

THE LIFE OF HIPPARCHIA
Diogenes Laertius Book VI. 96-98
Celia Luschnig, Translation and notes copyright 1997.

Hipparchia, the sister of Metrocles,(1) was also captivated by philosophical discourse. Sister and brother were natives of Maroneia.(2)

She fell in love with Crates, his words and his way of life, and took no interest in any of the men who wanted to marry her, not their wealth, not their family connections, not their good looks.(3) Crates was everything to her. It went so far that she threatened her parents with suicide if she could not be married to him. Her parents begged him to make her see reason, and Crates did everything he could. Finally when he was unable to convince her, he rose from his seat and threw off his clothes right in front of her. "Here," he announced, "is your husband-to-be, and this is all he owns: base your decision on this!" He wanted her to know that she would not be his partner unless she shared his way of life.

The girl made her choice and taking up the same style of dress as his she made the rounds with her husband, consorted with him in public, (4) and went out to dinner with him. Once she had gone to Lysimachus' house for a symposium, and while there she confounded Theodorus, nicknamed the Atheist, by posing the following argument:

If it is not wrong for Theodorus to do a particular act, then it is not wrong for Hipparchia to do it.

If Theodorus slaps himself he does nothing wrong, therefore if Hipparchia slaps Theodorus she does nothing wrong either.

He had no answer to this, and he tried to pull up her cloak.(5) But Hipparchia refused to be bullied and did not panic like a woman. And when he said to her: "Is this the woman 'who left her carding combs beside her loom'?"(6) "Yes, Theodorus," she replied, "it is I. But do you think I have made a bad decision if instead of wasting my time at the loom I have used it for my education?" These are among the numerous sayings of the woman philosopher.

Notes:

- (1) Metrocles, in the previous section (VI.94), was introduced as "brother of Hipparchia." He too became a Cynic and disciple of Crates. Crates was a Theban Cynic philosopher whose dates are 368/5-288/5.
- (2) A large town on the Thracian coast.
- (3) The Cynics despised wealth and high birth. Crates himself was so far from handsome that people made fun of him when they saw him doing his exercises (D.L. VI.91).

- (4) This may well mean that they had sex in public. For the sexual practices of Diogenes the Cynic see D.L. VI.69, VI.46, and VI.72. He is said to have practiced "everything in public, both the works of Demeter and those of Aphrodite" (69) and he was criticized not only for publicly masturbating but also for eating in the agora. When Pasicles, the son of Hipparchia and Crates, came of age (after leaving his ephebic training), Crates himself took him to the house of a prostitute and told him, "this is what your father's wedding was like" (D.L. VI.88). Although the climactic third example of Hipparchia's outrageous behavior, going out to dinner, might seem pale beside the former breach of public decency, it leads to the final anecdote. On the other hand, since the same word meaning "be with" is used of the relationship between philosopher and pupils and of that between sexual partners, I prefer to leave the various possibilities for interpretation open.
- (5) A rather rude gesture, since he meant to expose her. Cf. D.L. VI.46, where Diogenes the Cynic refused to answer a question put to him by a flashily dressed teenager unless he lifted his cloak to show whether he was male or female. See also D.L. II.116, Theophrastus, Characters 11.1.2, Diodorus Siculus I.83.
- (6) Appropriating Euripides, Bacchae 1236. In the play the line is spoken by Agave when she boasts of her prowess as a hunter, before realizing that the prey is her own son. The quotation rounds out the hunting image with which the chapter begins: "she was captivated," that is, "hunted" or "caught."

Source: <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/hipparchia.shtml>