

Proposal to the 2008 NEH Summer Stipend program
Professor John Palmer, Philosophy

An English Translation of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*

[This is a successful 2008 NEH Summer Stipend proposal, authored by Professor John Palmer, Department of Philosophy, University of Florida. This PDF includes the: project narrative, bibliography, and sample translation that comprise the major part of the proposal. Not included are the Information Form required by the NEH and the copy of the author's CV that were also included in the application.]

An English Translation of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* Project Narrative

This past summer I was invited by the Commissioning Editor for Philosophy and Classics at Princeton University Press to undertake a new translation, with introductions and supporting material, of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*. The project was officially approved by the press's editorial board earlier this month, and we are currently in the process of discussing contractual details and drawing up a contract. The remainder of this project narrative will provide some idea of just how ambitious an undertaking this is, especially in light of the time-consuming nature of the work of translation. We are accordingly contracting for delivery of the manuscript in three years time. An NEH Summer Stipend during June and July 2008 would enable me to devote my full attention to the project at a critical early stage. My goal during this time will be to draft complete translations of Books II and III of the *Lives*, along with the introductory and supporting material pertaining specifically to these books. Since the project will still be at a formative stage, the work undertaken during this coming summer should be particularly important in further defining the various components of the whole work.

Character, Content, and Importance of Diogenes' *Lives*

Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* is one of the most important sources for the history of ancient Greek philosophy. It is the only work surviving from antiquity that presents a comprehensive overview of philosophy from its earliest origins down through the development of the major Hellenistic schools. In an apt metaphor, Nietzsche described Diogenes as the porter guarding the gate of ancient philosophy's castle. Essentially a vast compilation drawing upon over two hundred authors and three hundred named works of philosophical historiography, and dated on internal criteria to the first part of the third century A.D., the *Lives* provides a wealth of biographical information, many fascinating and sometimes odd anecdotes, major excerpts from important epitomes of the teachings of many of the major thinkers and schools, and even some significant excerpts from their own writings. While Diogenes may have been more interested in the philosophers' characters than in their philosophies, he still managed to provide critical, if sometimes rather basic, outlines of the views of the main philosophical schools.

In Book I.13-16, Diogenes himself describes the principles he employed in organizing his presentation. After discussing the early "sages," he divides the history of philosophy into two major lines of derivation: the Ionian tradition, specified as originating with Anaximander, and the Italian tradition, specified as starting with Pythagoras. His presentation of the so-called Ionian tradition occupies the greater part of the work, comprising Books II through VII. He traces a line of succession from Anaximander via Anaxagoras to Socrates and the Socratics (Book II), then two lines from Socrates: first via Plato (Book III) to the Old, Middle, and New Academies down to Clitomachus (Book IV), and second via the Cynics (Book VI) to the Stoics down to Chrysippus (Book VII). From Plato, Diogenes also traces a line of succession beginning with Aristotle and continuing with the members of the Peripatetic school (Book V). All these lines of succession comprise what Diogenes calls the Ionian tradition. The second major phase of his work, his exposition of the Italian tradition, begins with the direct line of succession he traces from Pythagoras to other members of the Pythagorean school (Book VIII). While at the end of Book VIII Diogenes refers to the figures treated in Book IX as the "scattered" philosophers (οἱ σποράδην), the Prologue indicates that he sees the Italian tradition as continuing via the Eleatics, Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Zeno, through the atomists, Leukippus, Democritus, and their pupils, down to Epicurus, who receives extensive treatment in Book X.

Because he organized his work to display lines of succession within and among the major philosophical schools, Diogenes has proved to be a particularly important source of information for many of the less familiar figures of Greek philosophy. For the more notable figures, he provides some extremely useful

documentation, particularly in the lists of their works deriving from Hellenistic library catalogues, but also with dates, letters (though many of these are certainly spurious), and even last wills and testaments. Diogenes makes a particular point of furnishing a general survey of the views of each school, often in the course of the *Life* of its founder. We thus have in Diogenes major doxographies for the Cyrenaics (II.86-99), Academics (III.47-109), Peripatetics (V.28-34), Cynics (VI.103-5), Stoics (7.38-159), Pythagoreans (8.24-25), Sceptics (9.79-105), and Epicureans (10.29-154). For the Presocratics, who generally are not so easily grouped into "schools" with an official set of doctrines, Diogenes tends to provide individual summaries of their views. The lengthy Stoic doxography and what is in fact a survey of Pyrrhonian skepticism in the Sceptic doxography are especially valuable, as is the Epicurean doxography, which actually preserves the three extant letters by Epicurus and the collection of his maxims known as the "Principal Doctrines" (Κυριαὶ Δοξαί). In the case of Plato and Aristotle, whose works we are fortunate to be able to read firsthand, and even Socrates, whom we know through better sources, Diogenes provides an invaluable window into how their philosophies came to be represented at a certain point in the later tradition.

