ON BION THE BORYSTHENITE

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Bion the Borysthenite\(^1\) is a minor figure in Hellenistic philosophy and literature, of interest to the modern scholar largely because of his influence on some authors of considerably greater intrinsic worth than he himself. But literary curiosity may well wish to find out something of the originator of Lucretius’

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\text{cur non ut uitae plenus conuiua recedis} \quad (3, 938)
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or Horace’s

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\text{crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops} \quad (Odes, 2, 10, 13)
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and in the end a surprisingly vivid picture emerges, of a figure whom several modern writers have clearly found attractive. I have tried to collect most of the evidence for Bion’s life, and have added a discussion of most of the sayings or fragments that can reasonably be attributed to him.\(^2\) It will become clear that, although Diogenes Laertius feels able to classify him as a philosopher and finds a place for him in his successions, we are not dealing with anyone who can be called a systematic philosopher, let alone a creative thinker, but with a practical populariser, who used rhetorical techniques to preach a way of life that was to appeal to the ‘ordinary man’. He was not, it seems, even a remarkably virtuous man; there are a handful of scurrilous stories about him, and he is said to have admitted that he did not practise what he preached (‘nor do boxes profit from the valuable medicaments that they contain’\(^3\)). But enough of what he said is sufficiently memorable to make him worth a little study, and I hope that what follows may excite some interest in a not quite deservedly neglected figure.\(^4\)

Life

Obviously Diogenes Laertius is the main, if not the only source.\(^5\) Within Diogenes’ life the most informative passage is Bion’s reply to Antigonus Gonatas,

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1. The best thing available on Bion is still the Prolegomena of O.Hense’s Teletis Reliquiae, 2nd ed. Tübingen 1909, to which I am greatly indebted. Pages of the prolegomena are cited by Roman numerals, and the fragments of Teles by page and line number of Hense’s edition.
2. See ‘Note on sources’ infra p.80.
3. Gnomologium Vaticanum 157. This collection of sayings (hereinafter GV) may be found in five parts, edited by L.Sternbach, in Wiener Studien 9-11 (1887-89).
4. I have not gone into exhaustive detail on his influence on the Roman poets; here G.C. Fiske (Lucilius and Horace, Madison 1920) and A. Oltramare (Les origines de la diatribe romaine, Lausanne etc. 1926) are valuable, as is E.J. Kenney in his edition of Lucretius III (Cambridge 1971). I have not yet seen Barbara Price Wallach’s Lucretius and the Diatribe against the Fear of Death (Leiden 1976).
‘Who are you among men and from where? Where is your city and who are your parents?’\textsuperscript{6} Bion, realising that he had been slandered, said to him, ‘My father was a freedman, who wiped his nose on his sleeve’ — he meant he was a pickled fish seller\textsuperscript{7} — ‘Borysthenite\textsuperscript{8} by birth, having not a face but the mark of his origin on his face, a sign of the cruelty of his master; my mother was the sort such a man would marry, from a brothel. My father, for a tax offence, was sold with all his household, including us. I was bought by a rhetorician, being young and goodlooking; he died and left me everything. I burnt his books, and scraping everything together I came to Athens and studied philosophy. “Of such ancestry and blood do I claim to be.”\textsuperscript{9} That is my story. So let Persaeus and Philonides stop telling it. Judge me by myself.’\textsuperscript{10}

These words are usually assumed to have been written to Antigonus in a letter, though as far as the context in Diogenes is concerned they could equally well have been spoken. Be that as it may, they have survived, and there is no particular reason for doubting their genuineness; this is supported by the pungency of style and the use of Homeric quotation by both Antigonus and Bion. Like others influenced by the Cynic tradition, Bion was fond of quoting and parodying the poets; moreover there seems to have been at Olbia a tradition of great enthusiasm for Homer, vouched for by Dio Prusaeus and confirmed by archaeological evidence.\textsuperscript{11} Further support may be forthcoming from Horace’s association of Bion with ‘black salt’\textsuperscript{12} and the presumably not unconnected rumour, reported in the Suetonian life of Horace though clearly based on Bion, that Horace’s father was a salt-fish merchant (salsamentarius).\textsuperscript{13}

The sequence of Bion’s philosophical studies at Athens is confused depending as it does on a disputed point in the text of Diogenes Laertius; I shall discuss this later. The tradition of at least a visit, perhaps a long stay, with Antigonus Gonatas, is strong; and Diogenes records that Antigonus sent two attendants to nurse him in his last illness, which took place at Chalcis. He adds that, according to Favorinus, Antigonus himself followed Bion’s funeral. The rest of Diogenes’ life adds little: a visit to Rhodes is twice mentioned, with the famous story of

\textsuperscript{6} Odyssey 10, 325.

