

Aristippus & Diogenes: Different Choices

A True Story Even If It Never Happened

Aristippus and Diogenes lived in the palace compound of King Denys. Diogenes was a well known advocate of reason and of living simply. Aristippus, on the other hand, was well known as one who sought to maximize his own pleasure, and was willing to do whatever it took to have nice things, an easy life, and to get ahead. In order to have the kind of life he wanted, Aristippus did the King's bidding, flattered him, laughed at his jokes, and did whatever was needed to ingratiate himself with the king.

Diogenes would have none of this: he lived simply, did what he thought was right, and didn't worry about pleasing the king. As a result, the King frequently assigned him the unpleasant task of cleaning the lentils that were brought in from the fields before they could be used in the day's cooking. It was a task that most people sought to avoid.

One day, Aristippus stopped by to talk with Diogenes while he was cleaning lentils. "If you would only flatter the King and pretend to be what he would like you to be, you would not have to clean the lentils." To this Diogenes replied, "If you would only clean lentils you would no longer have to flatter the King and pretend to be someone you are not."