# Creative visualizations of ethical principles of Ancient Greek Cynicism and their significance to modern society

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This article analyzes the application of creative visualization in the ethics of Ancient Greek Cynicism. The author concentrates on visualizations of 2 fundamental ethical principles (vicious chase of pleasures and virtuous radical temperance) and their relevance to modern society. The author comes to a conclusion that Cynics visualized the first principle through the image of a never-ending wheel of slavery and a concrete illness – dropsy, whereas the second one was visualized through the image of remedy for the above mentioned disease and slavery as well as images of the result of taking that remedy, that is, permanent health, freedom and happiness. The both visualizations bear an evident creative character. The other important conclusion is that those visualizations are not relevant to contemporary society. Yet, being prototypes of relevant modern visualizations of hasty chase of pleasures and mild temperance, they retain significance to that society.

**Key words:** Cynicism, creativity, visualization, temperance, surplus of pleasures, happiness

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of creativity is characteristic of different cultures, civilizations and historical epochs. Every epoch and civilization acquires certain specific features and aspects of creativity. Yet, this phenomenon always sustains some common characteristics. According to J. P. Guilford (1971), the main qualities of creative thinking are fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration and sensitivity to an actual creative problem. J. Howkins (2001) defines creativity as the ability to generate something new; as the production by one or more people of ideas and inventions that are personal, original, and meaningful. R. Florida (2002) also emphasizes the importance on novelties in creative activity. In his opinion, the Innovation Index is one of the constituent parts of the Creativity Index of a certain society (the other ones are Creative Class, High-Tech and Diversity Indices). Those and the other aspects of creativity were recently analyzed by Aglinskas (2014), Kačerauskas (2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2015), Barevičiūtė (2014), Juzefovič (2014; 2015), Lavrinec (2014), Mitkus (2013).

Creativity as a multidimensional phenomenon manifests itself in various areas. One of the latter is the sphere of imagination, imaging and visualization. The term "creative visualization" is mostly used in the psychological sense. In that context it means a technique using one's imagination to create and visualize scenarios in the mind's eye in order to translate them into reality (Wattles 2009); a technique of using imagination to create what one wants in his/her life (Gawain 2002). In this article the above mentioned term will be used in the widest possible sense – as creative delivering of a visual shape to certain ideas, conceptions, problems, convictions, doubts, questions etc.

While analyzing creative visualization (as well as any manifestation of creativity), it is important not to leave a historical perspective out of consideration. The latter allows us to identify the ideological and historical background of the given type of creativity as well as vouchsafes its deeper, wider and sounder understanding. This article analyses the technique and manifestations of creative visualization included in the ethics of Ancient Greek Cynicism.

Various aspects of the ethics of Cynicism were analyzed by Dudley (1937), Höistad (1948), Sayre (1948), Malherbe (1977), Downing (1992), Navia (1996; 2001; 2005), Valatka (1999), Cutler (2005), Mustain (2011), Redmond (2013), Desmond (2006; 2008). This article investigates ancient Cynicism in the new and almost unexplored aspect, that is, creative imagination. It concentrates on creative imaging by Cynics of 2 fundamental ethical principles – vicious surplus of pleasures and virtuous radical temperance, as well as relevance of these visualizations to the contemporary society.

## VICIOUS SURPLUS OF PLEASURES AND ITS VISUALIZATIONS

The Philosophical School of Cynics founded in Athens at the end of the 5th century BC by Antisthenes (445–365 BC) and Diogenes of Sinope (412–323 BC) was one of the most original phenomena of Ancient Greek philosophy and ethics. The Cynics gained fame mostly because of the revolt against Antique civilization and its morals, which was the first total revolt against civilization in the history of Western thought. According to Cynics, civilization annihilates temperance – the essential virtue of human nature, leading to a healthy and happy life. Moreover, civilization replaces natural temperance with surplus of pleasures, which is especially harmful to human nature.

Why, according to Cynics, the chase of that surplus is such a tragedy for mankind? Why did the founder of the Cynical School Antisthenes maintain: "I'd rather be mad than feel pleasure" (Diogenes Laertius 1925: 5)? The answer lies in one of the main principles of Cynicism ethics. It is the principle of a flywheel. According to it, the greater surplus of pleasures a person achieves, the greater surplus of pleasures he desires in the nearest future.