\textsuperscript{7} Plutarch may have Bion in mind when he writes (Quaest. Conv. II, 631d): \textit{ο γὰρ εἰπὼν \ ταρσοπώλη\ αὐτὸθεν ἐλοδόρρον, \ ο \ δὲ φήσας \ 'μεμρτμεθά σε τῷ \ βραχίων \ απομπτόμενον; \ έσκωπε.} It was presumably the onions rather than the salt that made this operation necessary (I owe this suggestion to Miss Susan Hope).

\textsuperscript{8} The Borysthenes (mod. Dnepr) flows into the Black Sea near the Crimea; the ancient city nearby was Olbia, on the mouth of the Hypanis (Bug). Nikolayev is the nearest modern town of any size.

\textsuperscript{9} Iliad 6, 211.

\textsuperscript{10} D.L.4, 46-47.


\textsuperscript{12} Epistles 2, 2, 59-60: delectatur…ille Bioneis sermonibus et sale nigro. Naturally ‘coarse wit’ is here another rendering of sale nigro.

\textsuperscript{13} For elucidation of this see E. Fraenkel, Horace (Oxford 1957), 6f.
how Bion persuaded the seamen to wear ‘student garb’ and accompany him to
the gymnasium, and we are told that he moved from city to city. The account of
homosexual activities, though possibly owing something to Bion’s own ‘confes­sions’,
seems to be rather part of the stock in trade of invective; Hense\textsuperscript{14} points
out the suspicious resemblances on this subject between Diogenes’ \textit{Bion} and his
\textit{Arcesilaus}.\textsuperscript{15} More general accusations of luxury and loose living may be better
substantiated; these will be examined later in connexion with Bion’s debt to
Theodorus. Certainly it seems established that he taught for money, doubtless a
principal reason why he could be classed as a sophist.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, Diogenes’
malignious account of the atheist Bion’s superstitious deathbed conversion, on
which he bases an epigram unusual in its awfulness even for Diogenes, may
probably be ignored.

\textbf{Bion’s philosophical studies}

Diogenes’ account is as follows (I quote Hicks’ Loeb translation):

\begin{quote}
Bion at the outset used to deprecate the Academic doctrines, even at the time
when he was a pupil of Crates. Then he adopted the Cynic discipline, donning
cloak and wallet. For little else was needed to convert him to the doctrine of
entire insensibility. Next he went over to Theodorean views, after he had
heard the lectures of Theodorus the Atheist, who used every kind of
sophistical argument. And after Theodorus he attended the lectures of
Theophrastus the Peripatetic.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

This account raises problems:

1. Crates the Academic did not become head of the Academy until 276, while
the other indications would put Bion’s student period considerably earlier than
this, at the latest in the last decade of the fourth century. Therefore some
scholars (e.g. Zeller and von Arnim) have concluded that Crates the Cynic is
meant, or that the name Crates is a mistake for Xenocrates, with whom Diogenes
associates Bion at 4, 10. Against this it may be urged first that Diogenes includes
Bion in the Academic ‘succession’, for which no obvious reason can be found
except this supposed period at the Academy, and secondly that at 4, 23 he
actually mentions Bion as a distinguished pupil of Crates the Academic. It looks
as though an Academic period must be found, and it may be that Bion arrived at
Athens before Xenocrates’ death in 314 and studied both under him and under
Crates, but, as Gomperz suggested, before the latter was head of the school.
2. In the first sentence of this account the mss read παρακεῖτο, which Hicks
renders ‘depreciated’. However there is no support in the Greek for the ‘even’ of
Hicks’ next clause; moreover the μέν at the beginning of this sentence, answered
apparently by εἰτα in the next sentence, suggests some sort of opposition

\textsuperscript{14} LXV.
\textsuperscript{15} Compare 4, 40-41 and 4, 53-54. Of course, it may all simply be true.
\textsuperscript{16} For references see below, n.49.
\textsuperscript{17} D.L. 4, 51-52.
between ‘at first. . .’ and ‘then he adopted. . .’ The conjectured alternatives of προήρητο or προχιρεΐτο (‘had preferred’ or ‘preferred’) would provide the necessary contrast; and the mss παρητεϊτο could be supposed to have crept in from the previous sentence, which ends with παρητησθαί. In addition, παρητεϊτο (‘declined’, ‘deprecated’) seems to me not sufficiently strong in meaning for the mockery its supporters want to find in the passage. 18

