

Conversion to philosophy in Diogenes Laertius: forms and functions

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1. P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris 2002²: 226:

La 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):

μῦν θεασάμενος διατρέχοντα, καθά φησι Θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ Μεγαρικῷ [SSR V B 172], καὶ μήτε κοίτην ἐπιζητοῦντα μήτε σκότος εὐλαβούμενον ἢ ποθοῦντά τι τῶν δοκούντων ἀπολαυστῶν, πόρον {τ'} ἐξεῦρε 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 στενωπῷ φασιν ἀπαντήσαντα Σωκράτη διατεῖναι τὴν βακτηρίαν καὶ κωλύειν παριέναι, πυνθανόμενον ποῦ πιπράσκοιτο τῶν προσφερομένων ἕκαστον· ἀποκρινάμενου δὲ πάλιν πυθέσθαι “ποῦ δὲ καλοὶ κάγαθοὶ γίνονται ἄνθρωποι;” ἀπορήσαντος δέ, “ἔπου τοίνυν,” φάναι, “καὶ μάθανε.” καὶ τούντεῦθεν ἀκροατῆς Σωκράτους ἦν.

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 honourable?” 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' ὢν ἀκόλαστός τε καὶ διακεχυμένος ἦν οὕτως ὥστε καὶ περιφέρειν ἀργύριον πρὸς τὰς ἐτοιμους λύσεις τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς στενωποῖς διέκρυπτεν. καὶ ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ πρὸς κίονί τινι τριῶβολον εὐρέθη προσπεπλασμένον αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν ὁμοίαν τῇ προειρημένῃ πρόφασιν. καὶ ποτε συνθέμενος τοῖς νέοις μεθύων καὶ ἐστεφανωμένος εἰς τὴν Ξενοκράτους ἦξε σχολήν· ὁ δὲ οὐδὲν διατραπείς εἶρε τὸν λόγον ὁμοίως· ἦν δὲ περὶ σωφροσύνης. ἀκούων δὲ τὸ μειράκιον κατ' ὀλίγον **ἐθηράθη** καὶ οὕτως ἐγένετο φιλόπρονος ὡς ὑπερβάλλεσθαι τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ αὐτὸν διαδέξασθαι τὴν σχολήν, ἀρξάμενον ἀπὸ τῆς ἕκτης καὶ δεκάτης καὶ ἑκατοστῆς 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 **θηραθείη** ὑπὸ Πολέμωνος, εἰπεῖν τῷ μῆτε ὀξύτερον μῆτε βαρύτερον ἀκοῦσαι 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):

ὁ δὲ φιλοσοφίας ἦρα. καὶ αὐτοῦ Κράντωρ ἐρωτικῶς διατεθεὶς ἐπύθετο τὰ ἐξ Ἀνδρομέδας Εὐριπίδου προενεγκάμενος·

ὦ παρθέν', εἰ σώσαιμί σ', εἴση μοι χάριν; [fr. 129 Kannicht]

καὶ ὃς τὰ ἐχόμενα·

ἄγου με, ὦ ξένε, εἴτε δμῳίδ' ἐθέλεις εἴτ' ἄλοχον. [fr. 129a Kannicht]

ἐκ τούτου συνήστην ἀλλήλοιιν.

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

O 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):

ἔθηράθη δὲ τοῖς λόγοις καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ Μητροκλέους Ἰππαρχία. Μαρωνίται δ' ἦσαν ἀμφοτέρω. καὶ ἦρα τοῦ Κράτητος καὶ τῶν λόγων καὶ τοῦ βίου, οὐδενὸς τῶν μνηστευομένων ἐπιστρεφόμενη, οὐ πλούτου, οὐκ εὐγενείας, οὐ κάλλους· ἀλλὰ πάντα ἦν Κράτης αὐτῇ. καὶ δὴ καὶ ἠπέλει τοῖς γονεῦσιν ἀναιρήσειν αὐτήν εἰ μὴ τούτῳ δοθείη. Κράτης μὲν οὖν παρακαλούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν γονέων αὐτῆς ἀποτρέψαι τὴν παιῖδα, πάντα ἐποίη· καὶ τέλος μὴ πείθων, ἀναστὰς καὶ ἀποθέμενος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σκευὴν ἄντικρυς αὐτῆς ἔφη, "ὁ μὲν νυμφίος οὗτος, ἡ δὲ κτῆσις αὐτή, πρὸς ταῦτα βουλευού· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔσσεσθαι κοινωνός, εἰ μὴ καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων γενηθείης."