To be prevented from a merely theoretical status, this principle required convincing visualization. First of all, it was concretized through the image of slavery. According to Cynics, in the wheel of pleasures a person little by little loses his/her natural freedom and becomes a total slave to surplus of pleasures. He/she permanently chases for pleasures, constantly desires them, having no possibility to live out of their reach. Nevertheless, no surplus of pleasures can fully satisfy him/her, no indulgence in pleasures can procure him/her with tranquility and happiness.

On the other hand, turning in a circle of pleasures was visualized by the image of a certain illness – dropsy. Cynics compared the hunter for pleasures with a man possessed with that malady: this man is constantly being tortured by unappeasable thirst, and the more abundantly his thirst is satisfied, the greater it grows (Stobaeus 1822: 295). This general image of

dropsy was individualized into concrete images, or manifestations, of dropsy: property, power, fame, sexual pleasure and so on. According to Cynics, those things never suffice. A person is never satisfied with wealth and fame he/she possesses; there is no end to striving and strengthening of power and so on.

The both visualizations of a vicious flywheel of pleasures bore an evident creative character. Firstly, they were sensible to the actual problem of Antique civilization – the permanent chase for pleasures. Secondly, they have to be regarded as new and original visualizations in the general context of Classic Greek culture. For a citizen of classic world numerous pleasures were a certain objective visualized through the images of prosperous terrestrial life and never-ending feast in the Elysian Fields after death. So, surplus of pleasures was not associated with slavery and illness. Lastly, the above mentioned visualizations were well elaborated – Cynics presented detailed descriptions of manifestations of slavery and dropsy caused by pleasures.

## VIRTUOUS RADICAL TEMPERANCE AND ITS VISUALIZATIONS

According to Cynics, human nature under conditions of civilization is seriously ill. To prevent it from death it is necessary to heal that serious disease. But what kind of treatment is required? After Cynics, there is only one effective medicine, namely, the return to natural temperance – the essential and universal human virtue.

Speaking about this medicine Cynics did not mean an ordinary temperance – the sense of proportion in everything. In fact, they were talking about a radical temperance – the ultimate constraint of human needs. In modern terms such a variant of temperance may be entitled as the ultimate reduction of consumption. According to Cynics, only a minimal quantity of food, drink, sexual pleasures, clothes, shoes and other goods is able to fully content human nature; to provide human being with self-sufficient pleasures not leading to surplus. On the other hand, minimal human needs are the most necessary ones, which actually can be fulfilled always and everywhere. Hence, such a minimal number of needs guarantee the absence of fear of the future as well as tranquility and good disposition of human soul that, as Cynics believed, is nothing else but human happiness itself (Stobaeus 1824: 294).

Therefore, if chasing for pleasures was visualized through the images of an ill and enslaved man, the temperance, on the contrary, was interpreted and propagated by the image of remedy (*pharmakon*) as well as the images of a free, healthy and entirely happy man. The latter images sometimes acquired even cosmopolitan dimension turning into the image of citizen of Universe capable of living free and happy life in any part of it. The spatio-temporal universality of that image was represented in a double way. Firstly, by the mythical Past, that is, scenes from lives of people of the Golden Age. Secondly, by the utopian and mythologized Presence: remote imaginary islands and some idealized Barbarian tribes and states.

## VISUALIZATIONS OF TEMPERATE LIFE IN MYTHICAL PAST

Let us examine all of these visualizations. And let us start from the vision of the Golden Age. Cynics interpreted it in a Hesiodic manner – as state of universal morality, happiness, peace and tranquility. According to them, moderate people of that age were entirely satisfied with the gifts given to them by generous nature and fertile soil. The universal human equality also prevailed in those days. According to the famous Greek sillograph and sceptic Lucian, who ardently sympathized with Cynical philosophy, in the times of Golden Age "slavery was not" (Lucian, 1905: 111). Unfortunately, this blissful pre-civilization and natural state was replaced with maleficent civilization. The latter, having denied the maxim of natural temperance, heavily and for a long

time mutilated human nature. According to the most famous Cynical philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, all the contrivances of civilized men did not brought them any use: "man's ingenuity and his discovering and contriving so many helps to life had not been altogether advantageous to later generations, since men do not employ their cleverness to promote courage or justice, but to procure pleasure" (Dio Chrysostom 1932: 266).

So, surplus of pleasures was announced by civilization as the supreme good. The means procuring such a surplus (wealth, fame, power, nobility etc.) have also acquired a high status in the frames of civilization. Surplus of pleasures having become an analogue of happiness, people began an inevitable and severe fight for it and its means. This fight was followed by wars; wealth, social and legal inequalities (that is, unequal distribution of pleasures and their sources within society as well as uneven diffusion of social and juridical power) and, finally, slavery – the most loathsome vice of civilization.

