

The Pain of Philosophy: A Cynic Objection to Plato*

DOI: 10.14746/PEA.2025.1.2

MASAKI NAGAO / *The University of Tokyo* /

Since antiquity, Diogenes the Cynic has been known as a fierce opponent of Plato.¹ Numerous testimonies report instances of conflict between the two;² this article focuses on the apophthegm related by Plutarch and Stobaeus. The two accounts read:

As Diogenes also said, when Plato was praised, “But what admirable point does this man have? He has been philosophising for so long and has never caused anyone pain”.³ For one cannot

* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP23KJ0717.

¹ See Overwien (2005: 381–384). Niehues-Pröbsting (2016: 21) characterises the anti-Platonic nature of Diogenes as ‘die notwendige Ergänzung und Kehrseite des Platonismus’, ‘respektlose Randglosse dazu, deren Konjektur zu machen wäre’, ‘Satyrspiel zum erhabenen platonischen Idealismus’ and ‘dessen »verrückte« Entsprechung.’

² For a rich collection of testimonies, see *SSR* (Giannantoni 1990) V B 55–65.

³ In this article, I use the term ‘pain’ and its derivatives to mean both physical and mental suffering without distinction (corresponding to the ordinary ambiguity of the Greek word ‘λυπέω’, ‘λύπη’). I will return to this point in Section 3 below.

say, as Xenocrates did, that scientific knowledge is as much the ‘handles of philosophy’⁴ as are the emotions of the young: shame, desire, regret, pleasure, pain and ambition. (Plu. *De virtute morali* 452d = SSR V B 61).⁵

From Themistius’ *On the Soul*.⁶ Now, whether Diogenes was right when he said of Plato, “How on earth can a man be beneficial to us if he has already been philosophising for so long and has never caused anyone pain?”, different people will judge [differently]. That is because the words of a philosopher should probably have the sweetness capable of stinging the wounded⁷ like honey. (Stob. III 13, 68 = SSR V B 61).⁸

Both testimonies convey an intriguing yet obscure criticism of Plato by the Cynics: philosophy ought to be painful, but Plato hurts no one. On what grounds did they make such a claim? Three issues arise here: first, it is unclear what is meant by ‘painful’; second, why should philosophy be so; third, whether Plato’s philosophy truly ‘never caused anyone pain’.

In this paper, I attempt to elucidate the Cynic conception of ‘philosophical pain’ and reflect on these issues. In the first section, I examine the two testimonies quoted above and their implications. The subsequent sections then discuss the key concepts of *parrhēsia* and *askēsis* to explore the possibility of a new interpretation that differs from those of Plutarch and Stobaeus.

Previous studies have referred to these testimonies without questioning their details. Owing to their elusiveness, such treatment is certainly understandable. Nonetheless, as the following arguments demonstrate, the concept of ‘pain’ has a much broader scope than expected, even relating to the overall outlook of each philosopher. I hope that this article will contribute to a deeper comprehension of both Platonic and Cynic philosophies by reconsidering their differences from this hitherto overlooked perspective.

Before we begin the investigation, a brief remark on the treatment of sources is necessary. There is no guarantee that the two testimonies can be traced directly back to

⁴ See D.L. IV 10 = fr. 2 Isnardi Parente (ed. Dorandi 2013): πρὸς τε τὸν μῆτε μουσικὴν μῆτε γεωμετρικὴν μῆτε ἀστρονομικὴν μεμαθηκότα, βουλόμενον δὲ παρ’ αὐτὸν φοιτᾶν, πορεύου, ἔφη [sc. Xenocrates], λαβὰς γὰρ οὐκ ἔχεις φιλοσοφίας. The phrase ‘λαβὴ φιλοσοφίας’ seems to have been coined by Xenocrates in the sense of a ‘preliminary course for further studies’. See Isnardi Parente (1982: 302–303): ‘propedeutiche alla filosofia.’

⁵ ἥ καὶ Διογένης ἐπανοιμμένου Πλάτωνος ‘τί δ’ ἐκεῖνος’ εἶπεν ἔχει σεμνόν, ὃς τοσοῦτον χρόνον φιλοσοφῶν οὐδένα λελύπηκεν; οὐ γὰρ οὕτως τὰ μαθήματα φαίη τις ἂν, ὥς ἔλεγε Ξενοκράτης, λαβὰς εἶναι φιλοσοφίας, ὥς τὰ πάθη τῶν νέων, αἰσχύνην ἐπιθυμίαν μετάνοιαν ἡδονὴν λύπην φιλοτιμίαν. (ed. Pohlenz 1929).

⁶ This work survives only in fragments, all quoted by Stobaeus. See Stob. IV 22, 89; 50, 29; 52, 45.

⁷ The oxymoronic expression, ‘the sweetness capable of stinging the wounded’, presumably reflects the ancient use of honey as a kind of salve in surgical treatment (see Kuropatnicki, Klósek and Kucharzewski 2018). In this respect, the symbolism of honey can be ambivalent: it is a sweet and pleasant food, but it may also cause pain on occasion by penetrating wounds. It is probably because of this ambiguity, shared by honey and philosophical *logos*, that Themistius assumes that ‘different people will judge differently’.

⁸ Θεμιστίου ἐκ τοῦ Περί ψυχῆς. Εἰ μὲν οὖν ὀρθῶς ἐπὶ Πλάτωνος εἶπε Διογένης ‘τί δαι ὄφελος ἡμῖν ἀνδρός, ὃς πολὺν ἤδη χρόνον φιλοσοφῶν οὐδένα λελύπηκεν;’ ἕτεροι κρινοῦσιν. ἴσως γὰρ ὥς τὸ μέλι δει καὶ τὸν λόγον τοῦ φιλοσόφου τὸ γλυκὺ δηκτικὸν ἔχειν τῶν ἡλκωμένων (ed. Hense 1894).

