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SELLING CYNICISM: THE PRAGMATICS OF DIOGENES' COMIC PERFORMANCES

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the two related topics of humour and performance in the anecdotes concerning Diogenes of Sinope.[1] Although these are often referred to in scholarship, a comprehensive picture remains to be drawn of the interrelationship between humour and comic performance in the early Cynic. While the present investigation cannot claim to be comprehensive, approaching the issue from the perspective of performance yields valuable insights, particularly since it points to the importance of audience participation. Diogenes' humorous performances do not simply constitute the arbitrary choice of a comically gifted person. Rather, they are intimately related to Cynic philosophy and its programme of social criticism, and to the Cynic's need to maintain an audience.

Due to its particular focus, the paper does not aim at presenting a balanced view of early Cynic philosophy, nor even of the method of Diogenes. The argument presupposes that the early Cynic considered himself a philosopher attempting to contribute seriously to the fourth century philosophical scene. Working within the broad Socratic and, more particularly, Antisthenic legacy, Diogenes made use of both conventional and unconventional methods to get his message across.[2] As his lasting contribution lies with the latter, it should come as no surprise that the tradition stresses the unconventional Diogenes.

The Diogenic material to be considered for the purposes of this paper are the anecdotes scattered through the works of various ancient authors and compilations, the most important of which remains the sixth book of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. The small literary form of the anecdote, or χρεία, is defined by Theon as 'a concise statement or action which is attributed with aptness (μετ' εὐστοχίας) to some specified character or to something analogous to a character'.[3] It should be accepted that many statements of a jocular, Cynic nature were in antiquity 'aptly' attributed to Diogenes. Furthermore, many anecdotes may have come from literary works on Diogenes: later Cynics often were authors in their own right and

[1] I am grateful to Professor Gottfried Mader and the anonymous referee for the *Classical Quarterly* for their valuable comments.

[2] While a master–pupil relationship is widely rejected, most scholars accept that Antisthenes exerted a profound influence on Diogenes; cf. A. A. Long, 'The Socratic tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic ethics', in R. B. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (edd.), *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy* (Berkeley, 1996), 32; J. L. Moles, 'The Cynics and politics', in A. Laks and M. Schofield (edd.), *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), 130, n. 2.

[3] Theon, *Progymn*. 201.17; cf. J .F. Kindstrand, 'Diogenes Laertius and the "chreia" tradition', *Elenchos* 71/72 (1986), 214–43; F. Hock and E. N. O'Neil, *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric*, 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1986– 2002), 1.1–22, 82. Modern collections of Diogenes material in F. G. A. Mullach, *Fragmenta Philosophorum Graecorum*, 3 vols. (Darmstadt, 1968), 2.261–395, and G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Naples, 1990), 2.227–509.

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prolific originators of genre, and creativity regarding a founder of the movement may therefore be expected.[4] Consequently, historical claims based on the χρεία tradition must be highly contentious. These difficulties notwithstanding, I would like to suggest that the comic, performing Diogenes portrayed in the anecdote tradition reflects the strategies followed by the historical person, as these were dictated by the nature of his philosophical wares and the context of his activities.

II. THE COMIC DIOGENES

The relationship between Diogenes and Comedy was well noted in antiquity. Demetrius associates Comedy and satyr plays with the κυνικὸς τρόπος as having the common stylistic elements of humour (τὸ γελοῖον, *Eloq.* 170) and forcefulness (ἡ δεινότης, *Eloq.* 259–61). Marcus Aurelius calls the Cynic the successor of Old Comedy in their shared use of παρρησία for the purposes of education (M. Aur. 11.6). With Diogenes and his comic predecessors, the concept of παρρησία found wider application than mere political right and even verbal expression. Diogenes famously proclaimed bold speech to be 'the most beautiful thing among people' (D.L. 6.69) and made startling use of the concept in everyday life, including both speech and action.[5] Similarly, Old Comedy was renowned for its exceptional liberty of expression, which included not only frankness on political issues, but personal abuse and obscenity as well.[6] Both Old Comedy and the Cynics employed the pedagogical technique of presenting serious content in humorous and satirical form; the concept of σπουδαιογέλοιον was especially associated with Cynic literature.[7]

The comic and humorous aspect of early Cynicism has not gone unnoticed in modern scholarship either. Kindstand notes four similarities between Comedy and Cynicism: unrestricted παρρησία, a strong element of humour and satire, a combination of joking and seriousness, and the inclusion of subjects and expressions of a vulgar nature.[8] For Niehues-Pröbsting, various affinities emerge when early Cynicism is regarded as a literary, rather than a philosophical or a social phenomenon. These include the comic figure of Socrates as much as the generic relationship between

[4] For the influence of early Cynicism on genre development in antiquity, cf. R. B. Branham, 'Defacing the currency: Diogenes' rhetoric and the invention of Cynicism', in Branham and Goulet-Cazé (n. 2), 83–7; K. Döring, ' "Spielereien mit verdecktem Ernst vermischt": Unterhaltsame Formen literarischer Wissensvermittlung bei Diogenes von Sinope und den frühen Kynikern', in W. Kullmann and J. Althoff (edd.), *Vermittlung und Tradierung von Wissen in der griechischen Kultur* (Tübingen, 1993), 337–52.

