt I was not merely looking at a list of didactic books aimed at a curious and intelligent student. I also felt that I had before me a series of manuals, or at least fragments of manuals concerning ways of life that are perhaps still available. (Notice that someone claiming that the Cynic way of life is no longer available could be accused of taking a cynical position). Grasped as manuals they suggest a different sort of curiosity, and perhaps another aspect of intelligence as well. I have advocated for a pragmatic use of certain anthropology books along the same lines, as manuals concerning the organization and disorganization of social and cultural life, available to all. This sort of reading is obviously also in some sense a willful misappropriation, or at least a misreading; something else than the conventional use of such texts. It has two facets: the patience of engagement with the text (one cannot simply call it plagiarism or 'stealing ideas'); the impatience, or maybe hurried patience,

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[11] *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* 138.

[12] This is one of the few places where Desmond seems to go too fast, overstepping his doxographical task. I find no correlate in the texts he discusses to any such substantial concept of the self, which I take to be a more recent invention. The same problem occurs in the definition of *typhos* that I cited above: "...insubstantial 'smoke' in relation to the self and its present experiences, which alone can be known and possessed." For me the highly abstract concept of the self is more likely to be another example of *typhos.*

concerning whatever in it is significant enough to draw into one's life as an urgent problem, challenge, or question …

That said, I would like to consider that the Cynic way of life is impossible. Maybe no one could embody their way of life perfectly, avoiding the ambiguities brought about by the public aspect of the example or the harangue. Or at least, if someone did, it was in a way that was inimitable and so incommunicable. Historically speaking, such perfect Cynics must have disappeared. I recall the first day I spoke in public of the Cynics. One of my strange teachers was present; he said something like: "What about the Cynics who were such perfect masters that they disappeared?" At the time, I did not know how to respond. Perhaps I was confused. I now find his question calming, in two perhaps contradictory ways. First, if we suppose that the real Cynics disappeared, we can be untroubled about finding real Cynics; we can assume that we never will. The use of the question "Who is a Cynic?" is modified accordingly: we will expect to find masks, semblances, references. Imperfect embodiment is still embodiment, and literature is still (is very much so!) life.

Secondly, however, one can certainly disappear *to* the historical record without disappearing *from* the historical record. One's life can just as much be expressed in an anecdote as hidden within it. (Or both, which is what I suppose Nietzsche meant: the best anecdotes reveal and conceal at once. Otherwise we are collecting bad gossip, trivia, distractions, *typhos*). This idea of disappearing (of secrecy, or of clandestinity) could be used to finally dispose of the seriousness behind the question "Who is the real Cynic?", dissolving the distinction between "hard" and "soft" Cynics: the first might have written all manner of things, an exquisite and singular literature which they destroyed or shared with a very few; the latter might have undertaken countless ascetic exercises, from the ridiculous to the grotesque, but opted not to record them and disallowed others from reporting on them. All of this is intimately related to the problem of vanity at stake between Lucian and his character Peregrinus; it also shows much of what is at stake in the difference between ancient or medieval ways of life and our so-called lifestyles.

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I conclude by discussing the interesting references to anarchist ideas in *Cynics*. This has great interest for me and mine. One of my companions, when I showed him, patted me on the back and said something like: "See, now our movements are points of reference for everything, even for a book on ancient philosophy!" At which point I cringed twice, once for the phrase "our movements" and again for the pat on the back, that little victorious sentiment … I do not think that is exactly what is interesting here. That Desmond makes the reference is indeed noteworthy, especially given the clearly pedagogical intent of his book.[13] But at the same time, that is not a reason for us to be comforted; rather, it is a matter of curiosity, a reason to think differently about who we suppose we are and what we suppose we are doing. I mean that we could provisionally accept the connection he makes, taking everything he writes about the Cynics as an intimate challenge.