Prospectus for a new English translation

There has been no English translation of Diogenes' *Lives* at all since that by R. D. Hicks in his 1925 Loeb Classical Library edition. (Also available, in a cheap reprint edition by Kessinger Publishing, is the wretched "literal translation" by Charles Duke Yonge, originally published in the Bohn's Classical Library [London, 1853]; now in the public domain, this version has found its way onto the internet at a site called "Peitho's Web.") My overall aims are: (i) to produce a translation at once authoritative, readable, and more accurate and up-to-date than Hicks's Loeb version; (ii) to base the translation throughout on the best current textual scholarship; and (iii) to equip it with introductory and supporting materials that will make Diogenes' work both accessible to the general audience and serviceable to professional scholars. The accompanying appendix, which provides a sample translation of an excerpt from Diogenes' *Life of Pythagoras* in Book VIII, will hopefully be indicative of my ability to carry out the first of these aims. Here let me say something about the second and third.

The new translation will in fact be the first English version based on a critical edition of the Greek text. There was no such edition when Hicks made his translation: the text he used and printed was what he called an "eclectic text" based primarily on Cobet's 1850 edition for the Parisian press of A. Firmin Didot. There have since appeared not one but two major critical editions: the 1964 Oxford Classical Text by H. S. Long and the 1999 Teubner Library text by M. Marcovich. Long's OCT has been much criticized, and it is certainly not one of the series' better editions. As for the Teubner text, while it is an improvement in some respects, Marcovich acknowledges that deteriorating health prevented him from bringing his edition to the desired state of completion. Despite neither being ideal, the texts in Long's OCT and Marcovich's Teubner are nevertheless both superior to the "eclectic text" Hicks prepared for his Loeb edition. By comparing the two critical editions, by also taking into account the good editions there have been of limited portions of the work, and by attending to Laertian scholarship more broadly, it will be possible to make informed decisions about the text in those places where it seems uncertain. These will be duly noted in an Appendix of Textual Notes explaining, where necessary, just what text is being translated and why. There is also some hope that Tiziano Dorandi will complete his long-awaited critical edition of Diogenes Laertius for the Collection Budé, as this can certainly be expected to be a major contribution to the establishment of the text.

It will be very important, furthermore, to provide the translation with a good introduction, both to the *Lives* as a whole and to each individual book, and to follow the translation with the kind of indices, glossaries, and other supporting material required to make it as user-friendly as possible. Here the main objective will be to deal briefly but effectively with the kind of questions anyone reading Diogenes is

bound to have, especially those reading him for the first time. For example: What is this book? When was it written? Is it really a history of ancient Greek philosophy? Who was Diogenes Laertius? What were his purposes and methods in writing the *Lives*? Did he have any philosophical agenda of his own? Who are all these other authors Diogenes keeps quoting as sources? How reliable are his reports about the philosophers he discusses? Where should I go to find out more about them? Does the work as a whole have any particular structure? Do the individual books, or even their individual *Lives*? What are their internal organizing principles? If I'm interested primarily in a particular thinker, school, or topic, where will I find this discussed? If the introductions give the reader an informed view on such basic questions as these, and if the material following the translation provides some more specific types of orientation, then the reader should be able to read Diogenes' *Lives* more easily and profitably, with genuine understanding. In preparing these introductions and the supporting material, it will of course be crucial to take account of the scholarship of the past few decades both on Diogenes Laertius specifically and on ancient philosophical historiography more generally.

Given that each of the works ten books raises problems of its own, it is particularly important that each book have its own introduction addressing questions not covered in the general introduction. Questions, for example, regarding the reliability of Diogenes' information are best answered on an individual basis. In the *Life* of Pythagoras, for instance, Diogenes employs a particularly good source for the doxography in §§ 25-33, the report of the Pythagorean *hypomnemata* in Alexander Polyhistor's *Successions of the Philosophers*; for by going back to this 1st c. B.C. source, Diogenes provides a snapshot of Pythagorean teaching free from the influence of subsequent Neopythagoreanism. Other questions regarding the structure and content of each Book will likewise best be treated in targeted introductions, where directions to other ancient sources as well as key modern scholarship can also be provided. Left for the general introduction will be discussions of Diogenes' identity, what may be inferred regarding his own agenda and philosophical persuasion, the nature of his work and its relation to the broader tradition of ancient philosophical historiography, his methods of composition and the work's broader structure, and its importance and influence. The supplementary material at the back of the volume will include an Appendix of textual Notes, an Index of Philosophers and Topics, an Index and Glossary of Authors Employed by Diogenes as Sources, with a Concordance of their Fragments keyed to modern editions, and an Index of Other Individuals.