But when has it all happened? As it is already noticed, Cynics established predominance of natural temperance in the vision of blessed Golden Age. Hence it is natural that in their interpretation malignant civilizational turn also did not escape creative mythical visualization – it was Titan Prometheus that was announced a destructor on the natural state of mankind and a creator of civilization. In other words, the figure of Prometheus became creative visualization of civilizational turn. In the eyes of Cynics he was regarded as a progenitor and a *primus motor* of all disasters of the human race.

At first sight such a position could appear suspiciously strange, for it was precisely in Ancient Greece that Prometheus was probably the most adored and worshipped mythical hero. Yet, knowing the strict orientation of Cynics toward the virtue of temperance, the above mentioned position becomes absolutely reasonable. As a well-known myth relates, Prometheus granted fire to the human race. In the eyes of a typical ancient Greek such an action was nothing but a real deed – the gift of Prometheus facilitated the hard life of human beings. Still, extremely temperate Cynics did not regard this action as a heroic one. Theft of fire from gods and donating it to human beings was considered the most serious crime, for which Prometheus was rightly punished. According to Diogenes, "Prometheus was justly said to have been bound to the rock and to have had his liver plucked by the eagle" (Dio Chrysostom 1932: 267). The reason is absolutely clear – the bestowal of fire was "the origin and beginning of man's softness and love of luxury" (Dio Chrysostom 1932: 265). In other words, it was the first step of mankind to civilization and its surplus of pleasures. Thus Cynics visualized domination of natural temperance and its decay because of civilizational turn within the frames of original creative synthesis of the myths of Golden Age and Prometheus.

## VISUALIZATIONS OF TEMPERATE LIFE IN MYTHOLOGIZED AND UTOPIAN PRESENCE

But what about this turn? Is it complete, irreversible and irrevocable? By no means! Cynics did not lock the realm of temperance in the mythical past. Gone Golden Age was not the only visualization of freedom, health and happiness of a moderate way of life. The areas of temperance were as well projected in the utopian or, at least, mythologized Presence: remote imaginary islands and some idealized Barbarian tribes. Let us analyze all of these creative visualizations.

First of all, Cynics found relics of once global Golden Age in some Barbarian tribes – Persians, Scythians, etc. According to Cynics, these tribes have not yet lost the primordial relation and contact with global and human nature. The perfect ascetic life of theirs hardening both flesh and spirit was constantly held up as an example to contemporary Greeks that were regarded as absolutely lax and corrupted by vices.

In the eyes of Cynics, the most representative personifications of such an ascetic life were the Persian king Cyrus and the Scythian sage Anacharsis. It is interesting to note that the founder of the Cynical philosophical school Anthistenes compared Cyrus to the Antique Greek hero Heracles – the paragon of morality, temperance, hardiness and diligence (Diogenes Laertius 1925: 5). As for Anacharsis, he was also praised for the above mentioned virtues. An unknown Cynical author put those words into the mouth of Anacharsis: "My clothing is a Scythian mantle, my shoes the thick skin of the soles of my feet, my bed is the earth, hunger my relish. I live on milk, cheese, and flesh" (Cicero 1927: 516). Such a moderate food is generously provided by numerous herds of cattle. Those herds, as well as the whole Scythian land, are common property of all the Scythians[1]; therefore the latter fight for neither such a land nor any other wealth. And what is more, Scythians are never being attacked by external aggressors fearing their concord, endurance and fortitude: "We have weapons, not to attack other people, but to defend ourselves, if it should be necessary. And it has not as yet been necessary. For we are set before those who would attack us as combatants and as prizes of combat at the same time. For not many men welcome this prize of combat kindly." (Malherbe 1977: 51).

Visualization of moderate happy life through the examples of Heracles, Cyrus, Anacharsis etc. is an interesting and original creative synthesis of Greek and Barbarian myths. Nevertheless, the real world of Scythians, Persians and the other Barbarians was entirely different. The offensive and plundering wars, subjection and enslavement of defeated, desire for power, fame and luxury – these features were no less specific to "nature-oriented" Barbarians than to civilized Greeks.

