

The Greek and Roman Cynics presented themselves as philosophers who “deface the currency” by rejecting traditions and challenging social convention . From their unusual attire (double cloak, wallet, staff, dirty beard) to their often theatrical behavior (sleeping in *pithoi*, rejecting wealth, public masturbation, hugging statues) the Cynics dared to be different. However, when it comes to the conception of masculinity and disdain of and hostility toward effeminacy, they seem to be as conventional and narrow minded as any other Greek or Roman males. This paper examines this phenomenon especially as it relates to the Roman Cynics.

I argue that there are at least two elements underlying the Cynic hostility to effeminacy in males: First, I will show that the Cynics’ (and Stoics’) ideal of following nature had direct implication in terms of the presentation of gender. Although rejecting other forms of essentialism, the Cynics and Stoics did conceive gender in an essentialist way. Since following nature had normative implications, both sects concluded that for a man to act effeminately was a betrayal of nature. I reject the notion that the origins of this essentialism were cosmological. Instead, I will show that the Cynics saw the body semiotically. The body, including (or especially) its public presentation, is a mirror of the “firmness” (*tonos*) of the soul.

Secondly, and this relates to the first point, the general normative distinction between masculine and feminine was so fundamental and so much a part of Roman culture that it simply did not occur to the Cynics to seriously evaluate the naturalism of masculinity; the fact that “gender bending” was not even considered as a legitimate form of social revolt, while public sex and masturbation was, shows the centrality of this value. In order to demonstrate that this prioritizing of the masculine shows that this bias was not primarily a philosophical supposition, I draw attention to Hipparchia, the wife of Crates. When she converted to Cynicism she did not follow nature by emphasizing female traits as one might expect from a naturalist perspective but rather by dressing and behaving in a masculine way. Hipparchia demonstrates that for men, acting according to nature is not necessarily acting in accord with gender. Effeminacy is against nature for a man, while for women, masculinity is somehow consistent with their gender. Insofar as the Cynics saw their philosophy as not simply reactionary, but as a service to the cosmopolis and a calling from god, only masculine forms of Cynicism prevailed.