

Cynicism From Diogenes To Dilbert

Ian Cutler



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Cynicism began as a school of philosophy that was largely inspired by Socrates and often decried by popular commentators as a social pathology, a nihilistic rebellion against the foundations of civilization. Modern definitions of the cynic describe an individual who is negative and sarcastic, violently opposed to established authority and social convention, and dedicated to existentialism. This book attempts to vindicate cynicism, arguing that it is both a progressive approach to social dilemmas and an enlightened understanding of the human condition. Chapter One establishes the foundations of classical Greek cynicism, while later chapters illustrate the varied faces of the cynic phenomenon in the persons of such disparate characters as Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Diogenes, the Dadaists, George Bataille, Samuel Beckett, Auberon Waugh, the creators of *South Park*, and others. Nietzsche is portrayed as the most important representative of both classical and postmodern cynicism, as well as the pivotal link between the two. The book focuses on significant periods of historical change, such as the Renaissance, and the historical cynics responsible for several seminal social ideas, including cosmopolitanism (citizenship of the world), asceticism (personal growth through self-testing), and parrhesia (finding one's voice in the presence of tyrannical forces). The! author claims that aspects of Greek cynicism are present in contemporary society, offering a positive strategy for living in a hostile world.

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