Diogenes or other ‘genuine’ Cynics: the remarks they contain may have been devised by later generations and then attributed retrospectively to Diogenes.⁹ In that case, reconstructing the Cynics’ thought based on such statements of Diogenes as an anecdotal figure would be methodologically dubious. However, even if the testimonies are not necessarily historically grounded, it is still worth discussing the extent to which they represent the true spirit of Cynicism and the distance between it and Plato’s philosophy. The main concern of this article is precisely this discussion. Therefore, while the problem of historical accuracy constantly haunts the study of Cynicism, it is not fatal to the present work but rather a presupposition of it.

1. The Accounts of Plutarch and Stobaeus

Let us first consider the implications of Plutarch’s account. He quotes Diogenes’ criticism of Plato in support of his own belief that regret (μετάνοια) and shame (αἰσχύνη) can serve corrective purposes, especially in the education of the young (*De virtute morali* 452C–D). According to Plutarch, the pain (λύπη) engendered by admonition (νουθεσία) or censure (ψόγος) has a considerable pedagogical effect; Plato was, thus, an incompetent teacher for not using it. This context encourages us to understand ‘philosophical pain’ as a psychological motivator: it drives the will to change the *status quo* and remove the causes of such pain (e.g. ignorance) by continuing to practise philosophy. Scientific knowledge (μαθήματα), in contrast, does not have as strong a motivational force¹⁰ as pain (or rather emotions in general).¹¹ Plutarch links this allegedly weaker stimulus with Xenocrates, one of Plato’s most celebrated disciples. In this passage, at least, he is almost synonymous with his master. Both are equally criticised as poor mentors, unable to give their students sufficient incentive to apply themselves to philosophy.¹²

What about Stobaeus? Using Themistius as his source, he introduces a lesson in parallel to Plutarch’s, with a brief note on its controversial nature. Since *Florilegium* III 13, which contains the quoted passage, is entitled ‘On *Parrhēsia*’, Stobaeus seems to have interpreted the mooted apophthegm as concerning the intimate connection between

⁹ For the complicated transmission process of Diogenes’ anecdotes or sayings, see Overwien (2005).

¹⁰ Here, the vagueness of the phrase ‘handles of philosophy’ is worth noting. Plutarch seems to understand this expression as ‘the psychological occasions to begin the practice of philosophy’, deviating from the original usage of Xenocrates. See also footnote 4 *supra*.

¹¹ For Plutarch’s theory that *pathē* or the irrational part of the soul plays an essential role in moral formation, see Chastelnérac (2007).

¹² In this passage, Plutarch, a Platonist, presents Plato’s stance as a caricature nearly equivalent to that of his adversaries (e.g. the Stoics, who underestimate the importance of *pathē*), at least regarding the issue of pain. This unexpected portrayal is likely a consequence of adjustment to Diogenes’ critique, which he cites to substantiate his argument, and does not reflect his personal view on Plato. For the mainly Platonic foundation of *De virtute morali*, see Roskam (2021: 62–63).

‘philosophising’ and ‘outspokenness’ (the typical translation of *parrhēsia*).¹³ One might suppose that a philosopher must be a *parrhēsiastēs*, who does not hesitate to sacrifice the feelings of his audience in service of the truth.¹⁴ In Diogenes’ eyes, Plato did not meet this requirement. This was exactly because he never caused anyone pain in his long philosophical career and, thus, was most unlikely to have been a truth-teller. Compared to Plutarch’s version, there is less emphasis on pedagogical issues. In Stobaeus’ account, Diogenes simply questions whether Plato is ‘beneficial to us’ (ὄφελος ἡμῖν). The issue here is unlikely to concern the education of the young since Diogenes counts himself among the potential beneficiaries.¹⁵ Additionally, Stobaeus does not generalise the object of Plato’s neglect to emotions as a whole (πάθη); he tacitly countenances the possibility that Plato appealed to pleasure (ἡδονή), which Plutarch’s account (or at least its implication) does not allow.

In either case, was Plato unfamiliar with ‘painful’ philosophy, as the two texts claim? It seems not. At least in his dialogues, Plato portrays the protagonist Socrates as a distinctly irritating figure.¹⁶ He was a ‘gadfly’ (μύωψ) who disturbed the sleep of the *polis* (*Ap.* 30e–31a) and his philosophical practice often upset those around him.¹⁷ Consequently, he incurred the deep hatred of several people who eventually obliged him to die. Notably, such annoyingness was, in a sense, an essential requirement of Socrates’ philosophy and, therefore, impossible to reduce entirely to his peculiar (i.e. dissimilar to Plato’s) personality. According to his attitude, intellectual improvement necessarily involves the pain of recognising one’s ignorance (especially of what one believes one should and does know).¹⁸ Not experiencing such pain is tantamount to closing one’s eyes to one’s ignorance and remaining intellectually inferior. Hence, those who wish to be wise (thus, virtuous and happy) must endure pain, at least transitionally. This is a recurrent motif in Platonic–Socratic philosophy. In the *Symposium* (*Smp.* 218a), Plato has Alcibiades describe the shock caused by Socrates’ ‘philosophical discourses’ (οἱ ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγοι): “I was bitten by something more painful [than a viper], in the most painful place one can be bitten”.¹⁹ In the *Republic* (*R.* 502d–e), the Platonic Socrates lays

¹³ As is well known, *parrhēsia* was a hallmark of the Cynics. See e.g. D.L. VI 69 = SSR V B 473: ἐρωτηθεὶς τί κάλλιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποις, ἔφη [sc. Diogenes], ‘παρρησία’. For further discussion, see also Section 2 below.