Conclusion

While Diogenes' *Lives* is of foremost interest to historians of ancient philosophy, scholars working in other areas, in both philosophy and classical studies, should also be interested in having a reliable and modern English translation of the work. Since the work has also had an important history of reception, the translation should also be of interest to those specializing in the subsequent history of European thought, particularly during the early modern period. Apart from being an important source for ancient philosophy as well as the major extant example of ancient philosophical historiography, Diogenes' *Lives* are also fascinating and intriguing in their own right and therefore should interest the curious and intelligent general reader. Witness the success of the 1999 re-edition of the French translation as well as the numerous reprintings and re-editions of Marcello Gigante's Italian translation (Bari 1962¹, 1972², 1983³, 1987⁴, repr. Milan 1991, Rome/Bari 1998). It is almost scandalous that English readers are so poorly served by comparison. By providing an essential source for both scholars in a range of disciplines and laypersons interested in intellectual history and the history of philosophy in particular, I hope this project will further understanding of origins and early history of both philosophy and philosophical historiography. Perhaps more importantly, I hope it promote appreciation of how philosophy in antiquity was conceived of as inseparable from the life and character of its proponents, for this is certainly one of the most important things Diogenes hoped to communicate.

Project Bibliography

Texts. For the text of Diogenes Laertius, I shall, as indicated, be relying principally upon M. Marcovich's edition in the *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* series (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1999) and on H. S. Long's edition in the Oxford Classical Text series (Oxford, 1964). An edition of the text of Diogenes by T. Dorandi has long been projected to appear in the comparable French series, the Collection Budé, and I sincerely hope that it does appear during the course of my work given certain problems with these two present editions; but my editor, the project reviewers, and I agree that work on the project should not be delayed in the meantime. **Translations.** The only English translation of note is that of R. D. Hicks in his Loeb Classical Library edition of Diogenes Laertius (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1925). There is also the Italian translation by M. Gigante, *Diogene Laerzio: Vite dei filosofi* (Bari, 1962; augmented 3rd edition, 1983), and the French translation by a team of scholars under the direction of M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *Diogène Laërce: Vies et doctrines des philosophes illustres* (Paris, 1999²), both of which are superior to Hicks English translation. There is also a less worthy German translation by F. Jürss in Reclam's Universalbibliothek series (Stuttgart, 1998), which does not surpass O. Apelt's *Diogenes Laertius, Leben und Meinungen berühmter Philosophen* (Leipzig, 1921). **Secondary Works.** Here I merely list a few of the more important works specifically pertaining to Diogenes Laertius to be consulted in preparation of the general introduction as well as the introductions to each of the ten books. (It will also be necessary to work with relevant editions and studies of the individual philosophers represented in Diogenes, but I shall not list such works here.) A monograph of fundamental importance is Jørgen Mejer's *Diogenes Laertius and His Hellenistic Background* (Wiesbaden, 1978). Also important is Mejer's "Diogenes Laertius and the transmission of Greek philosophy," the first of a series of very useful articles on Diogenes in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Band II, 36.5 and 36.6 (Berlin and New York, 1992), with the remaining articles focusing on individual books—with G. Giannantoni on Socrates and the Socratics in Book II; L. Brisson on Plato in Book III; T. Dorandi on the Academics in Book IV; M. G. Sollenberger on Aristotle and the Peripatetics in Book V; M.-O. Goulet-Cazé and again A. Brancacci on the Cynics in Book VI; D. E. Hahm on the Stoics in Book VII; B. Centrone on the Pythagoreans in Book VIII; F. Deleva Caizzi on the 'scattered' philosophers in Book IX; J. Barnes on the Pyrrhonists in Book IX; and M. Gigante on Epicurus and Epicureanism in Book X. This series of usually lengthy articles will be an extremely useful point of departure for the set of introductions. Among more recent works of some scope are: R. Goulet, "Des sages parmi les philosophes: le premier livre des Vies des philosophes de Diogène Laërce," in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, G. Madec, and D. O'Brien (eds.), *Sophiês Maiêtotes: hommage à Jean Pépin* (Paris, 1992), 167-178; A. Chitwood, *The Deaths of the Greek Philosophers*, diss. The Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, 1993); K. A. Algra, "Gassendi e le texte de Diogène Laërce," *Elenchos* 15 (1994), 79-103; W.-R. Mann, "The life of Aristippus," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 78 (1996), 97-119; J. L. Calvo Martínez, "El 'bios' de Diógenes el cínico en Diógenes Laercio," in J. A. Sánchez Marín, J. L. Tuero, and C. López Rodríguez (eds.), *Historiografía y Biografía: Actas del Coloquio Internacional sobre Historiografía y Niografía* (Madrid, 1997), 139-150; J. Bollansée, "Animadversiones in Diogenem Laertium," *Rheinisches Museum* 144 (2001), 64-106; M. Gigante, "Il bios laerziano di Epimenide," in E. Federico and A. Visconti (eds.), *Epimenide cretese* (Naples, 2001), 7-24.; and R. Goulet, *Études sur les vies de philosophes dans l'antiquité tardive: Diogène Laërce, Porphyre de Tyr, Eunape de Sardes* (Paris: 2001). There are, in addition, notes and articles too numerous to list here on minor issues pertaining to the establishment of the text at particular points, minor historical and philosophical questions, and so on.