[5] *Παρρησία* came to be the hallmark of the true Cynic; cf. Plut. *Brut.* 34.5; Epict. 3.22.96; Lucian, *Demon.* 50.10; K. Kennedy, 'Cynic rhetoric: the ethics and tactics of resistance', *Rhetoric Review* 18.1 (1999), 33–7.

[6] The παρρησία of Old Comedy includes αἰσχρολογία, κακηγορία, and λοιδορία; cf. Lys. fr. 53 Thalheim; Isoc. 8.14; Arist. *Pol.* 1336b3–23; *EN* 1128a22–5; S. Halliwell, 'Comic satire and freedom of speech in classical Athens', *JHS* 91 (1991), 67–9.

[7] Strabo 16.2.29 uses the term for the first time, calling Menippus a σπουδαιογέλοιος. L. Giangrande, *The Use of* Spoudaiogeloion *in Greek and Roman Literature* (The Hague, 1972), 8–9, 34 treats it as a broad stylistic method, but denies that it could be accommodated in Diogenes of Sinope's harsh asceticism: the style was introduced into the Cynic tradition by Crates; see, however, K. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes* (Uppsala, 1976), 47–8. For Old Comedy, cf. A. Ercolani (ed.), *Spoudaiogeloion : Form und Funktion der Verspottung in der aristophanischen Komödie* (Stuttgart, 2002).

[8] Kindstrand (n. 7), 45.

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comedy and the dialogue, the latter being the Cynic genre of choice. Most importantly, however, is the shared use of humour, which in both cases allow for dabbling with the obscene and the blatantly sexual without losing all respectability. As is the case with Old Comedy, humour constitutes the civic characteristic in Cynicism that prevents the philosophy from sinking into pure animalism and cultural pessimism.[9]

Both these scholars view the early Cynic tradition from a literary perspective. Kindstrand traces the stylistic background for early Cynic literature in order to define the style of the later Cynic, Bion of Borysthenes.[10] Niehues-Pröbsting, on the other hand, elects to focus exclusively on the Diogenes reception. Impressed by the difficulties in establishing its historical veracity, he finds the anecdote tradition unsuitable for making any historical claim whatsoever, even about whether the Sinopean actually lived or not.[11] A purely literary approach conflicts with that of scholars who refuse to give up the search for the historical Diogenes, but also with the current scholarly emphasis on the performativity of ancient literature. In the case of texts explicitly created to be performed, it is of obvious importance to take aspects of performance into account. It is equally useful in the interpretation of texts claiming to portray performances, such as the Cynic χρεῖαι.

III. CYNIC PERFORMANCE

In the Diogenes anecdotes, the philosopher's public appearances have a distinct theatrical quality, in which personality and display occupy centre stage.[12] In what follows, the Cynic's 'performance art' is contextualized within the established tradition of the performing public figure, and within fourth-century theatricality. His self-presentation and activities are then analysed in terms of the four matrices of ancient performances proposed by Goldhill.[13] Finally, the relationship between Cynic performance and Cynic philosophy is broached.

The sage as showman

As a fourth-century performer of wisdom, Diogenes had venerable predecessors. In the predominantly oral environments of archaic and classical Greece, the transmission of disembodied words and ideas did not suffice. Instead, public figures of various professions and learning were required to perform their views in public, through verbal display and visual enactment. The legendary Seven Sages had three things in common: they were poets, they were involved in politics, and they were performers of some sort. Combining action and utterance in ways similar to the Diogenes anecdotes, the sages performed their wisdom and put their sagacity on

[9] H. Niehues-Pröbsting, *Der Kynismus des Diogenes und der Begriff des Zynismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 208–10.

[10] Kindstrand (n. 7), 43–8.

[11] Niehues-Pröbsting (n. 9), 37; reservations about this productive approach by K. von Fritz, *Arcadia* 16 (1981), 183–7, G. Striker, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 66 (1984), 96–7, and M. Billerbeck (ed.), *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung*: *Aufsätze mit Einführung und Bibliographie* (Amsterdam, 1991), 3–4, 11, n. 24.

[12] T. McEvilley, 'Diogenes of Sinope (*c.* 410–*c.* 320 B.C.): selected performance pieces', *Art Forum* 21 (1983), 58–9; Branham (n. 4), 83, 92–104.

[13] S. Goldhill, 'Programme notes', in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (edd.), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge, 1999), 2–10.

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verbal display.[14] The same applies to verbal professions of the classical age, historians, philosophers, sophists, and rhetoricians alike.[15]

While not the golden age of Athenian drama, fourth-century literature suggests a heightened atmosphere of theatricality, when public display in Athens becomes informed by the cultural prominence of the theatre. In general, the language of the era increasingly contains theatre imagery, and theatrical performance gains importance in rhetorical displays.[16] The tendency points to the permeation of theatricality into public consciousness, or, as Zeitlin puts it, to the 'theatricalization of civic experience' in the Athenian democracy.[17] In order to enhance communication during the fourth century, public figures resorted to the tricks of the performing trade.

Within such a cultural environment Diogenes demonstrably enacts his role as Cynic sage. While he would not have been regarded as a complete novelty, the theatricality of his self-presentation is none the less striking. Firstly, the extent to which the philosopher is depicted in public spaces is of itself remarkable: he is seen as frequenting temples, halls, lecture rooms, theatres, stadia, gymnasia, and marketplaces.[18] Secondly, some stories reflect an explicitly theatrical approach. In D.L. 6.64, the visual dramatisation of the Cynic's habit of going against the grain is perhaps not by coincidence staged at the theatre entrance.[19] In D.L. 6.35, the philosopher marks his self-presentation as an exaggeration and compares himself to the coach of a dramatic chorus who sets in above pitch in order for the chorus to strike the right note. While the reference is primarily to the radical portrayal of the Cynic lifestyle, it may on a secondary level allude to the Cynic's costume, actions, and language, at the same time implying an audience. Such allusions add the unmistakably theatrical flavour to the typical Cynic method still to be observed in later adherents (cf. D.L. 4.52).

Setting the stage: performance matrices

The Diogenes performances may usefully be analysed by means of the four terms

[14] R. P. Martin, 'The seven sages as performers of wisdom', in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (edd.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece* (Cambridge, 1993), 108–28. Contrary to Martin's opinion, I believe that these performances of verbal and gestural skill continued after Socrates. The sayings of the Seven Sages could have been the first to be collected, cf. Kindstrand (n. 3), 230–1.

[15] One may recall in this regard Herodotus at Olympia, the Platonic Socrates, and the various other recorded anecdotes of philosophers in Diogenes Laertius. Branham (n. 4), 91, n. 33 refers to the theatricality of fifth-century sophists and rhetoricians like Hippias and Protagoras, suggesting continuance between such 'actors' and the Cynic.

[16] P. Easterling, 'Actors and voices: reading between the lines in Aeschines and Demosthenes', in Goldhill and Osborne (n. 13), 166; cf. also E. Hall, 'Lawcourt dramas: the power of performance in Greek forensic oratory', *BICS* 40 (1995), 39–58.

[17] F. Zeitlin, 'Aristophanes: the performance of utopia in the *Ecclesiazousae*', in Goldhill and Osborne (n. 13), 167.

[18] D.L. 6.22–3, 34, 37–8, 41, 45, 46, 58, 61, 64, 66, 69. Diogenes' constant portrayal in public spaces and gatherings is linked in literature to the Cynic mission; cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 8.5–8, 9.1–3. Zeitlin (n. 17), 167 mentions one of the purposes of Comedy as providing 'a glimpse of the degree to which these spaces (law-court, assembly, marketplace, theatre, temple, gymnasium, symposium) and those who act within them are in fact themselves actors, primed to play their roles in a stratified society of competitive public display'.

[19] This is not negated by the anecdote relating Diogenes' criticism of Dionysiac competitions as 'great spectacles for fools' (D.L. 6.24), in which the educational value of the dramatic performances is scorned.

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Goldhill posits as matrices of the ancient performer: ἀγών, competition or contest, ἐπίδειξις, display, σχῆμα, referring, among other things, to the physical appearance of the performer presented to the audience, and θεωρία, or audience engagement.[20]

The second and third matrices find obvious application in the Diogenes legend. The physical σχῆμα of the Cynic philosopher was widely known throughout antiquity: bare feet, folded cloak, wallet, and staff.[21] The Cynic attire carried rhetorical and philosophical significance. It became the outward appearance of αὐτάρκεια; it stood for pauperism for the sake of freedom, self-sufficiency, and contempt for convention. This was the costume required for the role, recognized and often abused as such.[22] With regard to ἐπίδειξις, the anecdotes abound with examples of deliberate displays. Mostly they are verbal, but many contain a visual activity. Diogenes' living in a πίθος in the Metroön (D.L. 6.23) captured the imagination of generations of artists, as has the famous scene of wandering around with a lamp in broad daylight, 'looking for a human being' (D.L. 6.41). To the same category, but probably with programmatic value, belongs the story recorded in D.L. 6.27: 'When nobody was noticing him discoursing gravely, he reacted by whistling; as a crowd gathered, he reproached them for coming earnestly to nonsense, but slowly and contemptuously to serious things.' His whistling has the double function of drawing attention to himself, while at the same time confronting his attracted audience with their own distorted values.

As far as ἀγών is concerned, the pervasively agonistic core of ancient Greek culture made itself felt inside as much as outside of the πόλις. The Greeks admired the best and cultivated an environment in which individuals were encouraged to vie for the top spot. This applied equally to sport, drama, oratory, and philosophy. Already the Presocratics saw themselves as advocating competing views, and ἀγών remained a feature of ancient philosophy until the final closure of the schools. The Cynic's axe is ground with society at large, whom he criticizes for engaging in all sorts of absurd competitions, but not in attaining καλοκἀγαθία (D.L. 6.27). Antagonists populating the Cynic stage correspondingly cover a wide range: from powerful political figures to orators, grammarians, mathematicians, musicians, athletes, women, and slaves. 'He was terrific', relates his biographer, 'in humiliating others' (D.L. 6.24). The anecdote tradition contains a substantial number of skirmishes with philosophers. Typically, the Cynic battle is against disembodied theory, for which visual ἐπίδειξις is particularly effective. When someone of Eleatic persuasion argues for the impossibility of motion, Diogenes gets up and walks about (D.L. 6.39); when Plato declares man to be a featherless biped, Diogenes plucks a chicken and holds it up in the lecture room, declaring: 'Here is Plato's man' (D.L. 6.40); after a discourse on the heavenly bodies, he asks the lecturer: 'How many days since you've been back from the sky?' (D.L. 6.39). The philosophical ἀγών has various aspects, pertaining to both philosophical content and the personality of the philosopher.[23] Although of doubtful historical value, these battles of wit provide valuable insight into the reception of the Cynic stance.[24]

[20] Goldhill (n. 13), 2–10.

[21] Cf. Kindstrand (n. 7), 161–3; Giannantoni (n. 3), 301–14.

[22] Cf. Epict. 3.22.50; 4.8.5; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.9; 34.2; D. Clay, 'Picturing Diogenes', in Branham and Goulet-Cazé (n. 2), 371 refers to the 'Cynic stage costume'.

[23] While both philosophers accuse the other of vanity and τῦφος, Plato's accusation combines with Diogenes' shamelessness, revealing it as criticism for a lack of σωφροσύνη, cf. D.L. 6.26, 40, 41.

[24] Giannantoni (n. 3), 251–6. The scenes pitting Diogenes against Plato and Alexander

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Θεωρία in Goldhill's definition includes all aspects of the relationship negotiated between performer and audience. The matrices of *ἀγών* and *θεωρία* are related, as philosophers compete for the attention and approval of their audiences. Diogenes is forced to define a unique public identity. In order to be accepted, even tolerated, he needs his audiences to recognize his *σχῆμα* and to make sense of his *ἐπίδειξις*. Wide acclaim added to a philosopher's standing. Even though the tradition stresses that he disregarded public ridicule as of no concern, it seems—paradoxically—that Diogenes brought his philosophy to the public spaces exactly for this purpose: to make his views known to, and respected by, as wide an audience as possible.[25]

Performance philosophy

Although Diogenes stands in a tradition of enacted wisdom, performance is of even greater importance for the Cynic than for his predecessors. Firstly, strict congruence between thought and action is a fundamental element of early Cynicism.[26] A number of anecdotes portray Diogenes as criticizing theoretical philosophy and speculation. Apart from rejecting abstract thought (D.L. 6.38–9, 40, 53), Diogenes often criticizes philosophers for engaging in idle talk (D.L. 6.24, 26). Anecdotes such as D.L. 6.24, 58, and 63 show that a certain style of philosophy, and not philosophy itself, is the object of his critique. But philosophers are not by any means his only sparring partners. The criticisms of D.L. 6.27–28 against grammarians, musicians, mathematicians, and orators reveal that he directs it against failure to apply reason to matters close at hand and to the personal sphere. The Cynic double *ἄσκησις* for mind and body demands that action should accompany thought.[27] At least to some extent, Diogenes' exhibitionism derives quite literally from the required mental and bodily exercise: 'In summer he used to roll on seething hot sand, and in winter he embraced snow-covered statues, disciplining himself fully from all sides' (D.L. 6.23).[28] Acting out philosophical content belongs to Cynic core business.

However, this only explains why Diogenes emphasizes the physical aspect of his

(Giannantoni [n. 3], 240–9) seem to have gathered a literary momentum of their own. While probably neither set is historical, their popularity is not coincidental: Plato is cast as the philosophical counterpart to Diogenes, representing theory versus practice and abstraction versus contingency; similarly, Alexander serves as antipode to the Cynic in relation to notions of ambition, possession, and power.

[25] D.L. 6.58; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 9.7–8; cf. Döring (n. 4), 340.

[26] The issue of Diogenes' literary output has been contentious since antiquity. While scholars reject the alternative tradition that Diogenes wrote nothing (D.L. 6.80), it remains uncertain how much theoretical philosophy his works contained. Most seem to agree that at least the Republic contained some philosophising in the traditional sense; cf. T. S. Brown, *Onesicritus: A Study in Hellenistic Historiography* (Berkeley, 1949), 129–31; Giannantoni (n. 3), 4.461–84; Döring (n. 4), 342; Moles (n. 2), 134. Branham (n. 4), 84, n. 9 plays down Diogenes' literary output in order to present Cynic philosophy as amounting to no more than the contingent rhetorical response.

[27] D.L. 6.70–1; the passage may have been extracted from Diogenes' own works; cf. D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the Sixth Century AD* (London, [1937] 2003), 216–20; R. Hoïstad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (Lund, 1948), 38–47; Long (n. 2), 37, n. 24.

[28] Hoïstad (n. 27), 137 attributes instances of rigorous asceticism in the Diogenes tradition to its recension by Onesicritus, in order to counter the construction by G. Gerhard, 'Zur Legende vom Kyniker Diogenes', in Billerbeck (n. 11), 89–106 and K. von Fritz, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu Leben und Philosophie des Diogenes von Sinope* (Leipzig, 1926), 43–7 of a thoroughgoing ascetic. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *L'ascèse cynique. Un commentaire de Diogène Laërce VI 70–71* (Paris, 1986), 77–84 argues for a reconciliation of the harsh asceticism and hedonistic traits; cf. Billerbeck (n. 11), 9–10.

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thought, not why he chooses to perform in the public eye. Part of the solution lies in the Cynic's deliberate disregard for the conventions of space boundaries, as noted twice in Diogenes Laertius (D.L. 6.22, 69). The other part lies with the Cynic's need for an audience, as correctly pointed out by Mansfeld.[29] This, however, does not derive solely from Diogenes' exhibitionistic personality. Rather, it should be related to the philosophical marketplace in classical Athens, where philosophers used the methods at their disposal to sell their wares. Diogenes no doubt employed rational argument as well, as indicated by the references to his rhetorical skills (D.L. 6.74, 75). But what made his self-presentation unique and came to stick in the mind of his ancient audiences, was his quick and witty responses, and his consistent, provocative displays.

The Cynic performs in the midst of everyday life. He practises his *παρρησία* without the protection that the comic poet gets from his setting. He provokes and subverts, but remains dependent on public recognition, tolerance, and acceptance. He sells a controversial product not unambiguously belonging to the philosophical market, but wishes to be taken seriously. Relying on the privileges that ancient audiences were used to afford comic performance, Diogenes turns to humour.

IV. CYNIC HUMOUR

Diogenes and his successors have the reputation of being the humorists of antiquity. Dudley remarks that the stories about Diogenes are 'decidedly funnier' that those told of other philosophers.[30] The question is: do these stories have any significance, or do they, as Dudley believes, 'belong rather to an anthology of Greek humour than a discussion of philosophy'?[31] Many anecdotes indeed seem to have little to do with Cynic doctrine. These are amusing displays of quick repartee and ready wit in their own right. Two anecdotes may serve as examples. A man strikes Diogenes with a beam and shouts: 'Watch out!' 'Why?', retorts Diogenes, 'Do you mean to strike me again?' (D.L. 6.41). Diogenes sees the son of an adulterer throwing stones into the marketplace. 'Stop it, lad', comes the warning, 'you may unknowingly hit your father.' (Theon, *Progymn*. 100.29; D.L. 6.62). While the latter contains oblique social or moral criticism, the former is little more than a quick humorous reply with a slight sting in the tail. Such witty responses were recognizably Cynic, as the definition offered by Demetrius for the Cynic style implies: 'The readiness of the response is funny (*γελοῖον*) and the hidden significance is clever (*δεινή*). In general, briefly said, every form of Cynic speech seems to contain fawning as much as biting' (*Eloq*. 261).

It appears that typically Cynic jokes were transmitted for more purposes than the strictly philosophical. They gathered around the name of Diogenes to illustrate the personality and style of the philosopher, in ancient biographies considered to be on a par with the importance of his views.[32] Diogenes' humour should not, however, be

[29] J. Mansfeld, *CR* 38 (1988), 163; cf. Long (n. 2), 33, n. 17.

[30] Dudley (n. 27), 29, n. 2.

[31] Dudley (n. 27), 29.

[32] Cf. T. Korhonen, 'Self-concept and public image of philosophers and philosophical schools at the beginning of the Hellenistic period', in J. Frösén (ed.), *Early Hellenistic Athens: Symptoms of a Change* (Helsinki, 1997), 33. Dudley (n. 27), 29 allows for some anecdotes to have originated with Diogenes, but thinks that Bion of Borysthenes was probably the father of most. Von Fritz (n. 28), 42–6 distinguishes between typical Cynic jokes, and Cynic jokes applied for non-Cynic purposes, the difference being the presence of hedonistic traits in the latter, which were introduced into the tradition by Bion and Menippus.

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restricted to its characterizing function.[33] It belongs as much in an analysis of his rhetoric.[34] As a rhetorical strategy, the biting and the fawning need to be held together in order to establish the pragmatics of Cynic humour.[35]

The Cynic role

Diogenes' role as humorist spans a broad comic spectrum.[36] While he ought to have been at home in the category of the comic intellectual, the Cynic stance deconstructs the category, using the power of mockery and ridicule against both society in general and his philosophical rivals.[37] The general categories of the comedian and the clown do not fit neatly, nor does that of the buffoon, who displays many of the features of the parasites and the flatterers who are the objects of Diogenes' scorn (D.L. 6.51). The role of the fool is more appropriate, in the sense of not conforming to group standards, of having special power because of a privileged position, and of being admired. However, his 'foolish' appearance has nothing to do with stupidity or incompetence; from the Cynic perspective, this ought to be the norm, society itself being the foolish party.

A closer approximation of Diogenes' style is to be found in the category of the wit.[38] The typical wit regularly appears to be a person of high social status, often very influential within a group, and of a definite personality type. He owes his influence not only to the fact that he manages to relieve social and situational tensions, but also to his special ability in providing fresh insight. The function of the witty or caustic remark is to view a situation from a different, often surprising angle. By means of incongruity, it establishes a passage from one view to another, thus providing an escape from social pressures and from anxiety caused by conflicting loyalties.[39] Diogenes' comic role is therefore a particular admixture of apparent foolishness and penetrating wisdom. At the same time, it is an expression of freedom and superiority. Verbal skill, caustic derision, and contempt render the Cynic performance much more directly confrontational than the undermining foolishness of the clown, the social clumsiness of the idiotic intellectual, or the aloofness of the wit. Diogenes does not erode the discourse of power: he launches a frontal attack.[40]

[33] C. W. Goettling, 'Diogenes der Cyniker oder die Philosophie des griechischen Proletariats', in Billerbeck (n. 11), 41–2, regards Diogenes' humour as a personality trait which functions as a coping mechanism and emotional outlet for the severity of the Cynic lifestyle.

[34] Branham (n. 4), 92–101.

[35] Branham and Kennedy stress the alienating qualities of Cynic rhetoric, that it is 'hostile, argumentative, and subversive of authority' (Branham [n. 4], 99), and that it follows a strategy of 'dissensus', of rejecting decorum 'by adopting incivility as a means of speaking out . . . to often unwilling audiences' (Kennedy [n. 5], 29). In my view, they neglect both audience diversity and the role of humour in audience construction and maintenance.

[36] For the various humorous social roles, cf. G. A. Fine, 'Sociological approaches to the study of humour', in P. E. McGhee and J. H. Goldstein (edd.), *Handbook of Humor Research* 1: *Basic Issues* (New York, 1983), 161–4; J. Bremmer, 'Jokes, jokers and jokebooks in ancient Greek culture', in J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (edd.), *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 11–28.

[37] Cf. B. Zimmermann, *Die griechische Komödie* (Düsseldorf, 1998), 127.

[38] Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Frankfurt, 1905), distinguishes between tendentious wit and harmless wit, the former being mainly hostile and obscene humour, masking aggression against society or aspects of it; cf. D. Zillmann, 'Disparagement humor', in McGhee and Goldstein (n. 36), 98–9. The Freudian categories appear to be too sharply differentiated.

[39] Cf. Fine (n. 36), 163.

[40] Branham (n. 4), 99.

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The arsenal of the wit

To Diogenes, his ready wit is his discursive weapon (D.L. 5.18; 6.74). When analysed, a threefold purpose emerges for the humour in the anecdotes. It is a means of dominating the discourse, of subverting prevalent views, and of establishing and maintaining audience relations.

As rhetorical strategy in power discourses, humour belongs to the ἀγών of the performance situation. A comparison with the agonistic situation of the comic poet is illuminating. The comedy writer uses his humour as a tool against his competitors at the agonistic festival, and is judged by his skill in using it better than his rivals. But he also employs humour to 'wipe the floor' with ideological opponents. The dramatic poet is on stage in full command of his target: he may draw caricatures as he likes of powerful public figures, distorting their views and manipulating their actions. The discursive situation of the philosopher as performing humorist is more complex. He has to rely on his quick assessment of, and witty responses to real-life situations, to demolish his opponents rhetorically, and to impress his audience. None the less, on both occasions the principle remains the same: the comic has the edge over the serious. It is always possible to deride even the most serious thing, while taking the comic too seriously is to expose yourself to ridicule. The comic interpretation is always the concluding one. It ends the discourse.

Closely related to discursive power play is Diogenes' use of the subversive power of humour. As such, it serves the fundamental structure and aim of the philosophy. Cynicism attempts to redefine the relationship between human nature and human behaviour, which naturally leads to conflict with generally accepted norms. This is the meaning of the programmatic Cynic slogan, παραχαράττειν τὸ νόμισμα (D.L. 6.20; 56; 71): 'reminting the coinage', the 'transvaluation of values'.[41] Few stories could portray the Cynic subversion of power relations better than the famous, though probably fictional, encounter between the philosopher and Alexander. What would the expected response be when the great Alexander offers the philosopher anything he wants? Diogenes responds with the unexpected: 'Get out of my light' (Plut. *Alex.* 14.4; D.L. 6.38). By blocking out any association of power and privilege in his focus on the contingent nuisance of the king's present physical position, he breaks all the rules of power discourse. The Cynic deliberately disorganizes the unified view of the social system and hierarchies of power.[42] Humour serves as the ideal vehicle for conveying the resulting incongruity, while also suggesting an alternative, more profound truth. When asked what animal he would regard to have the worst bite, he answers: 'Of wild animals, the sycophant; of tame ones, the flatterer' (6.51). When temple officials lead off a person they caught stealing a bowl, Diogenes observes, 'The big thieves leading the small', suggesting the criminalization of religious institutions, generally regarded as fundamental to structured society (D.L. 6.45).

Branham has correctly noted the centrality of the body in Cynic rhetoric. Diogenes is seen as mocking the bodies of others, while he displays his own in confronting the barriers between private and public, shamelessness and decency. When featuring in provocative humour, the body is an unfailing instrument of subversion: it confronts the moral order with the universal; it manages without fail to bring down the edifices

[41] Kennedy (n. 5), 28.

[42] M. Douglas, 'The social control of cognition: some factors in joke perception', *Man* 3.3 (1968), 369–70, as quoted by Branham (n. 4), 95.

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of propriety. 'It is the ideal instrument for the Cynic attack on the artificiality and falsity of the official codes of civilized life.'[43]

The abundant examples of puns and wordplay in the anecdotes also serve Cynic subversion.[44] These cover a wide range: attaching different meanings to words (the word ἀνάπηροι, 'disabled', does not refer to the deaf and the blind, but to those without πήρα, the Cynic wallet, D.L. 6.33); imaginative quoting from literature (when asked to contribute to a shared meal (ἐρανάρχης), he answers: 'Collect from the others (τοὺς ἄλλους ἐράνιζ'), but keep your hands off Hector', D.L. 6.63); often they are just plain witticisms (seeing a clothes thief at the bath house, Diogenes asks: ἐπ' ἀλειμμάτιον ἢ ἐπ' ἄλλ' ἱμάτιον; 'Looking for ointment or another cloak?', D.L. 6.52) and verbal virtuosity (a letter from Alexander to Antipater, delivered by a certain Athlios elicits the response ἄθλιος παρ' ἀθλίου δι' ἀθλίου πρὸς ἄθλιον, D.L. 6.44).[45] Verbal wit is a cornerstone of the incongruity theory of humour.[46] By using a word in an unusual context or by attaching a different meaning to it, the Cynic subverts accepted beliefs and creatively opens new perspectives on reality. Cynic humour stems from and cultivates an original view of the world, by which societal folly is exposed.[47]

The funnyman's audience

Diogenes' wit elicits varied responses, ranging from hostile laughing, which generally serves as a social corrective to unacceptable behaviour, to laughter in recognition and agreement.[48] His provocations would have given ample reason for the former.[49] But the Cynic has a retort ready: people may laugh at him (καταγελῶσιν), but he is never 'laughed down' (οὐ καταγελῶμαι, D.L. 6.54). Hostile responses are ways of diminishing the subversive impact on the status quo, while the Cynic intends the exact opposite, namely to adjust ideological perspectives. He aims mainly at collateral laughter, recognition, and agreement.

According to the Freudian release theory, laughter is a spontaneous discharge of psychic energy, and functions as a mechanism for releasing psychological pressure

[43] Branham (n. 4), 100–1.

[44] One in six anecdotes in D.L. reporting the words of Diogenes relies on word play; cf. Branham (n. 4), 87.

[45] Elegantly rendered by R. D. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (London 1925), 2.45, as a 'graceless son of graceless sire to graceless wight by graceless squire'.

[46] Cf. P. E. McGhee, 'A model of the origins and early development of incongruity-based humour', in A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot (edd.), *It's a Funny Thing, Humour* (Oxford, 1977), 27–36; H. R. Pollio, 'Notes toward a field theory of humor', in McGhee and Goldstein (n. 36), 225–8.

[47] McEvilley (n. 12), 58–9: 'Consciousness is violently retextured by the imposition of a new conceptual overlay on its experiences. . . . Diogenes' actions always demonstrates the viability of behavioral options opposite to those of the citizens at large. Thrusting at the cracks of communal psychology, his tiny and quiet [*sic*] gestures laid bare a dimension of hidden possibilities which he thought might constitute personal freedom. His general theme was the complete and immediate reversal of all familiar values, on the ground that they are automatizing forces which cloud more of life than they reveal.'

[48] Dio Chrysostom's list of reactions in *Or.* 9.7–9, although idealizing, still captures the variety: pleasure, delight and admiration on the one hand, but intolerance, indignation and scorn on the other.

[49] Provocative actions include his begging, and breakfasting and masturbating in public, cf. D.L. 6.22, 37, 46, 49, 62, 69; jesting and jeering at various figures and societal roles would have caused hostility in his targets and mirth in the bystanders; cf. n. 48 above.

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arising from social repression.[50] Matched with the Cynic opposition between nature and convention (D.L. 6.38), the theory explains the dynamics of non-hostile responses to the humour of Diogenes. In similar vein, George Milner distinguishes between 'laughter of excessive nature' and 'laughter of excessive culture'.[51] Diogenes' humour, relating to his radical adherence to the dictates of φύσις, would belong to the former. In Milner's theory, a person feels socially repressed, but is so conditioned as to have ambivalent feelings towards both his natural self and his socially conditioned self. Laughter acts as a safety device by automatically issuing a warning when someone oversteps the limits either in the direction of nature or of culture, and thereby threatens his or her equilibrium. The theory explains how Diogenes could have done and said conventionally shocking things and got away with it. It also explains why, in spite of the obvious human hypocrisies he exposed, he did not induce widespread abandonment of cultural and conventional practices. His ideal audience member hears him, feels embarrassed by its unconventionality, recognizes the logic or the ethical truth, laughs at him- or herself, and is liberated by the release of built-up psychic tension between natural self and cultural self. Whether Diogenes intended his ideal audience to turn to the radical Cynic lifestyle is debatable; his real audiences certainly did not. Rather, they would typically have responded the way audiences of political satire in repressive societies normally do: they returned to society, albeit with a wider perspective on themselves and a measure of irony towards their world, and feeling more in equilibrium because of it.

Theorists have noted the function of humour in drawing ingroup–outgroup boundaries, creating solidarity within a group, and setting up congenial relationships between speaker and audience.[52] The Cynic position induces 'laughter of excessive nature' to those able to recognize the artificiality of societal conventions, at the same time excluding those who remain merely shocked at the lack of propriety. The in-group's liberating laughter furthermore creates a sense of unity amongst themselves, a bond that extends to the 'liberator' as well. But even preceding the group formation, Diogenes' humour enables him to present himself as a likeable personality.[53]

V. CONCLUSION: THE BALANCING ACT

Diogenes' contumacy is largely based on creating incongruity, such as his deliberate disregard for propriety and for social space boundaries. In a sense, dramatic representation and specifically the obscenity and ridicule of Old Comedy does much the same, presenting that which belongs to the private sphere in a public space. The difference is twofold. Firstly, comedy is performed in a confined space and within a

[50] Cf. P. E. McGhee, 'The role of arousal and hemispheric lateralization in humor', in McGhee and Goldstein (n. 36), 13–14.

[51] G. B. Milner, 'Homo ridens: towards a semiotic theory of humour and laughter', *Semiotica* 1 (1972), 24–5.

[52] E. Dupréel, 'Le problème sociologique du rire', *Revue Philosophique* 106 (1928), 213–60; K. Z. Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London, 1967), 152–3; Milner (n. 51), 9–11.

[53] T. R. Kane, J. Suls, and J. T. Tedeschi, 'Humour as a tool of social interaction', in Chapman and Foot (n. 46), 16, explain the role of humour in interpersonal attraction as follows: 'Given the advantages of being liked, it is understandable why persons engage in considerable effort to get others to like them. With regard to humour, a cheerful demeanour is an invitation to interaction. Ready humour indicates a spontaneity and joy in relating to others, indicates a willingness to explore alternatives with others prior to making serious overtures, reveals an ability to see through pretensions and the deceptions of others, and conveys the goodwill and benevolence of the source. . . . Humour also serves to attract and hold the attention of others.'

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demarcated time, where a remarkable degree of licence is expected from the genre. Secondly, the distancing effect created by grotesque characters wearing masks and speaking in poetic metre is significant. Diogenes plays the dangerous part of subversive provocation in his own person and in public spaces. If the Cynic strategy were limited to ridicule from the margins, it would undoubtedly have led to intolerance, isolation, and, ultimately, alienation. He would have lost his audience. Thus, audience maintenance must be viewed as a critical function of his comic performances. To those 'buying his act', it turns otherwise repulsive behaviour into humorous displays, and gives a congenial twist to his rigorous lifestyle, and his contempt for and ridicule of society.[54] May we then claim that the anecdotal Diogenes reflects the strategies of the fourth-century philosopher? Did the 'real' Diogenes use humour and comic conventions as a means of gaining and persuading an audience? His third century namesake and biographer of the ancient philosophers, tells us that the Athenians loved Diogenes, despite his provocation.[55] How do we evaluate this information from an author who wrote six centuries after the event? It may be completely mistaken, which in fact is likely if the view were to be accepted that the historical Diogenes was an animalistic half-barbarian and that this original stratum in the tradition was reworked to give him a more culture-friendly, literary face.[56] The problem is that such a person might have been respected for his conviction and courage, but even admiration would be dubious. A rigid ascetic abusively propagating a culturally undermining philosophy would stand little chance of influencing public opinion. If this view of the historical Diogenes were to be accepted, it becomes hard to explain how Diogenes became the vehicle for Cynic propaganda in the first place.

It seems more likely that Diogenes managed to make an impact on the philosophical and social scene because of a rare ability to marry not only seriousness with the comic, but also abuse and congeniality. The historical Diogenes faced a dilemma. He advocated an uncompromising, anti-social philosophical position, which he believed had to be enacted in the face of society. This, however, was clearly an unmarketable product, so he had to rely on packaging.[57] He had to forge a way of subverting accepted views without being ignored or getting banished. His solution was humorous performances, by means of which he could tap into comic conventions and the tolerance they could rely on. He could enact his views, at the same time exposing folly, demolishing opposition, and keeping his audience amused. In the terms used by Demetrius, the dog had to fawn in order to bite.

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[54] Goettling (n. 33), 41: 'Dieser Humor ist es, welcher die sonst eckige und mitunter abschreckende Gestalt des Cynikers mit einer gewissen Liebenswürdigkeit umgiebt und welcher ihn von allen indischen Büssern, allen Styliten, Trappisten, Kartheusern und ähnlichen Selbstpeinigern, auf eine anmuthige Weise unterscheidet.'

[55] D.L. 6.43; cf. also D.L. 6.33.

[56] Gerhard (n. 28); von Fritz (n. 28), 43–7; Giangrande (n. 7), 34.

[57] Döring (n. 4), 341; Branham (n. 4), 87.

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