Are Dogs Allowed?

Ancient Cynics and Hospitality

1. Introduction

In *De l'hopitalité*,[1] Derrida attempts to show the *aporia* that results from the constitution tension between an absolute notion of hospitality, that welcomes everyone with or without an invitation, not even asking who they are, and its conditional counterpart, mediated by the law, which ask of the guest both identification and duty. The guest under this latter conditional form is paradigmatically captured in the form of *l'étranger*, covering both the words 'stranger' and 'foreigner' in English. Derrida exemplifies this existential condition of the stranger in Plato's Socrates, who 'has the traits of the stranger, he represents, he symbolises the stranger, he plays the stranger he is not.'[2] In this talk, I will show how Classical Cynicism not only embodied both forcibly and willingly the role of 'the stranger' but how they showed the *aporia* resulting from existing forms of hospitality, and offered a live alternative.

2. The Cynic as *étranger*

Our evidence on the history of Cynicism is fragmentary and obscure, always threatened by the risk of posterior fabrication and instrumentalization. However, the two origin stories that Diogenes Laertius offers for this sect fittingly show how the Cynic, just like Socrates, would have been a stranger wherever they lived.

The first account of the origins of Cynicism goes back to Antisthenes, pupil of the sophist Gorgias, and, later, of Socrates himself (DL. VI, 2). After the latter's execution, Antisthenes is said to have lectured at the *Cynosarges* (agile or white dog), a gymnasium and temple to Heracles in the outskirts of Athens. From the name of this teaching spot, the adjective 'Cynic' for posterior sect-members is supposed to derive. But why would Antisthenes practise his philosophy outside the city walls, rather than at its heart, like his master and friend did?

The *Cynosarges* was mostly frequented by *nothoi*, that is, offsprings of mixed Athenian and non-Athenian parentage. Heracles, this temple's deity, was himself son to a mortal mother, thus, a *nothos* among the gods. By the time of Antisthenes, the *nothoi* had been declared noncitizens by Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451/0 BCE.[3] Antisthenes was son of an Athenian father and a Thracian slave mother, making him a *nothos*, and excluding him of Athenian citizenship. As strangers recognised by the *polis*, the *nothoi* were not, despite their noncitizenship, excluded from its usual workings. Yet this did not prevent Athenians from discriminating against their 'impure' ascendancy. As such, Laertius reports that Antisthenes was called out for his Thracian origins in more than one occasion. However, the philosopher, far from embracing the abuse— as might have been expected from a grateful *nothos*— stood up for his mixed heritage. Moreover, he mocked Athenian chauvinistic pride in their 'pure' Athenian blood saying they were no better (or worse) than snails for it (DL. VI, 1).

This first origin account of Cynicism has been suggested to be a later Stoic fabrication to secure a genealogy that connected their school with the Cynics and Socrates: Socrates-Antisthenes-

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[1] J. Derrida and A. Dufourmantelle, *De l'hospitalité* (Paris, France, 1997).

[2] Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *De l'hospitalité*, 19: *'[Socrate lui-même] a les traits de l'étranger, il représente, il figure l'étranger, il joue l'étranger qu'il n'est pas.*'

[3] S.C. Humphreys, 'The Nothoi of Kynosarges', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 94 (1974), 94–5, doi:10.2307/630421

Diogenes-Crates-Zeno.[4] Nonetheless, the reason such a potential fabrication is the undeniable proto-Cynicism of Antisthenes; enough, in any case, for Diogenes to have taken him for master.

The second explanation, widely accepted as the 'canonical' birth of the sect, begins with Diogenes of Sinope, 'the dog.' Legend has it that Diogenes visited the oracle of Delphi seeking for advice on how to lead his life. The oracle would have famously told him that it was his duty to deface all currency, or, equally, to deface all values (*paracharáttein to nómisma*) (DL.VI, 20-1). Now, this event is in direct connection with another significant one in Diogenes' life. Laertius reports that either him or his father had been caught, coincidentally, adulterating his city's coinage, leading to his exile from Sinope. Whether the visit to Delphi happened before the counterfeiting, thus, leading to it, or after is not decidable by the sources (DL. VI, 20-1).[5] It is probably an etiological myth devised to give philosophical charge to the actual criminal one.

But this: that his exile merited philosophical embellishment, is significant to the event's relevance to the Cynical disposition that Diogenes would later embrace. Indeed, when confronted about this matter, Diogenes allegedly replied: '[b]ut it's thanks to that, you fool, that I became a philosopher' (DL. VI, 49). Not only did Diogenes embrace his status as an exile, but, just like Antisthenes, seemed to think little of ties to a piece of land, replying to another one who brought up that the Synopeans had sentenced him to exile: 'And I sentenced them to stay at home' (DL. VI, 49).[6] Indeed, Diogenes not only was made a foreigner due to his exile, but he actively rejected the laws and customs, declaring himself 'a citizen of the world' (*kosmopolitês*) (DL. VI. 63). Diogenes' pupil, Crates, who was no exile and came from a wealthy family would follow him in this voluntary belonging to no city and the whole world at once (DL. VI, 93). Thus, although Antitheses and Diogenes were, as a historical contingency, forcibly rendered *étrangers*, Cynics would deliberately assume this role by both subverting existing institutions and claiming allegiance to a broader and more inclusive conception of belonging. I will analyse both in the following.

3. Defacement of hospitality

While Socrates attempted to lead their interlocutors to *aporia* theoretically, in speech, Cynics found that their actions spoke louder. As such, their transvaluative exercise consisted in, first, showing the arbitrariness or 'falsity' of customs by their practical violation. The Cynic's status of stranger, be it self-imposed or not, should still have entailed certain duties and societal expectations from them. Hence, all the Cynics' extravagant performances constitute themselves a rejection of the duties that their host city expects from them.

But Cynic defacement of hospitality does not only limit itself to the above generality, but concrete elements associated with hospitality, like the host's authority, gratitude towards them and the separation between public and private space, were often subverted by the Cynics. Crates was explicitly nicknamed 'Door-opener', 'from his practice of entering every house and admonishing its occupants (DL. VI, 86). So, not only did Crates overstep the boundaries between private and public spaces but inverted the power relations within the former by admonishing his unwilling host.

In his peculiar behaviour Crates was following Diogenes' steps. For example, when welcomed into a luxurious house, he spat on the host's face, 'saying he couldn't find a worse place

[4] This Stoic filter is generally recognised among scholars, Dudley, in his canonical monograph, 'A History of Cynicism, From Diogenes to the Sixth Century A.D', *Philosophy* 13, no. 51 (1938), 369–370, reads the Antisthenes genealogy under this consideration. Another example of Stoic encroachment is studied in, for example, M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *L'ascèse Cynique: Un Commentaire de Diogène Laërce Vi 70-71*, ed. D. Laertius (Paris, 1986).

[5] For some discussion of this origin story and the chronological assignment see L. Navia, *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study* (Westport, Conn., 1996), 87–93.

[6] See also DL. VI. 57.

to leave his spittle' (DL.VI, 32.). This, one may understand, aimed at teaching his host a lesson about the worthlessness of material wealth, contrary to the cultivation of one's virtue—which his host had abandoned for the former's sake. On another occasion, 'some guests were throwing bones to him, as one would to a dog— which itself is of dubious courtesy— but Diogenes, instead of taking offense and denouncing their bad manners, he embraced them, and 'in the manner of a dog, he urinated on the guests as he was leaving' (DL.VI, 46).

The above took place when Diogenes did resolve to make an appearance—be it expected or not— but this was not guaranteed. A host's hospitality: their sharing of food, their offering of a place to bath and rest was considered worth of gratitude. The extended underlying assumption for this gratitude would be respect for and acknowledgement of their private property that they, nonetheless, willingly decided to share. A way in which guests were expected to pay back for this treatment was to entertain their hosts with stories and conversation. The Cynics, however, did not share these assumptions and the reciprocal gift-giving dynamic they entailed. Diogenes, far from being thankful for an invitation to dinner, declined it on the basis that *he* had not been thanked for his presence last time around. In the same line, Diogenes thought that those who gave him food deserved no more praise than him for deserving it (DL. VI, 62).

Not even when sold as a slave did Diogenes accept the power relations that befitted this status, advertising himself as one who ruled over men and would be a master to their buyer (DL.VI, 29). As the anecdote goes, eventually, Diogenes did find a buyer willing to make him master and taught his children.

On the other hand, Cynic practice is marked by a deliberate appropriation of public space. Laertius repeatedly emphasizes this reconfiguration of spatial norms: Diogenes slept in public (VI.23), ate and masturbated in the marketplace (VI. 22, 46, 58, 69), the Cynic couple, Hipparchia and Crates, had sex in public,[7] treating the civic centre as their doghouse. Even Diogenes' improvised residence in a large jar (VI.23)—placed in the public precinct of the Metroon—symbolically rejected built domestic interiors in favour of a minimal, exposed habitation that anyone could see. These gestures collectively amount to a Cynic reterritorialisation of the public realm: rather than withdrawing from society, Cynics seized its most visible spaces and redefined them as sites of unmediated, natural life, thereby undermining normative distinctions between public modesty and private bodily existence.

4. Cynic hospitality?

So, if the Cynic respects neither the private sphere and its norms of hospitality, nor the public one, translating his personal doings to it, does the Cynic not become, in some sense, ruler of both the city and the household? Can we even call this seemingly autocratic aspiration a form of hospitality?

Diogenes celebrated anecdote involving Alexander of Macedon depicts this kingly aspiration aptly. Alexander introduces himself to Diogenes as owner, host of the whole land in which Diogenes is found by offering the Cynic whatever it is that he may desire. Rejecting this premise, he asks only, and in sovereignly manner, for the one thing Alexander has taken from him with no right: the sunlight. In the sixteenth century, Rabelais, inspired by this legend, would depict both characters in hell, only there, it was Alexander who was poor and wretched, and Diogenes who wore a purple cloak and held the sceptre with which to beat the former.[8]

[7] Apuleius, *Florida*, 13.
[8] François Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, chapter XXX.

As mentioned, Diogenes advertised himself as one who was good at ruling over men (DL.VI, 29). The Cynics' simple wooden staff, in their hands, turns into a sceptre worth of a king. One with which to beat virtue into their unknowing subjects, just like in Rabelais' depiction.

Epictetus, thus, wonders what may lead a human to such kingly aspirations:

> 'For in a well-ordered house no one comes along and says to himself, "I ought to be manager of this house"; or if he does, the lord of the mansion, when he turns around and sees the fellow giving orders in a high and mighty fashion, drags him out and gives him a dressing down. So it goes also in this great city, the world; for here also there is a Lord of the Mansion who assigns each and every thing its place."[9]

The only way one may engage in this otherwise unacceptable behaviour is, Epictetus concludes, that one 'must know that they have been sent by Zeus to men.'[10] It is useful to keep in mind, then, that the Cynics, despite their anti-systematic bent, were no Pyrrhonists uncommitted to any beliefs. Cynics were deeply convinced of their God-given mission and the correctness of the lifestyle they embodied, even if it their interventions were contingent.[11] It is only by holding such strong beliefs that Cynics were motivated and thought themselves justified in acting the way they did, including their right to rule over other 'uncanine' humans.