Sample Translation from Diogenes Laertius's *Life Of Pythagoras* (Bk. VIII, §§22-5)

... (22) He is said to have advised his pupils as follows. To say these things whenever one enters the house: "Where did I go wrong? What did I accomplish? What did I not do that I should have?" Not to permit offering sacrificial victims to the gods, but only to do obeisance at an altar unstained with blood. Not to swear by the gods—for one should make oneself the kind of person who inspires confidence. To respect those who are older, keeping in mind that what comes first in time is more worthy of respect: as in the cosmos rising precedes setting, and in life the beginning precedes the end, in every living creature birth precedes death. (23) Also, to honor gods before protective deities, heroes before humans, and, among humans, to honor parents most of all. To deal with one another so as to turn enemies into friends, and not to make friends into enemies. To consider nothing one's own. To support law and to combat lawlessness. Neither to kill nor to injure a cultivated tree or even an animal that does no harm to humans. That modesty and prudence involve neither to giving way to laughter nor wearing a long face. To avoid too much meat. To vary one's pace on a journey. To train the memory. Neither to say nor to do anything in anger. (24) To respect all divination. To employ hymns and songs on the lyre to show appropriate gratitude to gods and good men. To abstain from beans because their tendency to cause wind means they share especially in the vital force; and, besides, not eating them tends to make the digestive tract more orderly. For this reason, abstention also produces gentle and unagitated dreams.

In *The Successions of the Philosophers*, Alexander says that he found these points too in Pythagorean *hypomnemata*.¹ (25) The monad is the source of all things. From the monad comes the indefinite dyad as matter for the monad, which is itself the causal principle. From the monad and the indefinite dyad come the numbers. From the numbers come points; from these come the lines, from which the plane figures come; and from the plane come the solid figures. From these come the perceptible bodies, of which there are four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—that interact and are entirely transformed. From these there comes to be a cosmos that is animate, intelligent, and spherical. It embraces the earth at its center, which is itself spherical and inhabited all around. There are indeed people on the other side, and what is down for us is up for them.

(26) There are equal portions of light and dark in the cosmos, and of heat and cold, and dry and wet. Summer occurs when heat predominates, and winter when cold. ...

¹ Although the term "*hypomnemata*" is variously translated in this context as "memoirs" or "commentaries," just what these works were remains unclear. See above, xx, for further discussion of the Pythagorean doxography that here follows.

TEXTUAL NOTES {in appendix} §22: "To respect..." While the manuscripts are divided between τιμᾶν and τιμᾶν δεῖν, the former preserves the proper parallelism with μηδ' ὀμνύναι θεούς at the beginning of the previous sentence, while δεῖν seems to have entered the text under the influence of ἀσκειῖν...δεῖν. §23: In the first sentence of this section, M. follows Cobet in adding δαίμονας δὲ ἠρώων from the parallel passage at Iambli. *VP* 37, but this extra clause appears in none of the Laertian manuscripts. "That modesty and prudence involve..." is an attempt to translate the manuscripts' αἰδῶ καὶ εὐλάβειαν εἶναι. The awkwardness of the construction has led to suspicions of corruption, but none of the proposed corrections—αἰδοῖ καὶ εὐλαβεῖα συνεῖναι (Menagius), μετεῖναι (Reiske), ἐνεῖναι (M.)—makes things much better. §24: "To abstain..." The manuscripts variously give ἀπέχεσθαι, ἀπηγόρευεν ἀπέχεσθαι, and ἀπηγόρευεν ἔχεσθαι. The first of these variants, also given in the *Suda*, is accepted by L. and has been adopted here. M. prints ἀπηγόρευε γεύεσθαι, this being his own conjecture.