¹⁴ See Foucault (2009: 12): “Pour qu’il y ait *parrhēsia* [sic], [...] il faut que le sujet, [en disant] cette vérité qu’il marque comme étant son opinion, sa pensée, sa croyance, prenne un certain risque, risque qui concerne la relation même qu’il a avec celui auquel il s’adresse. Il faut pour qu’il y ait *parrhēsia* [sic] que, en disant la vérité, on ouvre, on instaure et on affronte le risque de blesser l’autre, de l’irriter, de le mettre en colère et de susciter de sa part un certain nombre de conduites qui peuvent aller jusqu’à la plus extrême violence. C’est donc la vérité, dans le risque de la violence.”

¹⁵ When Diogenes became (or awakened to his being) the Cynic, he had already reached adulthood (see D.L. VI 20–22). Even in the anecdotal tradition, there are no examples in which Diogenes the Cynic is portrayed as a youth.

¹⁶ Quotations from Plato’s dialogues follow the current editions in the Oxford Classical Texts series.

¹⁷ E.g. *Pl. Men.* 80a–b; *Tht.* 149a. See also Blank (1993); Helmer (2021: 95–99).

¹⁸ See Warren (2014: 21–32); Delcomminette (2018).

¹⁹ ἐγὼ οὖν δεδηγμένος τε ὑπὸ ἀλγεινότερου καὶ τὸ ἀλγεινότατον ὧν ἂν τις δηχθεῖν. In a slightly earlier passage (215d–216c), Alcibiades also speaks of the intense shame evoked by listening to Socrates and being

bare his conviction that “the downright truth is both disgusting and intractable”²⁰ in at least some topics. Moreover, the *Theaetetus* (*Tht.* 148e–151d) presents the famous metaphor of ‘maieutics’, comparing the process of philosophical inquiry to that of pregnancy and parturition. Socrates takes pride in his art of inducing and regulating ‘labour pains’ (ὠδῖνες) in the souls of those with whom he interacts.²¹

Furthermore, Plato did not fail to observe the motivational power of ‘philosophical pain’; on the contrary, he was well acquainted with it. In the *Symposium* (*Smp.* 203a–204c), *Erōs* is characterised as a true philosopher. He recognises his lack of knowledge and pangs of hunger for it, precisely because of his intermediate position between the perfectly wise and the utterly ignorant. In this passage, the Platonic Socrates takes for granted that the painful consciousness of one’s deficiency immediately arouses a desire for what one is lacking.²² The *Theaetetus* (*Tht.* 168a) offers another expression of such a perspective, where Socrates charitably represents Protagoras’ stance:²³

If you do the above [sc. refute properly], those with whom you converse will blame themselves for their confusion and embarrassment [caused by the refutation], not you. And then, while they will pursue and love you, they will hate themselves, flee from their present situation, and take refuge in philosophy – to abandon their former selves and become different people.²⁴

Notably, in this passage, unpleasant and painful states of mind of ‘confusion’ (ταραχή) and ‘embarrassment’ (ἀπορία) are mentioned as significant spurs to the love of wisdom. We can, therefore, assume that a certain kind of ‘pain’ also played an important psychological role in Platonic–Socratic philosophy.

Finally, *parrhēsia* is one of the most fundamental postulates of Platonic–Socratic dialogue.²⁵ In the *Gorgias* (*Grg.* 486e–487a), Socrates lists *parrhēsia* as one of the three requirements for the philosophical examination of opinions of the soul.²⁶ In multiple contexts, he urges his interlocutors to speak openly with their real beliefs.²⁷ This is mainly

made aware of his worthlessness (including his ignorance).

²⁰ ἐπίφθονός τε καὶ χαλεπὴ γίγνεσθαι ἢ παντελῶς ἀληθής. See also *Pl. Ap.* 31e: καὶ μοι [sc. Socrates] μὴ ἄχθεσθε λέγοντι τάληθῃ.

²¹ Here, I mainly follow Futter’s interpretation. Philosophical ‘labour pains’ are due to a lack of knowledge and a thirst for it (2018: 499, 502) and are closely related to the pain of ignorance, as described above.

²² The *Symposium* (*Smp.* 216d–e) refers to the relationship between *erōs* and pain more explicitly. See also *Pl. Phdr.* 251b–253c; *R.* 490b; Futter (2018).

²³ Like most interpreters, including Blank (1993: 430–431) and Delcomminette (2018: 38), I believe that the account here is perfectly consistent with Plato’s own position. See also *Pl. Sph.* 230b–d.

²⁴ ἂν μὲν γὰρ οὕτω ποιῆς, ἑαυτοὺς αἰτιάσονται οἱ προσδιατρίβοντές σοι τῆς αὐτῶν ταραχῆς καὶ ἀπορίας ἀλλ’ οὐ σέ, καὶ σὲ μὲν διώξονται καὶ φιλήσουσιν, αὐτοὺς δὲ μισήσουσι καὶ φεύξονται ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἵν’ ἄλλοι γενόμενοι ἀπαλλαγῶσι τῶν οἱ πρότερον ἦσαν.

²⁵ On Socratic *parrhēsia*, see also Foucault (2009: 67–152); on that of Plato, Foucault (2009: 57–59, 203–208).

²⁶ The other two are knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and favour (εὖνοια).

²⁷ E.g. *Pl. Cri.* 49c–d; *Grg.* 495a, 500b–c; *Prt.* 331c–d.

because his scrutiny is directed in each case at the whole life of the respondent.²⁸ The focus of this open exchange of views is not on seducing others with flattery or overwhelming them with sophisms but on living better (and leading others to do so) through sound arguments. In this respect, Plato was undoubtedly a faithful heir to Socrates.²⁹

Hence, we should recognise that Plato did cause pain, in a sense, to others. Although it is impermissible to identify Plato with the Socrates he portrays, the latter's frequent suggestion of the importance of 'philosophical pain' most likely reflects the former's tenet, at least in part.