Mythologized and idealized Barbarian tribes were not the only points of mythical space, within which Cynical creativity visualized dominance of natural morality and temperance. The unknown and undiscovered lands were also announced as realms of that temperance. As a rule, these lands were remote and distant islands – the results of creative imagination of Cynics. We may interpret them as certain prototypes of the Utopia of Thomas More. The representative example of such an island is Pera described in the poem of the same title by Crates of Thebes (365–285 BC) – the most famous disciple of Diogenes. The term of classical Greek language "pera" (πepa) means sack, and Cynics usually meant by it a sack of a beggar. The latter played a very significant role in the Cynical philosophy and mode of life. It was one of insignias of a real cynic – the representative symbols of the Cynical poverty, temperance and ultimate restriction of human needs[2]. Hence the very title of the island indicates predominance of natural temperance in it. That is how the only extant fragment relates such predominance:

"There is a city Pera in the midst of wine-dark vapour,
Fair, fruitful, passing squalid, owning nought,
Into which sails nor fool nor parasite
Nor glutton, slave of sensual appetite,
But thyme it bears, garlic, and figs and loaves,
For which things' sake men fight not each with other,
Nor stand to arms for money or for fame." (Diogenes Laertius 1925: 89).

Thus all the inhabitants of Pera practice the virtue of temperance. They are easily contented with simple food and drinks as well as a minimal quantity of other natural pleasures.

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[1] "All of us possess the whole earth" (Malherbe 1977: 49).
[2] The other insignias were a cup for water, a beggar's stick and a thin cloak.

All the citizens observing the maxim of temperance, there is no place in Pera for surplus of pleasures established by civilization. There is no room as well for fights for this surplus and its means: fame, wealth, etc.

The visualizations of radical temperance through the image of remedy and images of free and happy life of the inhabitants of Golden Age and remote islands as well as Barbarians bore an evident creative character. Firstly, all those visualizations were sensible to the actual problem of Antique civilization – permanent chase for pleasures. Actually, they were nothing but reactions to that problem proposing certain solutions. Secondly, they were new and original visualizations. For a citizen of classic world radical temperance was associated with neither remedy for social diseases nor tool of happiness. It was rather regarded as a matter of eccentrics, marginals, people rapt in religious mysteries or simply poor folks trying to justify their poverty. As for the gone world of Golden Age and "present" distant islands, they were usually visualized not as places where radical temperance prevailed but as the realms of prosperity and surplus of pleasures that were available without any efforts and labour. As for Barbarians, they were habitually presented as uncivilized creatures, very close to the world of wild animals having no mere concept of real human freedom and happiness and sunken in permanent fights and slaughters. Lastly, the above mentioned original visualizations of Cynics were as well well-elaborated – Cynics presented detailed scenes from the life of inhabitants of Golden Age and remote islands as well as Barbarians.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF CREATIVE VISUALIZATIONS OF CYNICS TO MODERN SOCIETY

The chase of pleasures did not disappear with Antique culture. It is as well typical of the contemporary consumer civilization. Modern science and technologies make variegated pleasures easily accessible to global consumption. Nevertheless, permanent consumption, a fast tempo of everyday life, a desire to be, to have, to do more and faster wears and exhausts a contemporary man. These factors do not allow him to contend himself with simple things, to enjoy life, to experience the beauty of the moment. So, the contemporary chase for pleasures could be visualized through the image of a man who is always in hurry that never stops. He hurries to fulfill his numerous works in order to hurry to relish his desired pleasures, which are quite easily accessible but still quite numerous. Nevertheless, he neither accomplishes his works through, nor fully indulges in desirable pleasures, the quantity of which is increasing together with demand for higher intensity. This man is simply short of time for both of these purposes. Therefore he closes himself in the never-ending circle of unfulfilled works and inexperienced pleasures, and, as Mike Jagger sings, still cannot get any satisfaction.

This modern visualization of the chase for pleasures may be compared with the ancient one, presented by Cynics. The latter visualized that chase through the image of a never-ending wheel of slavery and a very concrete illness – dropsy. The modern image of a man closed in the circle of never-ending hurry also indicates certain slavery and malady. Strictly speaking, this never-ending hurry itself is both slavery and malady. Therefore the modern circle of half-fulfilled works and inexperienced numerous pleasures is nothing but some variation of a classical flywheel of enslaving and dropsical surplus of pleasures. True, being visualization of a different type of slavery and malady, classical visualization cannot be regarded as relevant to contemporary society. Yet, it sustains the status of the prototype of modern visualization. That's where the significance of classical visualization to contemporary situation lies!

