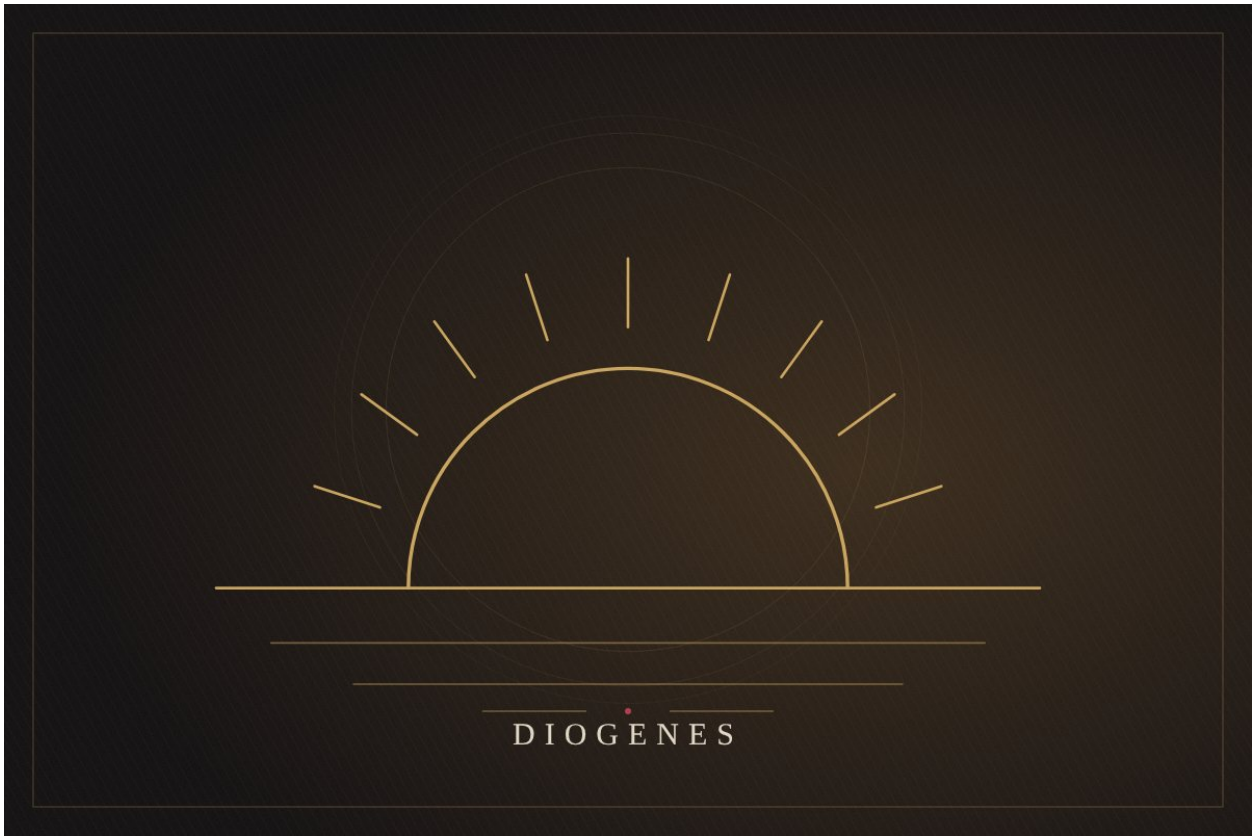
Wisdom

Diogenes of Sinope: the philosopher who lived in a jar and mocked convention

Who the Cynics were, what the famous anecdotes about the lantern and Alexander the Great tell us, why we should read them with care and what lesson remains for the simple life

2 November 2026 / 2 min read

Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



Original illustration by the lexoshpejt editors. Not a historical photograph or object.

Diogenes was born in Sinope, a Greek city on the coast of the Black Sea, perhaps around 404 BCE. According to tradition, he and his father were involved in a scandal over the city's coinage, and Diogenes was exiled. He ended up in Athens, where he became the best-known figure of a philosophical movement called **Cynicism**, from the Greek word for "dog", because the Cynics lived openly and without shame, like dogs.

A life without ornament

Diogenes believed that happiness is reached by living in accordance with nature and giving up artificial needs. According to the stories, he slept in a large clay jar near a temple, owned only a cloak and a bag, and even threw away his wooden cup when he saw a boy drinking water from his hands.

He openly criticised wealth, fame and hypocrisy. The best-known anecdote says that he walked through the streets of Athens in daylight with a lit lantern, and when asked what he was doing, replied: "I am looking for a human being."

Alexander and the sun

Another famous story tells of the meeting with **Alexander the Great** in Corinth. Alexander approached the philosopher, who was sunbathing, and told him he could ask for whatever he wanted. Diogenes replied: "Stand a little out of my sun." According to the story, Alexander later said that if he were not Alexander, he would wish to be Diogenes.

> *When asked where he came from, Diogenes replied: "I am a citizen of the world."*

Care with the anecdotes

Diogenes left no works that have survived. Most of what we know comes from **Diogenes Laertius**, an author of the third century CE, so about six hundred years later. Many anecdotes were probably embellished or invented. But they show clearly how the ancients remembered him: as a man who lived philosophy, not only talked about it.

What remains

The Cynics influenced the Stoics: Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was a student of a Cynic, Crates. The idea that virtue is enough for happiness and that we should be independent of external things passed from the Cynics to the Stoics.

1. **Ask what you really need.** Diogenes took it to the extreme, but the question remains valid.
2. **Do not be impressed by power.** Respect does not depend on a title.
3. **Think as a "citizen of the world".** Our moral obligations do not stop at the city walls.

Sources

Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, book VI. Translated by P. Mensch (2018). Oxford University Press. WorldCat

Piering, J. Diogenes of Sinope. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. iep.utm.edu

Desmond, W. (2008). *Cynics*. Acumen. WorldCat

Read online: https://www.lexoshpejt.com/en/article/diogenes-of-sinope