This conclusion, however, does not mean that the apophthegm under consideration is entirely inaccurate. 'Pain' is a polysemous concept. There remains the possibility that Plato's philosophy is, indeed, devoid of the kind of 'pain' that Diogenes identified. In that case, we could broadly countenance the mooted claim that "Plato never caused anyone pain". In the following sections, I shall introduce two antitheses that distinguish the Cynic usage of 'philosophical pain' from Plato's: passive/active and physical/mental.

2. Cynic *Parrhēsia* and Passive Pain

Since the Cynic *parrhēsia* differs palpably from Plato's in quality, there remains room for more careful examination than described above. In this section, I shall argue that the 'pain' involved in the Cynic *parrhēsia* is quite alien to Plato's philosophy: the former can be completely passive, while Plato's 'pain' requires the active commitment of the sufferer.

Etymologically, the Greek word *parrhēsia* means 'speaking all' (παῖς + ῥῆσις). Yet, at the level of ordinary language, the sense of 'all' is essentially relative.³⁰ Consider, for example, an enslaved person who can only speak as their master allows. Compared to such an individual, 'speaking all' would be understood as 'freedom of speech as a privilege of an independent citizen' or, more generally, 'saying what one thinks without being subject to any external oppression'.³¹ We can evaluate the Platonic–Socratic *parrhēsia* as a psychological extension of this meaning because it requires interlocutors not to be 'enslaved' to honour or victory but to be honest with themselves. If, conversely, we take as our contrast a civil person who chooses decent words and avoids unnecessary aggression, 'speaking all' would involve the use of vulgar or insulting language and a kind of shamelessness.³²

It is beyond question that the Cynic *parrhēsia* encompasses the latter connotation. According to Ammonius, the Cynics (literally the 'Doggish ones') were so named

²⁸ Pl. *La.* 187e–188a; see also Foucault (2009: 132–143).

²⁹ See Irani (2017).

³⁰ See also Foucault (2009: 11–12).

³¹ E.g. E. *Hipp.* 422; *Supp.* 433–441; *Ion* 670–675.

³² See Montanari (2015: s.v. παρρησία): 'licence, confidence, impudence'. *Parrhēsia*, in this sense, must be strictly distinguished from 'speaking what the hearer feels to be offensive'. In the *Meno* (94e–95a), for example,

‘because they were *parrhēsiastic* and fond of reproving’ (διὰ τὸ παρρησιαστικὸν τε καὶ ἐλεγκτικόν).³³ An Arabic gnomology also states, “Diogenes was called ‘Dog’ because of his provocative nature and the quarrels people had with him”.³⁴ Notably, these testimonies strongly associate the Cynic *parrhēsia* with dogs. While dogs had incredibly diverse symbolic value in ancient Greece,³⁵ we can interpret this kind of *parrhēsia* only in the second sense mentioned above:³⁶ the *parrhēsiastic* dog barks furiously and this barking is then easily identified with human abuse.³⁷ Indeed, numerous anecdotes substantiate the Cynic predilection for insults.³⁸ The Cynics occasionally resorted to pure invective or mockery without regard to the profound truth,³⁹ although they also engaged in the philosophical *parrhēsia* in the former sense.⁴⁰

Plato’s attitude is significantly different. Concerning the latter sense of *parrhēsia*, he was an uncompromising anti-*parrhēsiastēs*.⁴¹ Plato repeatedly objects to insults, abuse and ridicule⁴² throughout his dialogues. In the *Republic* (R. 555b–562a), for example, the Platonic Socrates trenchantly criticises democracy and the democratic populace, partly because of its excessive *parrhēsia*. Such people inevitably fall into decadence, disregarding the true virtues and calling insolence ‘good education’, anarchy ‘freedom’, prodigality ‘magnificence’ and shamelessness ‘courage’. More directly, in the *Laws* (Lg. 934e–935a), Plato’s spokesman, the Athenian Stranger, enacts a law forbidding slander. According to him, slanderous exchanges ultimately lead to hatred (μῖση) and enmity (ἔχθραι) between the participants, subsequently corrupting the right balance of their souls. In the following passage (Lg. 935a–936b), the Athenian Stranger combines slander with ridicule. Despite, or perhaps because of, his considerable comic talent,⁴³ Plato frequently warns against the dangers of such speech. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates demands that his interlocutors do not utter taunts or jokes because they can destroy philosophical inquiry.⁴⁴ In the *Republic* (R.

Socrates makes Anytus uncomfortable, but this is not his primary intention (although I am reluctant to eliminate the qualifier ‘primary’). Put another way, if the former sense of *parrhēsia* offends the listener, as in the case of Socrates and Anytus, this outcome is only incidental. The latter *parrhēsia*, on the other hand, expects from the outset to hurt the listener.

³³ Ammon. *In Cat.* 2, 2 = SSR I H 9 (ed. Busse 1895).

³⁴ Mun 4b (ed. Overwien 2005). The following quotation is based on the German translation by Overwien (2005: 128).

³⁵ See Terzaki (2023: 120–124).

³⁶ Neither civil liberties nor philosophical integrity apply to the dog, at least in the ordinary sense.

³⁷ E.g. Arist. [*Phgn.*] 808b36–37, 811a27, 811a31; Ath. XIII 611b.

³⁸ See Husson (2014: par. 16–36).

³⁹ E.g. SSR V B 202–206; see also Overwien (2005: 358–362). As the following discussion will show, we need not consider these deviations from the truth to reflect the ‘corruption’ of the later generations and to violate Cynic orthodoxies, if any.

⁴⁰ See Kennedy (1999: 33–37); Foucault (2009: 152–289).

⁴¹ See Husson (2014: par. 1–15).