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[13] His reference in making this connection ultimately seems to be Kropotkin's Britannica article of 1911 on "Anarchism," in which Zeno of Citium is given as an early inspiration. Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, was a student of Crates the Cynic. (It would be tremendously satisfying to discover a story about the two involving farts or something comparable, to embarrass the seekers of noble origins.)

When he calls the Cynics anarchists, Desmond confesses this is just "the most convenient label" for them. Of course:

> ... they renounced the authority of officialdom and of social tradition: not marrying; not claiming citizenship in their native or adopted cities; not holding political office; not voting in the assembly or courts; not exercising in the gymnasium or marching with the city militia; and not respecting political leaders ... To be free is to have no master, whether that master be a god, political assembly, magistrate, general, or spouse. (185)

But Desmond thinks, as many or most do, of anarchism as a form of politics, and so restricts the Cynic-anarchist connection to the rejection of certain forms of political organization. On this side of the question, he generalizes to the point of grotesque error: it is not true that, as he seems to think, all anarchists think humans are fundamentally good, or that life without the state is better because it is more natural than life under it. On the other hand, calling Cynics anarchists is compelling in that they did not form parties or foment revolutions. So it is precisely to those anarchists most suspicious of such activities that this comparison will be interesting.

For me, the import of this is to show the tense relation, or non-relation, between the Cynics' concern with ethics (a way of life) above all, and the various political stages of the world, with all of their *typhos*. One could anachronistically call them a subculture; this would be useful precisely to the degree that it allows us to focus on how they both maintained a way of life and did not entirely disappear in the doing. That is: it is arguably the public aspect of their way of life that brought them to these various platforms.

Desmond does not call the Cynics anarchists and leave it at that; he also suggests that the same Cynics could be called democrats, kings, or cosmopolitans. Indeed, for what does "carefree living in the present" *especially* have to do with the State or its rejection? Instead of asking: "what is Cynic politics?", we can ask: "who is the Cynic when she does this, when he says that ...?" Let us say provisionally that the Cynics were playing with, playing at politics, insofar as its cloudy stages are also so many platforms from which to launch the perhaps inevitable diatribe. They were democrats, because in so doing they discovered a way of simultaneously inhabiting and resisting their dominant political environment, pushing it in a radically egalitarian or at least populist direction (Desmond reminds us that for many "democracy" essentially meant "rule by the poor"(188).) But the democratic assembly is also a place to practice comic wit! And the funniest thing is to call oneself a king. Well, why not? It is much funnier than calling oneself an anarchist or a democrat! Cynics are kings in rags (57).[14] As with democracy, Desmond suggests

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[14] As Dio Chrysostom put it, alluding to the figure of Odysseus. In his "Fourth Discourse on Kingship," Dio imagines a version of the anecdotal dialogue between Diogenes the Cynic and Alexander the Great in which he prepares the idea of "kings in rags" by undermining the conventional understanding of monarchy. "And Alexander said: 'Apparently you do not hold even the Great King to be a king, do you?' And Diogenes with a smile replied, 'No more, Alexander, than I do my little finger.' 'But shall I not be a great king,' Alexander asked, 'when once I have overthrown him?' 'Yes, but not for that reason,' replied Diogenes; 'for not even when boys play the game to which the boys themselves give the name 'kings' is the winner really a king. The boys, anyhow, know that the winner who has the title of 'king' is only the son of a shoemaker or a carpenter — and he ought to be learning his father's trade, but he has played truant and is now playing with the other boys, and he fancies that now of all times he is engaged in a serious business — and sometimes the 'king' is even a slave who has deserted his master. Now perhaps you kings are also doing something like that: each of you has playmates ..." (46-48)

that what we have here is an intelligent exaggeration, a pushing to the limit, of another ancient commonplace: that the best should rule.

> The poor Cynic can claim to be a "king" because in his wild, unconventional life he has recovered all the natural virtues: courage, temperance, simplicity, freedom, and, most of all, *philanthropia*. As "kings" who try to lead people to a life "according to nature," they are acting only in the people's best interest. They alone love mankind, and so in comparison with them, Sardanapallus, Xerxes, Philip, Alexander, Antigonus, Seleucus, Ptolemy, Nero, Vespasian, Domitian and the rest are only gangsters. (199)

They are, or aspire to be, monarchs in the only non-deluded sense of the word. And cosmopolitans? It seems that at least some of them *did* use this term. And here again we have what seems to be a provocation. Since the *polis* was the only available sense of "state," to claim to be a citizen of the cosmos is to express oneself through paradox. "How can one be a *citizen* of the totality and its vast spaces? Can one make the cosmos one's *home*? ... Diogenes implies that only the Cynic wanderer is truly at home anywhere" (205). I conclude that this mixture of paradoxical and provocative attitudes is more interesting than opting for any one Cynic politics.

Keeping this in mind, what happens when we return to the initial connection and make it operate in the other direction, asking: are anarchists Cynics? Could anarchists (really) be Cynics?[15] As with other practices or ideas that interest me, for example those of the Situationists and Nihilists (there might even be people clever enough to play this game with the word "communist"!), I feel the need to keep asking the question "who is ...?" which is, among other things, the perspectival question of the true and false.[16] This is not a matter of identity or identification, of clarifying or purifying our essence. It means, among other things, asking if there are anarchists who, instead of considering their activities solely as a politics ("anarchism"), understand what they do as aspects of a way of life distributed unevenly between political activities in the ordinary sense, micropolitical activities, and anti- or non-political activities — even inactivities? Are there anarchists who experience their lives as the ultimate criterion, instead of some goal or cause? If so, they will find plenty of interest in a manual entitled *Cynics*.

Yes, someone could read this book as a manual; someone could begin a revaluation of anarchist activities stimulated by the example of the Cynics. In that direction, I conclude with an outline of topics for immediate discussion and implementation:

1. What is *typhos* to you? I think of this as a promising alternative to terms such as "ideology" or "spectacle." Rather than deploying a a true-false, reality-appearance dichotomy (the starting point of so many boring conversations), to me *typhos* suggests an intimate,

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[15] There are multiple ways to understand this question. It might be interesting to compare it, and its possible answers, with a topic of scholarly controversy discussed by Desmond: was Jesus a Cynic? (*Cynics*, 211-216). Naturally, the mere question would disturb the average Christian: if Jesus was a Cynic, then the entirety of the Christian religion is an colossal misunderstanding at best, a vile imposture at worst. Does the correlation of Cynics and anarchists similarly unground "anarchism"?

[16] The parallels are obvious: there are vague epithets, a noun and an adjective, for cynics and anarchists alike; there are Cynics and anarchists, and there may or may not be Cynicism or Anarchism, depending on who you ask. But "who is ..." is also the question of possible and impossible positions: "Who can be a Cynic?" So, for example, in the aphorism cited above, Nietzsche writes that the gentle Epicureans had the same perspective as the Cynics: "between the two there is usually only a difference in temperament."

personal, singular limit. It is the limit of my interest in the world, in the ideas and experiences of others, and in some of my own ideas and experiences as well. "Beyond this limit," I can make a habit of thinking, "all is smoke, vapor, *typhos*." Ah, the destestable convergence of the uninteresting and the confusing …

2. What are your forms of ascetic exercises, your *ponoi*? I know many people who have shaved half of their head, some who are dirty enough to be said to have caked mud on themselves, a few who have masturbated in public … what kinds of situations can you get yourselves into that exemplify, not in principle but in fact, detachment from what you wish to detach yourself from? Instead of contending with others about interpretations of the world, you could bend your urge to compete in the direction of increasingly absurd or confrontational public acts. It is stimulating to imagine how, violating before me a custom concerning sexuality, you could provoke me to go and violate one concerning diet or work.

3. In thinking through the first topic and living out the second, *who* can truly describe themselves as "laughing a lot and taking nothing seriously?" (65)[17]

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Footnotes

[10]Lucian, 75.

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[17] The quote is from Lucian.

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