Conversion to philosophy in Diogenes Laertius: forms and functions

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The philosophie devient essentiellement un acte de conversion. Cette conversion est un événement provoqué dans l’âme de l’auditeur par la parole d’un philosophe. Elle correspond à une rupture totale avec la manière habituelle de vivre: changement de costume, et souvent de régime alimentaire, parfois renonciation aux affaires politiques, mais surtout transformation totale de la vie morale, pratique assidue de nombreux exercices spirituels.

2. Diogenes the Cynic and the running mouse (DL VI 22):

> μόνον θεασάμενος διατρέχοντα, καθα ψηφι θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ Μεγαρικῷ [SSR V B 172], καὶ μήτε κοιτῆν ἐπιζητοῦντα μήτε ἐκτὸς εὐλαβούμενον ἢ ποθοῦντα τί τῶν δοκοῦντων ἀπολαυστῶν, πάρον τε ἐξέβρε τῆς περιστάσεως.

Through watching a mouse running about, says Theophrastus in the *Megarian dialogue*, not looking for a place to lie down in, not afraid of the dark, not seeking any of the things which are considered to be dainties, he discovered the means of adapting himself to circumstances. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

3. Xenophon’s conversion (DL II 48):

> τούτῳ ἐν στενῶπι φασιν ἀπαντήσαντα Σωκράτης διατείναι τὴν βακτηρίαν καὶ κωλύσαι τὴν σχολήν, πυθέσθαι, καὶ μάνθανε πάλιν πυθαν, ἐπιζητοῦντα μήτε ἐκτὸς εὐλαβούμενον ἢ ποθοῦντα τί τῶν δοκοῦντων ἀπολαυστῶν, πώρον τε ἐξέβρε τῆς περιστάσεως.

The story goes that Socrates met him in a narrow passage, and that he stretched out his stick to bar the way, while he inquired where every kind of food was sold. Upon receiving a reply, he put another question, “And where do men become good and wise?” Xenophon was fairly puzzled; “Then follow me,” said Socrates, “and learn.” From that time onward he was a pupil of Socrates. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

4. Polemo meets Xenocrates (DL IV 16):

> νέος δ’ ὃν ἀκόλουθος τε καὶ διακεχμένος ἦν ὑστὺς ὡστε καὶ περιφέρειν ἀργύριον πρὸς τὰς ἐτοιμὰς λύσεις τῶν ἔποδιμον ἄλλα καὶ ἐν τοῖς στενῶπις διέκρυπτεν. καὶ ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ πρὸς κινών τινί τριώβολον εὑρέθη προσπεπλασμένον αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν ὑμοίαν τῇ προσφερομένῃ πρόφασιν. καὶ ποτὲ συνθέμενος τοῖς νέοις μεθύων καὶ ἐστεφασμένος εἰς τὴν Ξενοκράτους ἥξε σχολὴν ὁ δὲ οὐδὲν διατραπεῖς εἰρὲ τὸν λόγον ὑμιῶς ἢ δὲ πρὶς σωφροσύνης, ἀκοῦσιν δὴ τὸ μειράκιον κατ’ ὀλίγον ἐθηράθη καὶ συχνῶς ἐγένετο φιλόπονος ώς ὑπερβάλλεσθαι τοῖς ἄλλους καὶ αὐτόν διαδέξασθαι τὴν σχολὴν, ἀρξάμενον ἀπὸ τῆς ἔκτης καὶ δεκάτης καὶ ἐκατοτης ὀλυμπιάδος.

In his youth he was so profligate and dissipated that he actually carried about with him money to procure the immediate gratification of his desires, and would even keep sums concealed in lanes and alleys. Even in the Academy a piece of three obols was found close to a pillar, where he had buried it for the same purpose. And one day, by agreement with his young friends, he burst into the school of Xenocrates quite drunk, with a garland on his head. Xenocrates, however, without being at all disturbed, went on with his discourse as before, the subject being temperance. The lad, as he listened, by degrees was taken in the toils. He became so industrious as to surpass all the other scholars, and rose to be himself head of the school in the 116th Olympiad. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]
5. Crantor being hunted by Polemo’s voice (DL IV 24):

φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν ἐρωτηθέντα τίνι ἡθοπάθεια ὑπὸ Πολέμωνος, εἶπεν τῷ μήτε ὑπὲρτερον μήτε ὑπὸτερον ἀκούσαι φθεγγομένου.