⁴² While the Platonic Socrates was a skilled user of ‘ridicule’ (Rossetti 2011), its virulence was significantly alleviated by his friendliness or remedial mission (see Tanner 2017: 153–155). In this section, I am concerned exclusively with the hostile or destructive kind of ridicule.

⁴³ See Tanner (2017).

⁴⁴ Polus in *Grg.* 473e; Callicles in *Grg.* 500b–c.

394b–398b and 606c) and the *Laws* (Lg. 816d–e and 935d–936b), Plato’s representatives unanimously preach the strict regulation of comedy. Moreover, in the *Philebus* (*Phlb.* 48a–50a), comic laughter or mockery is proved to contain a kind of evil. John Morreall, thus, has no difficulty in calling Plato ‘the most influential critic of laughter’.⁴⁵

What is the root of this difference between the Cynics and Plato? As Suzanne Husson indicates,⁴⁶ the issue of ‘dialogue’ is crucial here. In principle, Platonic–Socratic philosophy develops through dialogue (or collaborative discussion). To maintain this exchange, Plato/Socrates must avoid insulting remarks as much as possible, because the interlocutor can withdraw from the dialogue whenever he feels uncomfortable and does not wish to continue the conversation. The fragility of cooperative dialogue is, thereby, exposed. Those supposedly in need of philosophical scrutiny can always cease a vexatious dialogue with a ‘gadfly’ or refuse to enter that dialogue from the outset. Plato/Socrates would then be at a loss. The interactive nature of dialogue is, thus, necessarily impotent against lazy people who are unwilling to listen, perhaps indeed the majority.⁴⁷ Such a lack of mass appeal seems even more pronounced in Plato than in his master. He spent most of his career as a philosopher in the ivory tower of the Academy (from 387/386 to 347 with some interruptions) and dealt only with talented students already oriented in philosophy. Moreover, his ideal state strictly selected those qualified to engage in philosophy.⁴⁸ This apparent elitism was ironically a blessing for the so-called *misologoi*, leaving them free to continue their unjust but peaceful lives in pleasant ignorance.

When we turn our attention to Diogenes, the situation changes drastically. He suddenly accosts passersby and hurls insults at them without hesitation. Such an approach is entirely coercive or one-sided and cannot, therefore, be avoided in advance. Unlike the case of Socrates, the consent of the interlocutor is not needed or sought. Instead, the critical point at which the dialogue ceases is the home territory of the Cynic *parrhēsia*. To appreciate this aspect, it may be useful to apply the traditional analogy between Cynicism and drama (especially comedy).⁴⁹ This analogy identifies the Cynic practice with public performance: it creates an unusual theatrical space amid the everyday world through the practitioner’s abrupt and bizarre eccentricities. What the Cynics perform in this space is an avant-garde improvisation that indiscriminately involves people who happen to be nearby. Unexpectedly compelled to ascend the virtual stage of the Cynics, these people are temporarily stripped of the veil of *nomos* that they have been wearing and unwill-

⁴⁵ Morreall 2024: sec. 1; see also Tanner (2017: xvii–xx) for the justifiable amendment to such an evaluation.

⁴⁶ Husson 2014: par. 15–16; see also Chapuis (2021: 139–51).

⁴⁷ We cannot overestimate the perilousness of this impotence, given that Socrates was ‘killed’ by such unwelcoming people.

⁴⁸ Pl. *R.* 412b–415c, 502c–541b. While not necessarily historically founded, later tradition attributes a kind of esotericism to Plato: see e.g. Pl. [*Ep.*] II 314a–c; D.L. III 63.

⁴⁹ Demetr. *Eloc.* 259 = SSR V H 70; Luc. *Bis Acc.* 33; M. Ant. XI 6.2 = SSR V B 474. See also Niehues-Pröbsting (2016: 208–210); Overwien (2005: 423–426); Bosman (2006); Hall (2019: 45–50). Of course, this analogy differs entirely from that between Plato’s dialogues and drama. For the Cynics, neither writings nor ideas but practices are the terms of the analogy.

ingly transformed into theatrical figures. They stand out from their surroundings and become objects of dramatic criticism for their audience (i.e. other passersby). In this way, abnormally insulting *parrhēsia* provides the Cynics with a convenient setting to subversively question conventional codes. The difference from the methodology of Socratic dialogue should now be noticeable. On the one side, Plato/Socrates can only fold his arms in front of the ‘foolish’ masses who do not listen to the philosophers’ wisdom; on the other, Diogenes easily targets those masses as the objects of his practice and does not allow them to remain safely on the sidelines.

Although the claim that “Plato never caused anyone pain” is somewhat overstated, it contains an informative implication. The limits of Platonic–Socratic philosophy are overcome in a surprisingly scandalous way by the merciless insults of the Cynics. The pain caused by the former always requires the interlocutor’s consent or active participation; that caused by the latter, in contrast, can be experienced purely passively by its target and is precisely a ‘suffering’. In this sense, we can say that Plato certainly did not inflict the kind of pain that Diogenes did.

Of course, this interpretation does not mean that Diogenes’ method is superior to Plato’s. The former is a kind of violence that stands on the brink of degenerating into harm. We should note here that Cynic insults only serve to propel the target into the virtual theatrical space that they create. Once the target has ascended the stage, the delivery of insults ends and *parrhēsia* in the sense of ‘telling the truth’ is spotlighted. Otherwise, we would lose the criterion to distinguish Cynic insults from those of the simply mad. Undoubtedly, Diogenes, like Plato/Socrates, also embarked on *parrhēsia* in the truth-telling sense, while the mocking sense was adopted only to ensure the former’s validity.