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 ἐμφαινόντων διὰ τοῦ εἴδους τὴν πρὸς ἀρετὴν εὐφυΐαν.

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:

ἀλλὰ θαρρῶν, ἔφη, ὦ Κριτόβουλε, πειρῶ ἀγαθὸς γίγνεσθαι, καὶ τοιοῦτος γενόμενος **θηρᾶν** ἐπιχειρεῖ τοὺς καλοὺς τε κάγαθούς. ἴσως δ' ἂν τί σοι κάγῳ συλλαβεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν καλῶν τε κάγαθῶν **θήραν** ἔχοιμι διὰ τὸ ἐρωτικὸς 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):
ὡς παρὰ τοῖς Σκύθαις καὶ οἱ φεύγοντες τοξεύουσι καὶ οἱ διώκοντες, οὕτω τῶν φιλοσόφων οἱ μὲν διώκοντες **θηρῶσι** τοὺς μαθητάς, οἱ δὲ φεύγοντες, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Τίμων.

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 Phliunt]. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

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

ὃς πρότερον ἀκούων Θεοφράστου τοῦ περιπατητικοῦ τοσοῦτον διέφθαρτο, ὥστε ποτὲ μελετῶν καὶ μεταξύ πως ἀποπαρδῶν ὑπ' ἀθυμίας οἴκοι κατάκλειστος ἦν, ἀποκαρτερεῖν βουλόμενος. μαθὼν δὲ ὁ Κράτης εἰσηλθε πρὸς αὐτὸν παρακληθεὶς καὶ θέρμους ἐπίτηδες βεβρωκῶς ἔπειθε μὲν αὐτὸν καὶ διὰ τῶν λόγων μηδὲν φαῦλον πεποικέναι· τέρας γὰρ ἂν γεγονέναι εἰ μὴ καὶ τὰ πνεύματα κατὰ φύσιν ἀπεκρίνετο· τέλος δὲ καὶ ἀποπαρδῶν ἀνέρρωσεν αὐτόν, ἄφ' ὁμοιότητος τῶν ἔργων παραμυθησάμενος. τούντεῦθεν ἤκουεν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐγένετο ἀνὴρ ἱκανὸς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ.

He had been formerly a pupil of Theophrastus the Peripatetic, and had been so far corrupted by weakness that, when he made a breach of good manners in the course of rehearsing a speech, it drove him to despair, and he shut himself up at home, intending to starve himself to death. On learning this Crates came to visit him as he had been asked to do, and after advisedly making a meal of lupins, he tried to persuade him by argument as well that he had committed no crime, for a prodigy would have happened if he had not taken the natural means of relieving himself. At last by reproducing the action he succeeded in lifting him from his dejection, using for his consolation the likeness of the occurrences. From that time forward Metrocles was his pupil, and became proficient in philosophy. [Translation by R. D. Hicks]

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

Ἀπολλόδωρος δ' ὁ Ἐπικούρειος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ τοῦ Ἐπικούρου βίου φησὶν ἐλθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν καταγνόντα τῶν γραμματιστῶν, ἐπειδὴ μὴ ἐδυνήθησαν ἐρμηνεῦσαι αὐτῷ τὰ περὶ τοῦ παρ' Ἡσιόδῳ χάους [cf. *Theog.* 116-117]. φησὶ δ' Ἑρμιππος [FGrHistCont 1026 F 82] γραμματοδιδάσκαλον αὐτὸν γεγενῆσθαι, ἔπειτα μέντοι περιτυχόντα τοῖς Δημοκρίτου βιβλίοις ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἄξει.