3. Though Diogenes’ curriculum vitae associates Bion with all the philosophical groups known to have been active at Athens before the rise of the Epicurean and Stoic schools (and this in itself, in the case of a young man who clearly ‘went the rounds’, may be significant for the dating of Bion; Epicurus starting teaching c.306), no Cynic is named as his teacher. If Diogenes’ chronology is even roughly correct it may be assumed that he learned the Cynic way of life from Crates the Cynic. It is possible therefore to postulate a considerable confusion of evidence which originally stated that Bion studied first with Xenocrates and then went over to Cynicism, associating with Crates the Cynic and ‘deprecating’ Academic views; then later ‘hearing’ Theodorus (who seems to have been in Athens in 306 or earlier) and Theophrastus. It is of course possible that he went from one Crates to the other.

Bion’s visit to Antigonus
The evidence is scanty. It does seem certain that Antigonus assembled some sort of an intellectual circle at Pella, and that this included philosophers as well as poets and historians. The Stoic representative was Persaeus, who arrived at Pella around 276, and the circumstances of Bion’s account of himself (quoted above) make it clear that these two came into conflict. Tarn 19 was much impressed by the character of Bion and elaborated a winning account of him that unfortunately owes as much to imagination as it does to firm testimony. Tarn with some justice sees Bion as the first of a line of wandering preachers who flourished particularly under the early Roman empire; but it was clearly the Borysthenite’s personality that caught his imagination. He saw parallels between sayings attributed to Bion and those attributed to Antigonus, and these led him to believe in a ‘close association of the king and the wandering philosopher’. The similarities 20 are striking if not conclusive, and it certainly seems unnecessary to deny some sort of intimacy between the two men, while Antigonus’ reported attentions at the end of Bion’s life, whether personal or merely vicarious, support such a belief. Here too it is worth quoting Bion’s reply to Antigonus as found in Stobaeus; 21 it is clearly related to the autobiographical passage quoted

18. See Dudley, op.cit. (n.11), 90.
20. Tarn op.cit. (n.19), 236 n.47.
21. Stobaeus 4(5), 86, 13, p.706. References to Stobaeus are to the five volume Wachsmuth and Hense edition (vol.5, from which the present extract is taken, is paginated continuously with vol.4).
above and may, as Hense conjectures, come from the same letter:

When the philosopher Bion had been slandered on the grounds of his ignoble birth Antigonus the king asked him, ‘Who are you among men and from where? Where is your city and who are your parents?’ Bion said, ‘But you, O king, when you need archers, you do not, I think, ask their parentage; you put up the target and choose the best archers and quite rightly. So do the same in the case of friends; ask not where they are from but who they are.’

Tarn quotes for affinity Antigonus’ own remark about rewarding a man’s own excellence rather than his father’s (ανδραγαθία vs. πατραγαθία; Hense sees Bion at work here too).

For Bion’s life we are left with a period that must stretch from about 325 to some time after 276; if study with Xenocrates is admitted the birth date must be pushed some ten years earlier, and any sojourn at Pella is likely to have been after the death of Pyrrhus in 272. Apart from these rather vague limits conjecture is pointless.

**Writings**

Diogenes refers merely to υπομνήματα (‘treatises’), but from other sources it is fairly clear that Bion was one of the earliest practitioners, if not the originator of what is known as the diatribe (διατριβή; the word is actually commoner in modern literature than in ancient). This was an ethical sermon or lecture, which may be thought of, from a literary point of view, as occupying an intermediate position between the Socratic dialogue and the Horatian satire. The diatribe seems to have been a characteristic product of the Hellenistic age, when after the great philosophical system-building of the previous two centuries, the enormous spread of Greek culture, the growth of an unprecedented number of new poleis and the wider dissemination of a modicum of education led to a greatly increased interest in philosophy. Bion is typical of an age when the fundamental question that needed to be answered was that of Socrates — ‘how should one live?’ — and naturally there were few with the ability or the energy to accept the intricacies of Plato or Aristotle as an answer. The Epicurean and Stoic systems had a firm and elaborate intellectual foundation; it remains true that in ethics their elements were easily available to a large audience. The same is more obviously so of the Cynic way of life, which dispensed almost entirely with logical, physical and metaphysical background and addressed itself to the immediate problems of life. For the majority life was hard — at best uncertain, often brutish and always liable to be short — and it was only to be expected that