3. Cynic *Askēsis* and Physical Pain

Finally, I shall explain the second distinction between Diogenes’ and Plato’s ‘pain’: physical or mental. Our guide here is the following passages of Pseudo-Diogenes’ *Twenty-Ninth Epistle* (= SSR V B 559),⁵⁰ addressed to Dionysius the Tyrant:⁵¹

Since you think it is good to take care of yourself, I will send you a man who shares no similarities with Aristippus or Plato, by Zeus. He is one of the educators in Athens (of which I am also one), whose discernment is the keenest, whose steps are the most agile and who carries the

⁵⁰ I believe that this epistle, although written relatively late, is generally faithful to the essential spirit of the Cynics (see also Flores-Júnior 2021: 19–48). Whatever the case, I use it only as a clue to further arguments. For the epistles of Pseudo-Diogenes in general, see Malherbe (1977: 14–21).

⁵¹ Diogenes always condemns or scoffs at Dionysius as a debauched pleasure-seeker. See SSR V B 53–6; Plu. *An seni respublica gerenda sit* 783C–D = SSR V B 359; Diog. [*Ep.*] VIII = SSR V B 538; XXXII = SSR V B 562; XL 1 = SSR V B 570.

most painful whip. He will command you, by Zeus, to take no rest during the day and to rise early in the morning, and he will make you cease to be afraid or scared [...] (1).⁵²

You need a whip and a master, not someone who admires and flatters you. Indeed, who could ever be benefited by the latter kind of person? Or how could he benefit anyone? If he did not chastise the individual and simultaneously recall him to his senses, as one does with horses and oxen, and did not consider what is required, [that would not be possible]. But you are already far beyond depravity. Therefore, you need incision, cautery and the use of drugs (4–5).⁵³

In these passages, various elements correspond to the testimonies of Plutarch and Stobaeus: the contrast between the Cynics and Plato, the issue of pedagogy (as in Plutarch), the reference to beneficence (as in Stobaeus) and, most importantly, the close association of Cynicism with ‘pain’.

Based on these similarities, should we understand the ‘pain’ to which this epistle refers in the same way as the pain we have examined above? It seems not. The *Twenty-Ninth Epistle* consistently stresses the physical and corporeal character of ‘philosophical pain’ among the Cynics. This point is not mentioned, at least not explicitly, in Plutarch’s and Stobaeus’ versions: the ‘pain’ in their renderings is generally mental. By contrast, in the *Twenty-Ninth Epistle*, we find a repetition of physical and medical metaphors, such as ‘the most painful whip’ (σκύτος ἀλγεινότατον), ‘incision’ (τομή), ‘cautery’ (καῦσις) and ‘use of drugs’ (φαρμακεία). In my view, these are not merely rhetorical, standing in for mental pain; instead, there appears to be a positive reason for adopting physical metaphors. In this regard, the concepts of *askēsis* and *ponos* in Cynic thought are of decisive importance.

The Cynic doctrine of the ‘double *askēsis*’ recommends hybrid training, in which the body and the mind collaborate,⁵⁴ as opposed to the one-sided physical exertion of athletes or the one-sided mental labour of intellectuals. It is, in essence, a ‘corporeal *askēsis* directed to a moral purpose’.⁵⁵ As Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé explains,

⁵² Ἐπειδὴ δέδοκται σοι ἐπιμέλειαν ποιήσασθαι σεαυτοῦ, πέμψω σοι ἄνθρωπον οὐδὲν μὰ Δία Ἀριστίππῳ καὶ Πλάτῳ ὁμοιον, ἀλλ’ ἓνα τῶν Ἀθηνησιν παιδαγωγῶν ἐξ ὧν ἔχω, δριμύτατα μὲν βλέποντα, ὀξύτατα δὲ βαδίζοντα, σκύτος δὲ ἀλγεινότατον φέροντα, ὃς σε μὰ Δία ἐπιτρέψει τὸ μὴ καθ’ ὥραν ἀναπαύεσθαι καὶ πρῶτ’ ἐγείρεσθαι, παύσας φόβων καὶ δειμάτων [...] (ed. Malherbe 1977).

⁵³ σκύτους οὖν δεῖ σοι καὶ σεσπότου [*sic*; I read δεσπότου], οὐχ ὅς σε θαυμάσει καὶ κολακεύσει· ὥς ὑπὸ γε τοιοῦτου ἀνθρώπου πῶς ἂν τίς ποτε ὠφελῇθῃ, ἢ πῶς ὁ τοιοῦτος ὠφελήσῃε τινα; εἰ μὴ ὥσπερ ἵππον ἢ βοῦν κολάζει τε ἅμα καὶ σωφρονίζει, φροντίζει τε τῶν δεόντων. ἀλλὰ σύ γε πόρρω ἦκεις διαφθορᾶς, οὐκοῦν ἀναγκαῖον τομάς τε καὶ καύσεις καὶ φαρμακείας ποιεῖσθαι.

⁵⁴ See D.L. VI 70 = SSR V B 291: διττὴν δὲ ἔλεγε [*sc.* Diogenes] εἶναι τὴν ἀσκήσιν, τὴν μὲν ψυχικὴν, τὴν δὲ σωματικὴν ταύτην καθ’ ἣν ἐν γυμνασίᾳ συνεχεῖ γινόμεναι φαντασῖαι εὐλυσίαν πρὸς τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔργα παρέχονται. εἶναι δὲ ἀτελὴ τὴν ἑτέραν χωρὶς τῆς ἑτέρας, οὐδὲν ἦττον εὐεξίας καὶ ἰσχύος ἐν τοῖς προσήκουσι γενομένης, ὥς περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ περὶ τὸ σῶμα.

⁵⁵ Goulet-Cazé (1986: 54); translated from French.