What they thought this lifestyle consisted in is difficult to determine, given the surviving evidence and later appropriations. However, this lifestyle itself was sufficient for the good life: Cynics did not need to wait for the coming of a larger social change for their philosophy to be realised. Contemporary philosophers who denounce existing institutions largely abide by them while they wait for such a change. Ancients Cynics, on the other hand, actively subverted these institutions in practice as part of their readily lived and liveable right life. Cynicism was a short road to the good life (DL. VI. 104, VII, 121)[12] that required no waiting, only dog-like discipline.

This canine lifestyle that recognizes no home or city as they were institutionalised did, nevertheless, coexist parallelly with them. Indeed, Diogenes' lifestyle might be described as his earlier mentioned being a citizen of the world. The urban metaphor is continued by Crates: '[h]e had as his native land, he said, disrepute (*Adoxia*) and poverty (*Penia*), unassailable by fortune; and that to be a fellow citizen of Diogenes is to belong to a city not liable to envious attacks' (DL. VI, 93). Crates also spoke of an ideal city, Pera (DL. VI, 85), the name for the Cynic's wallet where they store their food and few necessary possessions, that for many would have been a utopia, while for the Cynic, it was always with them, hanging around their shoulder. The Cynic, an *étranger* to all cities and homes, was always at theirs, by virtue of their lifestyle.

But with whom does the Cynic share this home that is both nowhere and wherever they go? Epictetus here gives a clear answer:

> But where will you find me a Cynic's friend? For such a person must be another Cynic, in order to be worthy of being counted his friend. He must share with him his sceptre and kingdom, and be a worthy ministrant, if he is going to be deemed worthy

[9] Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.22.2-5. (Translation by William Abbott Oldfather).
[10] Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.22.23.
[11] Indeed, interpretations of Cynicism struggle to keep a balance between these two poles. For one that emphasises their strong commitments and downplays their subversive role see D. Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* (New York, US, 1992), ch. 3. The Cynic Way: A Life Without the Household, for another that focuses on their contingent interventions at the cost of their underlying convictions see A. Allen, *Cynicism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2020).
[12] Cynicism as a short road to virtue also in the 13th Cynic epistle; Plutarch, *Amatorius* 759; or Julian, *Oratio* VII, 225.

> of friendship, as Diogenes became the friend of Antisthenes, and Crates of Diogenes. Or do you think that if a man as he comes up greets the Cynic, he is the Cynic's friend, and the Cynic will think him worthy to receive him into his house?[13]

As Epictetus rightly points out, to walk with a Cynic, one had to embrace their lifestyle; that was the only condition required: it did not matter one's name, provenance or wealth, as those were to be abandoned to enter Diogene's city of disrepute and poverty. A later commentator of Aristotle reports that Cynics deserve their name because, like dogs, they bark at strangers, while showing friendliness to their own.[14] This should not be surprising, Cynics used violence philanthropically against those who did not follow the Cynic way and were deluded by *typhos*, but with their fellow dogs this was not needed. It is not the case either that Cynics were gatekeeping their open house, it is simply a fact that by being the Cynic's own lifestyle, one had to be one to enter. And, although Cynics rarely explicitly preached that others should take up the cloak and staff, all their interventions pointed to the possibility of this lifestyle and an invitation to their doghouse.

Perhaps, to the contemporary ear, the Cynic commitment to their ways sounds excessively strong, too high of a bar for their hospitality to qualify as absolute. However, it is worth pondering if Derridean absolute hospitality, awaiting largescale socio-political change for its arrival, does not hinge to an even higher one. Classical Cynics might have not had the broader political considerations that both Plato and 20th century thinkers did, but they embodied both a subversion of conditional hospitality and a model of absolute hospitality, one where only dogs were allowed.

References

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[13] Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.22.62-5. (Translation by William Abbott Oldfather).

[14] Olympiodorus, *Olympiodori Prolegomena et in Categorias Commentarium*, ed. A. Buse, vol. 12, Commentaria In Aristotelem Graeca 1 (Berlin: Reimer, 1902), 3.