And what could stop this vicious circle of never-ending hurry leastwise from time to time or at least slow it a little bit down? One of possible means to do that could be a choice of more temperate way of life, i. e. the reduction of consumption. True, a modern civilized man is used to comfortable life; he is used to desire, have and consume plenty of things. Nevertheless, it is possible just to try to live more temperately refusing what is not necessary. In any case, at least the minimal temperance, minimal reduction of consumption could leastwise minimally improve the quality of life bringing more health, tranquility, stability, consistency and elementary joy. So, contemporary society needs not radical but mild, or moderate, temperance – the sense of proportion in everything.

As it was told, the contemporary chase for pleasures can be illustrated by the image of a man in never-ending haste. The mild temperance, in turn, may be visualized through the image of remedy for that haste as well as the image of a man, who, according to the Latin proverb "Festina lente", hurries quite slowly. Or at least stops that hurry at least for a while to relish beauties of nature, to savor simple food, to talk with friends, to read a good book, to go to theater and so on.

This modern visualization of moderate temperance may be compared with the ancient one of radical temperance, presented by Cynics. The latter visualized temperance through the image of remedy for never-ending chase of pleasures as well as images of the result of taking that remedy, that is, permanent health, freedom and happiness. The modern visualization also involves the image of remedy. It is a medicine for the vicious circle of permanent hurry. On the other hand, modern visualization also includes the image of effect of taking that medicine. The effect lies in slowing down the never-ending hurry or at least breaking it for a while. And this effect is nothing else but a certain health, freedom and happiness that, differently from their classic prototypes, are rather temporal and partial than permanent and integral. Hence the modern visualization of moderate temperance is a certain variation of the classical visualization of radical temperance. True, being visualization of a different type of temperance, classical visualization cannot be regarded as relevant to contemporary society. Yet, it retains significance to the latter as the prototype of modern visualization.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ancient Greek Cynics fully rejected Antique civilization and its morals. According to them, civilization annihilates the essential virtue of temperance and replaces it with the vicious and never-ending chase of pleasures that never suffice. Cynics saw the only possible remedy to break such a chase – the return to natural radical temperance.

In ethics of Cynics the chase of pleasures was visualized through the images of a never-ending wheel of slavery and dropsy. The radical temperance was, in turn, visualized through the image of remedy for the above mentioned disease as well as the images of the result of taking that remedy, that is, permanent health, freedom and happiness. All these visualizations must be regarded as creative ones.

Within the frames of modern civilization the chase of pleasures takes a form of extreme hurry. It can be visualized through the image of a never-ending circle of half-fulfilled works and half-fulfilled as well as inexperienced numerous pleasures. One of possible means to slow this circle down is the mild temperance. It can be visualized through the image of remedy for the above mentioned circle as well as the image of effect of taking that medicine. The effect is again certain health, freedom and happiness that, differently from their classic prototypes, are rather temporal and partial than permanent and integral.

Modern visualizations of the chase of pleasures and temperance are certain variations of classical ones. The latter can no longer be regarded as relevant to the contemporary society. Yet, they retain significance as prototypes of modern visualizations.

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# Kinikų etikos principų kūrybiniai įvaizdinimai ir jų aktualumas šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje

*Santrauka*

Straipsnis analizuoja kūrybinės vizualizacijos taikymą Antikos kinikų etikoje. Autorius susitelkia ties dviejų pamatinių šios etikos principų – ydingosios malonumų pertekliaus medžioklės ir dorybingojo radikalaus saikingumo – įvaizdinimais bei jų reikšmingumu šiuolaikinei visuomenei. Prieinama prie išvados, jog kinikai vizualizavo pirmąjį principą nesibaigiančio vergijos ir konkrečios ligos (t. y. vandenligės) rato vaizdiniu. Antrasis principas buvo vizualizuotas vaistų nuo minėtos ligos ir vergijos vaizdiniu bei šių vaistų vartojimo rezultatų (t. y. nuolatinės sveikatos, laisvės ir laimės) vaizdiniais. Visi šie įvaizdinimai pasižymi akivaizdžiu kūrybingumu. Kitoje išvadoje teigiama, kad minėtos vizualizacijos nebėra aktualios šiuolaikinės visuomenės realijoms. Kita vertus, būdamos modernių skubios malonumų medžioklės ir švelniojo saikingumo vizualizacijų prototipais, jos išlaiko šios visuomenės analizės reikšmingumą.

**Raktažodžiai:** kinikai, kūrybiškumas, vizualizacija, malonumų perteklius, saikingumas, laimė