Knowing that one must be indifferent to the blows of Fortune or Destiny is absolutely not enough to be really so. If such knowledge is not supported by voluntary and rigorous training to confront the *ponoi*, it remains a dead letter, incapable of producing a moral act on its own. [...] In this way, *askēsis* plays the role of an indispensable auxiliary of reason, ensuring its practical effectiveness; it also appears to be the very condition of virtue in action.⁵⁶

Diogenes' famous eccentricities, such as hugging a snow-covered statue or rolling around on hot sand,⁵⁷ can be understood as part of a physical *askēsis* to prepare for the threats of fate.⁵⁸ These acts are a kind of bodily self-injury. In this sense, Cynic philosophy requires its practitioners to undergo physical pain. For Cynics, philosophy without pain is a mere 'dead letter' that lacks efficacy.

Of course, we cannot say that Plato was not engaged in physical training in general. He was a gifted wrestler⁵⁹ and his ideal state imposed gymnastic training on philosophers (*R.* 403c–412a). Nonetheless, he recommended that exercise should be gentle and reasonable (or, to exaggerate somewhat, even 'pleasurable'). That is largely because, in Plato's scheme, physical exercise functions only as a preliminary to mental works, helping one's soul to be more well-ordered (*R.* 410b–412a). The Cynics, conversely, appear to have committed themselves to more directly 'painful' exercises, which deviated from the usual framework of gymnastics. Furthermore, such exercises are supposed not merely to prepare but to 'complete' the mental *askēsis* (cf. *D.L.* VI 70 = *SSR* V B 291). The Cynics presented their philosophy as a 'steep and troublesome' (προσάντη τε καὶ δύσκολον) but 'short' (σύντομος / ὀλίγη) path that leads to happiness or virtue; in contrast, Platonic philosophy was 'smooth and easy to follow' (λείαν τε καὶ ῥαδίαν), yet circuitous and 'long' (πολλή).⁶⁰ This analogical antithesis, although oversimplified, seems legitimate in the main. Plato and Diogenes differ significantly in the definition of the *ponoi* they impose upon themselves and their disciples. For the former, *ponos* only denotes 'mental work' or 'healthy exercise'. For the latter, it also means 'physical pain'.⁶¹ Plato certainly did not cause this kind of 'pain' for most of his disciples. Even when he seems to have approved of some bodily punishment for corrective purposes,⁶² Plato likely confined his

⁵⁶ Goulet-Cazé (1986: 151); translated from French.

⁵⁷ Plu. *Apophthegmata Laconica* 233A = *SSR* V B 177; *D.L.* VI 23 = *SSR* V B 174; 34 = *SSR* V B 176. See also Diog. [*Ep.*] XXX 3 = *SSR* V B 560: ἵνα σε [sc. Diogenes] πρὸς ἄμφω συνασκήσω [sc. a *hetairos* of Socrates, alluding to Antisthenes], καὶ καῦμα τὸ ἀπὸ θερμίας καὶ ψυχρὸς τὸ ἀπὸ χειμῶνος.

⁵⁸ For the connection between hugging statues and gymnastic training, see Borthwick (2001). It seems that Diogenes intentionally distorted the gymnastic convention and rendered it painful.

⁵⁹ See Riginos (1976: 41–42).

⁶⁰ Greek expressions are taken from Pseudo-Diogenes' *Thirtieth Epistle* 2 (= *SSR* V B 560). See e.g. *D.L.* VI 104 = *SSR* V A 135; VII 121 = *SSR* V A 136; Diog. [*Ep.*] XII = *SSR* V B 542; XXXVII 4–6 = *SSR* V B 567; Crates Theb. [*Ep.*] VI = *SSR* V H 93; XIII = *SSR* V H 100; Them. *Περὶ ἀρετῆς*. See Emeljanow (1965), Foucault (2009: 189–193) and Prince (2017) for further discussions.

⁶¹ See Montanari (2015: s.v. πόνος).

⁶² E.g. Pl. *Prt.* 325d–e; *Lg.* 764b, 879c–e, 881c–d, 882a–b. See also some anecdotes collected by Riginos (1976: 155–156).

concern to the matters of upbringing or criminal penalties. Therefore, whether we can rightly term it ‘philosophical pain’ is highly doubtful.

4. Conclusion

In the preceding analysis, I have assessed several hypotheses to explain the ‘philosophical pain’ that Diogenes refers to in the two testimonies presented. First, Plutarch interpreted this ‘pain’ purely psychologically as a mental trigger that drives the youth towards further philosophical activity. His view is unconvincing, however, because Plato, who ‘never caused anyone pain’, also seems to have recognised the motivational power of the mental pain associated with philosophy. If we were to follow Plutarch’s interpretation, then, Diogenes’ criticism of Plato would miss the point.

Second, Stobaeus approached the issue from the perspective of the close connection between *parrhēsia* and philosophy: telling the truth as a philosopher often results in hurting someone. Nevertheless, again, the difficulty emerges that Plato does not appear indifferent to *parrhēsia* in general. To examine this problem further, I introduced in Section 2 a distinction between two kinds of *parrhēsia*: ‘telling the truth’ and ‘openly making abusive remarks’. Plato and Socrates, while deeply committed to the former, were thoroughly opposed to the latter because their philosophy called for the maintenance of an interactive dialogue (or collaboration). In contrast, Diogenes, who had no philosophical reason to support dialogue, resorted to one-sided and unavoidable insults to drag the lukewarm masses into the arena of philosophical criticism. Diogenes, therefore, clearly differed from Plato in inflicting completely passive pain on his targets.