22. LXXXVIII.
23. Loc.cit. (n.22); Plutarch de uit.pud. 534c etc.
24. In considering a time of such vast expansion of the Greek world it is unnecessary to speak of ‘failure of nerve’ or of a decline of the city state. Cf. F.H. Sandbach, The Stoics (London 1975), 23; Sandbach quotes C.B. Welles’ remarks on the same subject.
such popular philosophy should place most emphasis on how to conduct oneself satisfactorily in adversity.

For this the diatribe was the principal vehicle. Though particularly associated with the Cynics, for whom it seems to have been almost the only method of propagating their views, it was not confined to any philosophical school. Indeed the travelling preachers who practised this ‘form’ seem to have seen no virtue in keeping dogmatically to the tenets of a single system. One may speak, certainly, of eclecticism, but it is the informal eclecticism of a Horace, *nullius addictus iurare in urba magistri*, and more concerned with practical happiness than with logical consistency. The influence of the dialogue was great; we often hear of an imaginary interlocutor, minimally if at all characterised, whose statements, when as epigrammatically expressed as their rebuttals, can often lead to difficulties in attribution of sentiments. Oltramare sees the influence of rhetoric, coming from Gorgias through Antisthenes, as important, and considers that Bion by using rhetorical techniques created a revolution in philosophical writing — one may agree as long as it is not supposed that rhetorical techniques are noticeably absent from the dialogues of Plato. A third and obvious feature of the diatribe is the mixture of the witty and the serious, the blend which came to be known as *σπουδαω^έλοων*. To quote Horace again, *ridentem dicere uerum quid uetai?* Quotation and parody abound (the latter certainly a Cynic method, associated especially with Crates); myths may be used, or fables. Above all, personification and vivid image. Bion was said by Eratosthenes to have been the first to have decked philosophy in brightly coloured robes. The implication is that she was prostituted; but prostitution means general availability, and if the attraction of the diatribe is meretricious it is at least widely accessible, while even Eratosthenes, changing his image to a Homeric reminiscence, admitted that under the Cynic rags was hidden something substantial.

Prostitution of philosophy is a charge that is easily made of Bion, while flamboyant is a word that will spring to mind. Diogenes’ life has two brief characterisations of him, of which the first reads:

Καὶ ἦν Ἰκ. ἀληθῶς ὁ Βίων τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πολύτροπος καὶ σοφιστὴς ποικίλος καὶ πλείστας ἀφορμάς δεδωκώς τοῖς βουλομένοις καθιππάξεσθαι φιλοσοφίας· ἐν τισὶ δὲ καὶ πομπικός καὶ ἀπολαύσαι τύφου δυνάμενος.27

Hicks, in the Loeb edition, takes most of this pejoratively, translating:

In truth Bion was in other respects a shifty character, a subtle sophist, and one who had given the enemies of philosophy many an occasion to blaspheme, while in certain respects he was even pompous and able to indulge in arrogance.

25. For more detail on the character of the diatribe see Oltramare, op.cit. (n.4) ch.1.
26. Strabo 1, 2, 2.
27. D.L. 4, 47.
But most of these words can be taken quite otherwise. πολύτροπος need not be a compliment, but it is as used by Homer of the hero of the Odyssey in its first line. Even σοφιστής does not have to be derogatory, nor ποικίλος, for which Tarn offers ‘iridescent’. And Tarn may very well be right in his suggestion that Bion was giving people opportunities not to trample on philosophy (Hicks’ ‘blasphemous’) but to ‘mount the steed of learning’,28 according to LSJ καθιππάξομαι in the sense ‘trample underfoot’ usually takes the accusative; only here is the genitive attested, which seems better to suit the intransitive sense ‘ride’. As a term of style πομπικός (‘impressive’ LSJ; Hicks’ ‘pompous’) seems invariably to be favourable (though LSJ do not cite the present passage). Finally ἀπολαύσαι is as likely to mean ‘gain advantage from’ as ‘enjoy’ (Hicks’ ‘indulge in’),29 and there is no need to suppose that the τύφος referred to (‘illusion’, ‘vanity’; Hicks’ ