

Diogenes of Sinope (412 – 323 BC)

Diogenes was an ancient Greek philosopher, generally considered the founder of the Cynics, a school of philosophy.

He was born at Sinop, Turkey, a town on the Black Sea, and grew up in poverty. He studied in Athens, where he was a disciple of Greek philosopher Antisthenes, about whom Plato says in *Phaedo* was present at the death of Socrates. Diogenes plunged into a life of austerity, wearing coarse clothing, begged for food, and sleeping on bare ground in the open streets or under porticoes.



He eventually made his home in a disused bathtub! He destroyed the single wooden bowl he possessed on seeing a peasant boy drink from the hollow of his hands.

He taught by living example that wisdom and happiness belong to the man who is independent of society. Diogenes scorned not only family and political social organization, but property rights and reputation. He laughed at those who studied truth but did not practice it, and according to a popular story, he walked through Athens in broad daylight carrying a lighted lamp, looking for an honest man.

Diogenes believed human beings live artificially and hypocritically and would do well to study the dog. He was exiled from Sinope for "adulterating the coinage". He rejected normal ideas about human decency. Detractors have said he was an obnoxious ragpicker and an offensive churl.

Alexander the Great traveled to see him, and was so impressed that he left saying that if he had not been Alexander the Great, he would have liked to have been Diogenes. He followed his own advice when in later life he was captured by pirates while on a voyage and sold as a slave to Xenocrates of Corinth. The philosopher was appointed tutor to his children, remaining in Corinth for the rest of his life.

No writings of Diogenes survived even though he is reported to have authored a number of books. At the end, Diogenes made fun of people's excessive concern with the "proper" treatment of the dead. He became ill from eating raw octopus, and to have suffered an infected dog bite. When asked how he wished to be buried, he left instructions to be thrown outside the city wall so wild animals could feast on his body. The Corinthians erected to his memory a pillar on which rested a dog of Parian marble.