Third, I called attention to the Cynic doctrine of ‘double *askēsis*’, which demands that philosophers experience corporeal pain. While Plato also emphasised physical *ponoi*, that was only in the sense of ‘exercise’. In contrast, Diogenes recognised the significance of *ponoi* in the sense of ‘pain’. This approach offered him a harsh but economical shortcut to happiness, unlike Plato’s speculative philosophy, which was circuitous and required much time. To summarise, the ‘philosophical pain’ caused by each philosopher can be arranged into the following schema:⁶³

⁶³ Note that (1) the distinction between active and passive pain is based on the perspective of the sufferer and (2) this schema does not consider whether the philosopher himself is a sufferer (mainly because the experience of ‘philosophical pain’ could gradually transform the sufferer into a new philosopher who would, in turn, hurt another sufferer).

Classification of Philosophical Pain

	PARTLY ACTIVE	COMPLETELY PASSIVE
MENTAL	E.g. recognising one's ignorance	E.g. being dragged onto the Cynic stage
PHYSICAL	E.g. exercise/self-injury	E.g. bodily punishment/ injury done by others

The pain involved in Plato's philosophy is either active and mental (i.e. mental pain that sufferers somewhat voluntarily choose) or qualified and physical (i.e. healthy exercise and, if any, corrective chastisement; the former, however, is in a sense pleasurable and the latter is, at best, incidental). Contrarily, the pain caused by Diogenes covers at least three cells of the schema without qualification: active and mental, passive and mental (see Section 2 *supra*) and active and physical (see Section 3 *supra*). Concerning passive physical pain, some qualifications may be required. Certainly, Diogenes always exposed himself to assault by rogues;⁶⁴ it seems possible to call this 'passive physical pain'. However, we should note that he was deliberately trying to experience such pain, at least in part.⁶⁵ Therefore, in Diogenes' case, the distinction between active and passive physical pain is obscure and not overly enlightening.

In conclusion, the Cynic criticism of Plato reported in the two testimonies considered here has rightly (but elusively) highlighted a decisive point of contention between the two sides. While the Cynics' appeal to 'philosophical pain' might sound rather radical or violent, such dire paradoxicality enabled them to complement Plato and illuminate his blind spots from an idiosyncratic perspective. Therefore, even though (or even because) our moral standards can no longer be reconciled with Cynic vandalism, its philosophical importance remains today.

There are further considerations for future studies. First, this article has not assumed any substantial diachronic change in Plato's philosophy and referred to his diverse works as roughly unitary. In my view, and only within the scope of the preceding discussion, Plato's opinions did not fundamentally change throughout his career. However, this belief needs to be justified by specific research. Second, we cannot say that the various interpretations of 'philosophical pain' dealt with in this article exhaust all the possibilities. Several factors remain untouched and require further exploration. To give just one example, the Cynic claim of the necessity of 'pain' may have constituted a euphemistic critique

⁶⁴ See e.g. SSR V B 456–7; D.L. VI 33 = SSR V B 412; 41 = SSR V B 57; 42 = SSR V B 483; 43 = SSR V B 169; 89 = SSR V H 36; 90 = SSR V H 35; Diog. [Ep.] XX = SSR V B 550.

⁶⁵ See e.g. D.L. VI 54 = SSR V B 456: ἐρωτηθεὶς τί θέλοι κονδύλου λαβεῖν, 'περικεφαλαίαν,' ἔφη [sc. Diogenes].

of contemporaries other than Plato, especially the hedonistic Cyrenaics. Interestingly, the *Twenty-Ninth Epistle* 1, quoted in Section 3, refers to Plato alongside Aristippus, the founder of the Cyrenaic School.⁶⁶ Since the ‘Plato’ depicted in Cynic anecdotes is often a highly vulgarised figure,⁶⁷ we could regard him as the exact equivalent of Aristippus or the epitome of hedonism, his respectable dialogues notwithstanding.⁶⁸ In any case, however, the issue of ‘philosophical pain’ has such broad implications that these cannot be exhausted by such a facile interpretation alone.

⁶⁶ For Aristippus among the Cynic epistles, see Hock (1976: 48–53).

⁶⁷ The Cynic-caricatured Plato built an immoral relationship with tyrants. See *SSR* V B 55–56, 58–59, 559, 576.

⁶⁸ Aristippus and Plato were generally at loggerheads in the anecdotal tradition, as shown by various testimonies collated by Riginos (1976: 101–108). However, Cynic radicalism blurs the differences between them.

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MASAKI NAGAO
/ The University of Tokyo, Japan /
masaki.nagao98@gmail.com

The Pain of Philosophy: A Cynic Objection to Plato

According to the apophthegm reported by Plutarch and Stobaeus (SSR V B 61), Diogenes the Cynic accused Plato of ‘causing pain to no one’ during his long philosophical career. This article considers whether this critique of Plato is accurate by examining previous interpretations and proposing others. First, Plutarch understood the ‘pain’ required by Diogenes as a psychological motivator that drives the young to study hard. This interpretation, however, is implausible because Plato does not seem unfamiliar with this treatment of ‘pain’. Second, Stobaeus connected pain with *parrhēsia*, likely supposing that a philosopher should tell the truth even if it hurts his audience. Nevertheless, his account needs further clarification since Plato also emphasises the importance of *parrhēsia*. To resolve the problem, this article proposes a distinction between two kinds of *parrhēsia*: ‘telling the truth’ and ‘openly making abusive remarks’. Unlike Plato, the Cynics occasionally resort to the latter, which causes sufferers completely passive pain. This kind of pain is certainly alien to Plato’s philosophy, which presupposes some active participation by sufferers. Finally, the article introduces the Cynic concept of *askēsis* to illuminate another aspect of ‘philosophical pain’. While Plato confines his *askēsis* to mental labour or moderate physical exercise, the Cynics also demand that individuals undergo physical pain in the course of *askēsis*. In conclusion, the article argues that Diogenes’ objection to Plato is apt, at least in light of two antithetical natures of ‘pain’: passive/active and physical/mental.

KEY WORDS

Plato, Diogenes the Cynic, Cynicism, philosophical pain, *parrhēsia*, *askēsis*.

