

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

**CYNICISM.** See also *Despair; Nihilism; Pessimism*. Cynicism, whose founder would rather go insane than feel pleasure, was a school of Socratic inspiration. Virtue can be taught, thundered Antisthenes, although he and his disciples had little epistemology and sometimes employed the tawdry fallacies of the Sophists. This seeming inconsistency disappears when one realizes that the teaching was not dialectic disputation, but practical exercise in action. Hercules was their hero, and they assumed the role of hero or at least of example to other men.

Therefore they practiced asceticism (q.v.), braved the rigors of the weather, despised riches, begged bread from those whom they despised, and in rebellion against effete society, lived like dogs. Diogenes threw away his tin cup to be consistent and ordered Alexander the Great to get out of his sunlight.

As time went on the movement, because of its mendicancy and animalism, developed hedonistic tendencies. Its good points were absorbed in stoicism and were furnished with an epistemological foundation.

The modern meaning of the term cynicism is an inaccurate but natural development from the Greek background. With their ascetic virtue the early cynics despised society. Thus today a cynic is one who entertains a contemptuous disbelief in men's sincerity. The factor of moral athleticism is gone.

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