He is said to have been asked what it was in Polemo that attracted him, and to have replied, “The fact that I never heard him raise or lower his voice in speaking.” [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

6. The erotics of conversion: Crantor and Arcesilaus (DL IV 29):

ο ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἦρα. καὶ αὐτοῦ Κράντωρ ἐρωτικῶς διατεθεὶς ἔπυθετο τὰ ἐξ Ἀνδρομέδας Ἑυρυπίδου προενεγκάμενος·

καὶ ὡς τὰ ἐξήμενα· ἄγου με, ὦ ξένε, ἐπεὶ δωμίθ’ ἐθέλεις εἴτ’ ἔλοχον. [fr. 129a Kannicht]

He was himself devoted to philosophy, and Crantor, being enamoured of him, cited the line from the Andromeda of Euripides:

Ο maiden, if I save thee, wilt thou be grateful to me?

and was answered with the next line:

Take me, stranger, whether for maidservant or for wife. After that they lived together. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

7. Conversion and marriage: Hipparchia and Crates (DL VI 96):

Ἕθοπάθη δὲ τοῖς λόγοις καὶ ἡ ἀδελφή τοῦ Μητροκλέους Ἴππαρχία. Μαρωνίται δ’ ἦσαν ἀμφότεροι. καὶ ἦρα τοῦ Κράτητος καὶ τῶν λόγων καὶ τοῦ βίου, οὐδὲνός τῶν μνησευμένων ἐπιστερεομένην, οὐ πλοῦτον, οὐκ εὐγενείας, οὐ κάλλους ἄλλα πάντα ἢν Κράτης αὐτῆ. καὶ δὴ καὶ ἤπειλε τοῖς γονεύσιν ἀναιρήσειν αὐτὴν εἰ μὴ τοῦτο δοθεῖ. Κράτης μὲν οὖν παρακαλούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν γονέων αὐτῆς ἀποτρέψει τὴν παῖδα, πάντα ἐποίει· καὶ τέλος μὴ πεθών, ἀναστὰς καὶ ἀποθάνειν τὴν ἐαυτοῦ σκευὴν ἀντικρύσει αὐτῆς ἔρη, “ὁ μὲν νυμφίος οὐτὸς, ἢ δὲ κεῖσος αὐτῆ, πρὸς ταῦτα βουλεύον· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔσται κοινωνός, εἰ μὴ καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιτηδεύματως γενθείης.”

Hipparchia too, sister of Metrocles, was captured by their doctrines. Both of them were born at Maroneia. She fell in love with the discourses and the life of Crates, and would not pay attention to any of her suitors, their wealth, their high birth or their beauty. But to her Crates was everything. She used even to threaten her parents she would make away with herself, unless she were given in marriage to him. Crates therefore was implored by her parents to dissuade the girl, and did all he could, and at last, failing to persuade her, got up, took off his clothes before her face and said, “This is the bridegroom, here are his possessions; make your choice accordingly; for you will be no helpmeet of mine, unless you share my pursuits.” [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

8. The hunting philosophers in Zeno’s doxography (DL VII 129):

καὶ ἐρασθήσεσθαι δὲ τὸν σοφὸν τῶν νέων τῶν ἐμφανίσεων διὰ τοῦ εἰδοῦς τὴν πρὸς ἀρετὴν εὐφύιαν.

Further, they say that the wise man will feel affection for the youths who by their countenance show a natural endowment for virtue. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

9. Hunting Socrates in Xenophon, Memorabilia II 6, 28:

καὶ ἐρασθήσεσθαι δὲ τὸν σοφὸν τῶν νέων τῶν ἐμφανίσεων, ἔχοντας καὶ αὐτοῦς γενομένος ἡθοπάθης ἐπιστερεομένης τοῦς καλοὺς τε καθαῦσι. ίσως δ’ ἄν τι σοι κάγω συλλαβεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν καλῶν τε καθαυσιν θάρσον ἔχεις διὰ τὸ ἐρωτικόν εἶναι.

Courage, Critobulus; try to be good, and when you have achieved that, set about catching your gentleman. Maybe, I myself, as an adept in love, can lend you a hand in the pursuit of gentlemen. [Translation by E. C. Marchant]
10. Hieronymus of Rhodes on hunting philosophers (DL IX 112 = fr. 7 Wehrli = fr. 7 White):

"Just as with the Scythians those who are in flight shoot as well as those who pursue, so, among philosophers, some catch their disciples by pursuing them, some by fleeing from them, as for instance Timon [of Phlius]. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

11. Crates coaching of Metrocles (DL VI 94):

"Hesiod. According to Hermippus, however, Apollodorus the Epicurean, in the first book of his

12. When Epicurus read Democritus (DL X 2):

"Andromachus δ’ ὁ Ἑπικούρειος ἔν τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ τοῦ Ἑπικούρου βίου φησίν ἐξευθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ


"περὶ τῶν Φυσικοῦ πρὸς τῷ Πειραιᾷ ἐναὐάγησεν. ἀνελθὼν δ’ εἰς τάς Ἀθήνας ἦπε τριακοντοτῆς, ἐκάθετε παρὰ τίνα βιβλιοπωλην. ἀναγνώρισκοντος δὲ ἐκείνου τὸ δεύτερον τῶν Ξενοφόντος Ἀπομνημονευμάτων, ἦθες ἐπιθυμεῖν τοῖς διατρίβοις οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἄνδρες εὐκαίρως δὲ παρὶς Ὀλυμπίας Κράτης, ὁ βιβλιοπώλης διέτασε ὧς ταῦτα ὑπενεχθήσασθαι, ἐντοίχῳ κατὰ τὴν φοινικικὴν ἀναπνεύσασθαι, ἐγένετο δὲ χαῦς τοῖς Φιλόσοφοι ἐπὶ φιλοσοφιάν ἔξει.

Apolloenas the Epicurean, in the first book of his Life of Epicurus, says that he turned to philosophy in disgust at the schoolmasters who could not tell him the meaning of “chaos” in Hesiod. According to Hermippus, however, he started as a schoolmaster, but on coming across the works of Democritus turned eagerly to philosophy. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

He was shipwrecked on a voyage from Phoenicia to Peiraeus with a cargo of purple. He went up into Athens and sat down in a bookseller’s shop, being then a man of thirty. As he went on reading the second book of Xenophon’s Memorabilia, he was so pleased that he inquired where men like Socrates were to be found. Crates passed by in the nick of time, so the bookseller pointed to him and said, “Follow yonder man.” From that day he became Crates’ pupil, showing in other respects a strong bent for philosophy, though with too much native
modesty to assimilate Cynic shamelessness. Hence Crates, desirous of curing this defect in him, gave him a potful of lentil-soup to carry through the Ceramicus; and when he saw that he was ashamed and tried to keep it out of sight, with a blow of his staff he broke the pot. As Zeno took to flight with the lentil-soup flowing down his legs, “Why run away, my little Phoenician?” quoth Crates, “nothing terrible has befallen you.” [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

14. Diogenes’s initiation (DL VI 21):

On reaching Athens he fell in with Antisthenes. Being repulsed by him, because he never welcomed pupils, by sheer persistence Diogenes wore him out. Once when he stretched out his staff against him, the pupil offered his head with the words, “Strike, for you will find no wood hard enough to keep me away from you, so long as I think you've something to say.” From that time forward he was his pupil, and, exile as he was, set out upon a simple life. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

15. Initiations by Diogenes (DL VI 30-31):
κατέειχον δ’ οἱ παῖδες πολλὰ ποιητῶν καὶ συγγραφέων καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ Διογένους, πᾶσαν τε ἐροδόν σύντομον πρὸς τὸ εὐμνημόνευτον ἐπίσηκε. ἐν οἷς τε ἐδίδασκε διακονεῖσθαι λιτὴ τροφὴ χρωμένους καὶ ὕδωρ πίνοντας, ἐν χρῷ κουρίας τε καὶ ἀκαλλωπίστους, ἀνυποδήτους πολλὰ πᾶσαν τῶν ποιητῶν Διογένους αὐτοῦ οἱ τῆς ἐπανατειναμένους τὸν βάθρων ἐπὶ κυνηγέσια.

The boys used to get by heart many passages from poets, historians, and the writings of Diogenes himself; and he would practise them in every short cut to a good memory. In the house too he taught them to wait upon themselves, and to be content with plain fare and water to drink. He used to make them crop their hair close and to wear it unadorned, and to go lightly clad, barefoot, silent, and not looking about them in the streets. He would also take them out hunting.

16. Failed initiations: the rich young man from Rhodes (DL VII 22):
Ῥοδίου δὲ τινὸς καλοῦ καὶ πλουσίου ἄλλως δὲ μηδέν, προσκειμένου αὐτῷ, μὴ βουλόμενος ἀνέχεσθαι, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπὶ τά κεκονιμένα τῶν βάθρων ἐκκάθιζεν αὐτόν, ἕως μεν ἐκεῖ τὴν βακτηρίαν ἐπαινεῖν εἰς τὸν τῶν πτωχῶν τόπον, ὡσεὶ συνανταρκτεῖσθαι τοῖς ῥάκεσιν αὐτῶν· καὶ τέλος ἀπῆλθεν ἦν νεανίσκος. πάντων ἔληγεν ἀπερέπετερον εἴναι τὸν τύφον, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπὶ τῶν νέων.

A Rhodian, who was handsome and rich, but nothing more, insisted on joining his class; but so unwelcome was this pupil, that first of all Zeno made him sit on the benches that were dusty, that he might soil his cloak, and then he consigned him to the place where the beggars sat, that he might rub shoulders with their rags; so at last the young man went away. Nothing, he declared, was more unbecoming than arrogance, especially in the young.

Some bibliographical references