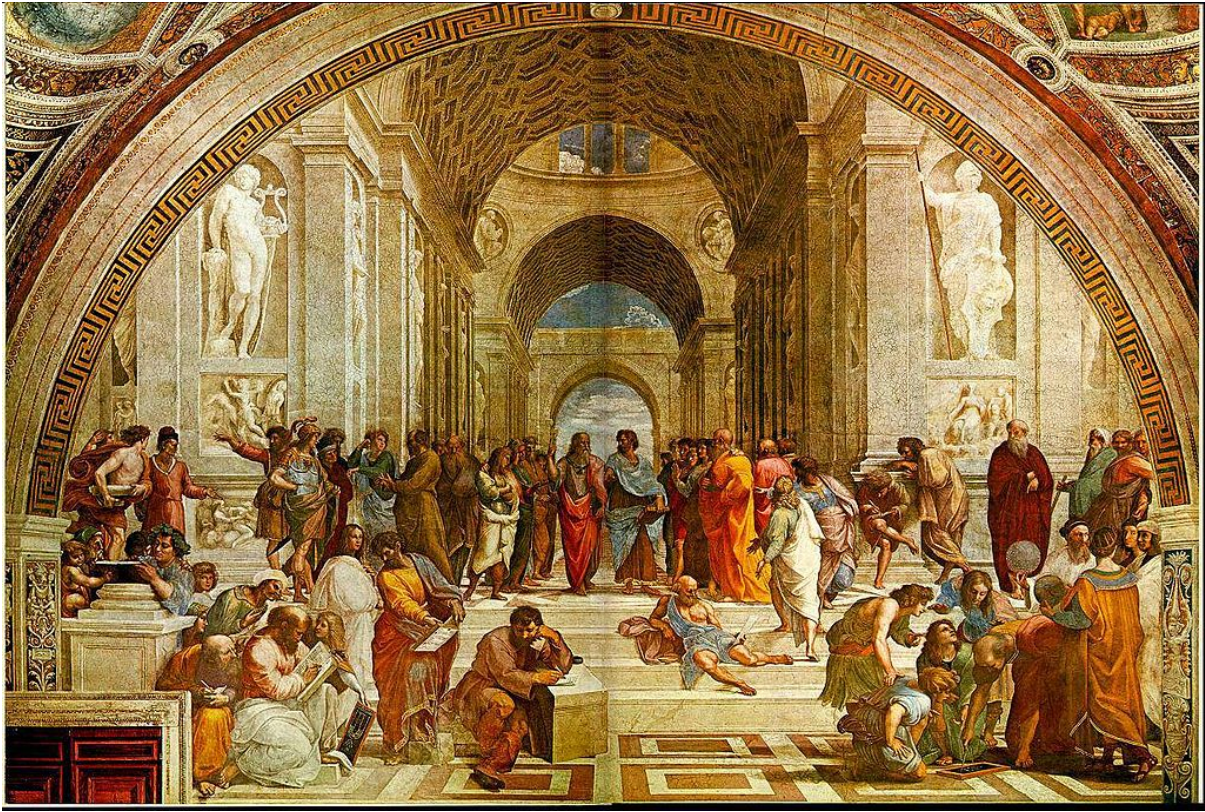


BELLARIA LXXXV

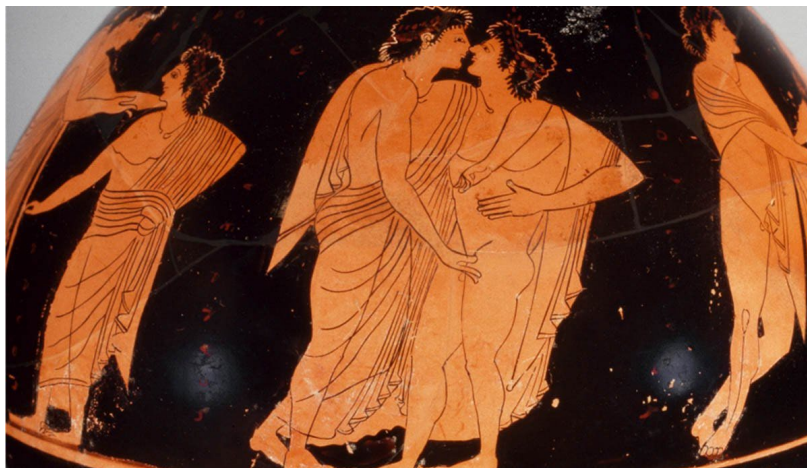


School of Athens (Raphael, 1511)

Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*

III BION c. 325-250 BC

Shifty, arrogant but useful



Soft cheese

47 In truth Bion was in other respects a wily character, a subtle sophist, and one who had given the enemies of philosophy many an occasion to trample philosophy underfoot, while in certain respects he was even affable and able to make fun of his arrogance. He left very many memoirs, and also sayings of useful application. For example, when he was reproached for not paying court to a youth, his excuse was, ‘You can’t get hold of a soft cheese with a hook.’

47 Καὶ ἦν ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ Βίων τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πολύτροπος καὶ σοφιστῆς ποικίλος καὶ πλείστας ἀφορμὰς δεδωκὼς τοῖς βουλομένοις καθιππάζεσθαι φιλοσοφίας· ἐν τισὶ δὲ καὶ πομπικὸς καὶ ἀπολαῦσαι τύφου δυνάμενος. πλείστὰ τε καταλέλοιπεν ὑπομνήματα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποφθέγματα χρειώδη πραγματεῖαν περιέχοντα. οἷον ὄνειδιζόμενος ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ θηρᾶσαι μειράκιον, ‘οὐχ οἷόν τε,’ εἶπεν, ‘ἀπαλὸν τυρὸν ἀγκίστρῳ ἐπισπᾶσθαι.’

Anxiety, marriage, old age (etc.)

48 Being once asked who suffers most from anxiety, he replied, ‘He who is ambitious of the greatest prosperity.’ Being consulted by someone as to whether he should marry—for this story is also told of Bion—he made answer, ‘If the wife you marry be ugly, she will be your bane; if beautiful, you will not keep her to yourself.’ He called old age the harbour of all ills; at least they all take refuge there. Renown he called the mother of virtues; beauty another’s good; wealth the sinews of success. To someone who had devoured his patrimony he said, ‘The earth swallowed Amphiarus, but you have swallowed your land.’ To be unable to bear an ill is itself a great ill. He used to condemn those who burnt men alive as if they could not feel, and yet cauterized them as if they could.

48 ἐρωτηθεὶς ποτε τίς μᾶλλον ἀγωνιᾷ, ἔφη, ‘ὁ τὰ μέγιστα βουλόμενος εὐημερεῖν.’ ἐρωτηθεὶς εἰ γήμαι—ἀναφέρεται γὰρ καὶ εἰς τοῦτον—ἔφη, ‘ἐὰν μὲν γήμης αἰσχροῦ, ἔξεις ποιήν· ἂν δὲ καλήν, ἔξεις κοινήν.’ τὸ γῆρας ἔλεγεν ὄρμον εἶναι τῶν κακῶν· εἰς αὐτὸ γοῦν πάντα καταφεύγειν. τὴν δόξαν ἀρετῶν μητέρα εἶναι· τὸ κάλλος ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν· τὸν πλοῦτον νεῦρα πραγμάτων. πρὸς τὸν τὰ χωρία κατεδηδοκότα, ‘τὸν μὲν Ἀμφιάρων,’ ἔφη, ‘ἡ γῆ κατέπιε, σὺ δὲ τὴν γῆν.’ μέγα κακὸν τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι φέρειν κακόν. κατεγίνωσκε δὲ καὶ τῶν τοῦς ἀνθρώπους κατακαόντων μὲν ὡς ἀναισθήτους, παρακαόντων δὲ ὡς αἰσθανομένους.

Sexual favours, Alcibiades, Hades, rhetoric



Socrates and Alcibiades (Etienne-Barthélemy Garnier, 1759-1849)

49 He used repeatedly to say that to gratify someone else with his beauty was preferable to plucking the favours of others. For the latter means ruin to both body and soul. He even abused Socrates, declaring that, if he felt desire for Alcibiades and abstained, he was a fool; if he did not, his conduct was in no way remarkable. The road to Hades, he used to say, was easy to travel; at any rate men passed away with their eyes shut. He said in censure of Alcibiades that in his boyhood he drew away the husbands from their wives, and as a young man the wives from their husbands. When the Athenians were absorbed in the practice of rhetoric, he taught philosophy at Rhodes. To someone who found fault with him for this he replied, 'How can I sell barley when what I brought to market is wheat?'

49 ἔλεγε δὲ συνεχῆς ὅτι αἰρετώτερόν ἐστι τὴν ὥραν ἄλλῳ χαρίζεσθαι ἢ ἀλλοτρίας ἀποδρέπεσθαι· καὶ γὰρ εἰς σῶμα βλάπτεσθαι καὶ εἰς ψυχὴν. διέβαλε δὲ καὶ τὸν Σωκράτην, λέγων ὡς εἰ μὲν εἶχεν Ἀλκιβιάδου χρεῖαν καὶ ἀπείχετο, μάταιος ἦν· εἰ δὲ μὴ εἶχεν, οὐδὲν ἐποίει παράδοξον. εὐκόλον ἔφασκε τὴν εἰς ἄδου ὁδὸν· καταμύοντας γοῦν ἀπιέναι. τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην μεμφόμενος ἔλεγεν ὡς νέος μὲν ὦν τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀπαγάγοι τῶν γυναικῶν, νεανίσκος δὲ γενόμενος τὰς γυναῖκας τῶν ἀνδρῶν. ἐν Ῥόδῳ τὰ ῥητορικὰ διασκούντων τῶν Ἀθηναίων τὰ φιλοσοφούμενα ἐδίδασκε· πρὸς οὖν τὸν αἰτιασάμενον ἔφη, 'πυροὺς ἐκόμισα καὶ κριθὰς πιπράσκω·'

Hades, talkers, pirates, conceit, misers, old age



Danaids attempting to fill a vessel (Waterhouse 1903)

50 He used to say that those in Hades would be more severely punished if the vessels in which they drew water were whole instead of being pierced with holes. To an importunate talker who wanted his help he said, 'I will satisfy your demand, if you will only get others to plead your cause and stay away yourself.' On a voyage in bad company he fell in with pirates. When his companions said, 'We are lost if we are discovered.' 'And I too,' he replied, 'unless I am discovered.' Conceit he styled a hindrance to progress. Referring to a wealthy miser he said, 'He has not acquired a fortune; the fortune has acquired him.' Misers, he said, took care of property as if it belonged to them, but derived no more benefit from it than if it belonged to others. 'When we are young,' said he, 'we are courageous, but it is only in old age that prudence is at its height.'

50 Ἔλεγε δὲ τοὺς ἐν ᾄδου μᾶλλον ἂν κολάζεσθαι εἰ ὀλοκλήροις καὶ μὴ τετρημένοις ἀγγείοις ὑδροφόρουν. πρὸς τὸν ἀδολέσχην λιπαροῦντα αὐτῷ συλλαβέσθαι, 'τὸ ἰκανόν σοι ποιήσω,' φησὶν, 'ἐὰν παρακλήτους πέμψῃς καὶ αὐτὸς μὴ ἔλθῃς.' πλέων μετὰ πονηρῶν λησταῖς περιέπεσε· τῶν δέ, 'ἀπολώλαμεν,' εἰπόντων, 'ἐὰν γνωσθῶμεν,' ἐγὼ δέ γε,' φησὶν, 'ἐὰν μὴ γνωσθῶ.' τὴν οἴησιν ἔλεγε προκοπῆς ἐγκοπὴν. πρὸς τὸν μικρολόγον πλούσιον, 'οὐχ οὗτος,' ἔφη, 'τὴν οὐσίαν κέκτηται, ἀλλ' ἡ οὐσία τοῦτον.' ἔλεγε τοὺς μικρολόγους τῶν μὲν ὑπαρχόντων ὡς ἰδίων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, ὡς δ' ἐξ ἄλλοτρίων μηδὲν ὠφελεῖσθαι. τῇ μὲν ἀνδρεία νέους ὄντας ἔφη χρῆσθαι, τῇ δὲ φρονήσει γηράσκοντας ἀκμάζειν.

Prudence, old age, slander, low birth, friends, cynicism



Old age

51 Prudence, he said, excels the other virtues as much as sight excels the other senses. He used to say that we ought not to heap reproaches on old age, seeing that, as he said, we all hope to reach it. To a slanderer who was scowling his words were, 'I don't know whether you have met with ill luck, or your neighbour with good.' He used to say that low birth made a bad partner for free speech, for:

It cows a man, however bold his heart.

We ought, he remarked, to watch our friends and see what manner of men they are, in order that we may not be thought to associate with the bad or to decline the friendship of the good. Bion at the outset used to deprecate the Academic doctrines, even at the time when he was a pupil of Crates. Then he adopted the Cynic discipline, donning cloak and wallet.

51 τοσοῦτον διαφέρειν τὴν φρόνησιν τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν, ὅσον τὴν ὄρασιν τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων. μὴ δεῖν ἔφασκεν ὀνειδίζειν τὸ γῆρας, εἰς ὃ, ἔφη, πάντες εὐχόμεθα ἐλθεῖν. πρὸς τὸν βάσκανον ἐσκυθροπακότα, 'οὐκ οἶδα,' ἔφη, 'πότερον σοὶ κακὸν γέγονεν ἢ ἄλλῳ ἀγαθόν.' τὴν δυσγένειαν πονηρὸν ἔλεγεν εἶναι σύνοικον τῇ παρρησίᾳ·

δουλοῖ γὰρ ἄνδρα, κὰν θρασύσπλαχνός τις ᾖ.

τοὺς φίλους ὅποιοι ἂν ᾖσι συντηρεῖν, ἵνα μὴ δοκοῖμεν πονηροῖς κεχρηῆσθαι ἢ χρηστοῖς παρητηῆσθαι. Οὗτος τὴν ἀρχὴν μὲν παρητεῖτο τὰ Ἀκαδημαϊκά, καθ' ὃν χρόνον ἤκουε Κράτητος· εἶτ' ἐπανεῖλετο τὴν κυνικὴν ἀγωγὴν, λαβὼν τρίβωνα καὶ πήραν.

Atheism, jesting, parody



Democritus having a good laugh (Charles-Antoine Coypel, 1694-1762)

52 For little else was needed to convert him to the doctrine of entire insensibility. Next he went over to Theodorean views, after he had heard the lectures of Theodorus the Atheist, who used every kind of sophistical argument. And after Theodorus he attended the lectures of Theophrastus the Peripatetic. He was fond of display and great at cutting up anything with a jest, using vulgar names for things. Because he employed every style of speech in combination, Eratosthenes, we hear, said of him that he was the first to deck philosophy with bright-flowered robes. He was clever also at parody. Here is a specimen of his style:

O gentle Archytas, musician-born, blessed in thine own conceit,
most skilled of men to stir the bass of strife.

52 καὶ τί γὰρ ἄλλο μετεσκεύασεν αὐτὸν πρὸς ἀπάθειαν; ἔπειτα ἐπὶ τὰ Θεοδώρεια μετῆλθε διακούσας Θεοδώρου τοῦ ἀθέου κατὰ πᾶν εἶδος λόγου σοφιστεύοντος· μεθ' ὃν Θεοφράστου διήκουσε τοῦ περιπατητικοῦ. ἦν δὲ καὶ θεατρικὸς καὶ πολὺς ἐν τῷ γελοίῳ διαφορῆσαι, φορτικοῖς ὀνόμασι κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων χρώμενος. διὰ δὴ οὖν τὸ παντὶ εἶδει λόγου κεκρᾶσθαί φασι λέγειν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἐρατοσθένην, ὡς πρῶτος Βίων τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἀνθινὰ ἐνέδυσεν. εὐφυῆς γὰρ ἦν καὶ παρωδησαί· οἷά ἐστιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῦτα·

ὃ πέπον Ἀρχύτα, ψαλληγενές, ὀλβιότυφε,
τῆς ὑπάτης ἔριδος πάντων ἐμπειρότατ' ἀνδρῶν.

Mocks music and geometry, extravagance, showman, youths, shameless



53 And in general he made sport of music and geometry. He lived extravagantly, and for this reason he would move from one city to another, sometimes contriving to make a great show. Thus at Rhodes he persuaded the sailors to put on students' garb and follow in his train. And when, attended by them, he made his way into the gymnasium, all eyes were fixed on him. It was his custom also to adopt certain young men for the gratification of his appetite and in order that he might be protected by their goodwill. He was extremely selfish and insisted strongly on the maxim that 'friends share in common.' And hence it came about that he is not credited with a single disciple, out of all the crowds who attended his lectures. And yet there were some who followed his lead in shamelessness.

53 καὶ ὅλως καὶ μουσικὴν καὶ γεωμετρίαν διέπαιζεν. ἦν δὲ πολυτελής· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πόλιν ἐκ πόλεως ἤμειβεν, ἐνίοτε καὶ φαντασίαν ἐπιτεχνώμενος. ἐν γοῦν Ῥόδῳ τοὺς ναύτας ἔπεισε σχολαστικὰς ἐσθῆτας ἀναλαβεῖν καὶ ἀκολουθεῖν αὐτῷ· σὺν οἷς εἰσβάλλον εἰς τὸ γυμνάσιον περίβλεπτος ἦν. εἰώθει τε νεανίσκων τινῶν υἰοθεσίας ποιεῖσθαι εἰς τὸ ἀποχρηῆσθαι αὐτοῖς ἕς τε τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ὥστε φυλάττεσθαι ὑπὲρ εὐνοίας αὐτῶν· ἀλλὰ καὶ φίλαυτος ἦν ἰσχυρῶς καὶ πολὺς ἐγκείμενος τῷ Κοινὰ τὰ φίλων. παρ' ὃ καὶ οὐδεὶς μαθητῆς αὐτοῦ ἐπιγράφεται, τοσούτων αὐτῷ σχολασάντων· καίτοι τινὰς εἰς ἀναισχυντίαν προῆγεν.

Attacks gods, repents, dies



Antigonos II Gonatas (of Macedon, d. 239 BC)

54 For instance, Betion, one of his intimates, is said once to have addressed Menedemus in these words: 'For my part, Menedemus, I pass the night with Bion, and I don't think I am any the worse for it.' In his familiar talk he would often vehemently assail belief in the gods, a taste which he had derived from Theodorus. Afterwards, when he fell ill (so it was said by the people of Chalcis—where he died), he was persuaded to wear an amulet and to repent of his offences against religion. And even for want of nurses he was in a sad plight, until Antigonos sent him two servants. And he himself followed [Antigonos] in a litter.

54 ὁ γοῦν Βητίων εἷς τῶν συνήθων αὐτῷ πρὸς Μενέδημόν ποτε λέγεται εἶπεῖν, 'ἐγὼ τοι, ὦ Μενέδημε, νύκτωρ συνδέομαι Βίῳ καὶ οὐδὲν ἄτοπον δοκῶ μοι πεπονθέναι.' πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἀθεώτερον προεφέρετο τοῖς ὁμιλοῦσι, τοῦτο Θεοδώρειον ἀπολαύσας. καὶ ὕστερόν ποτε ἐμπεσὼν εἰς νόσον, ὡς ἔφασκον οἱ ἐν Χαλκίδι—αὐτόθι γὰρ καὶ κατέστρεψε—περίαπτα λαβεῖν ἐπέισθη καὶ μεταγινώσκειν ἐφ' οἷς ἐπλημμέλησεν εἰς τὸ θεῖον. ἀπορία δὲ καὶ τῶν νοσοκομούντων δεινῶς διετίθετο, ἕως Ἀντίγονος αὐτῷ δύο θεράποντας ἀπέστειλε. καὶ ἠκολούθει γε αὐτὸς ἐν φορείῳ.

Next week: Aristotle