Apollodorus 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]

13. Zeno of Kytion and the bookseller of Athens (DL VII 2-3):

πορφύραν ἐμπεπορευμένος ἀπὸ τῆς Φοινίκης πρὸς τῷ Πειραιεῖ ἐναυάγησεν. ἀνελθὼν δ' εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας ἤδη τριακοντούτης, ἐκάθισε παρὰ τινα βιβλιοπώλην. ἀναγινώσκοντος δὲ ἐκείνου τὸ δεύτερον τῶν Ξενοφῶντος Ἀπομνημονευμάτων, ἤσθεις ἐπέθετο ποῦ διατρίβοιεν οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἄνδρες. εὐκαίρως δὲ παριόντος Κράτητος, ὁ βιβλιοπώλης δείξας αὐτόν φησι, “τούτῳ παρακολούθησον.” ἐντεῦθεν ἤκουσε τοῦ Κράτητος, ἄλλως μὲν εὔτονος πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν, αἰδήμων δὲ ὡς πρὸς τὴν Κυνικήν ἀναισχυντίαν. ὅθεν ὁ Κράτης βουλόμενος αὐτὸν καὶ τούτου θεραπεῦσαι δίδωσι χύτραν φακῆς διὰ τοῦ Κεραμεικοῦ φέρειν. ἐπεὶ δ' εἶδεν αὐτὸν αἰδούμενον καὶ περικαλύπτοντα, παίσας τῇ βακτηρίᾳ κατάγνυσι τὴν χύτραν· φεύγοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς φακῆς κατὰ τῶν σκελῶν ρεούσης, φησὶν ὁ Κράτης, “τί φεύγεις, Φοινικίδιον; οὐδὲν δεινὸν πέπονθας.”

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's 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):

γενόμενος δὲ Ἀθήνησιν Ἀντισθένην παρέβαλε. τοῦ δὲ διωθουμένου διὰ τὸ μηδένα προσίεσθαι, ἐξεβιάζετο τῆ προσεδρία. καί ποτε τὴν βακτηρίαν ἐπανατειναμένου αὐτῷ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑποσχών, “παῖε,” εἶπεν, “οὐ γὰρ εὐρήσεις οὕτω σκληρὸν ξύλον ᾧ με ἀπείρξεις ἕως ἄν τι φαίνη λέγων.” τὸν τεῦθεν διήκουσεν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄτε φυγὰς ὧν ὥρμησεν ἐπὶ τὸν εὐτελεῆ βίον.

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):

κατεῖχον δ' οἱ παῖδες πολλὰ ποιητῶν καὶ συγγραφέων καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ Διογένης, πᾶσάν τε ἔφοδον σύντομον πρὸς τὸ εὐμνημόνευτον ἐπήσκει. ἐν οἴκῳ τε ἐδίδασκε διακονεῖσθαι λιτῆ τροφῇ χρωμένους καὶ ὕδωρ πίνοντας, ἐν χρῶ κουρίας τε καὶ ἀκαλλωπίστους εἰργάζετο καὶ ἀχίτωνας καὶ ἀνυποδήτους καὶ σιωπηλοὺς, καθ' αὐτοὺς βλέποντας ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς. ἐξῆγε δ' αὐτοὺς καὶ 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 τινος καλοῦ καὶ πλουσίου ἄλλως δὲ μηδὲν, προσκειμένου αὐτῷ, μὴ βουλόμενος ἀνέχεσθαι, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ κεκοιμένα τῶν βάθρων ἐκάθιζεν αὐτόν, ἵνα μολύνη τὴν χλανίδα· ἔπειτα εἰς τὸν τῶν πτωχῶν τόπον, ὥστε συνανατρίβεσθαι τοῖς ράκεσιν αὐτῶν· καὶ τέλος ἀπῆλθεν ὁ νεανίσκος. πάντων ἔλεγεν ἀπρεπέστερον εἶναι τὸν τυφόν, 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.

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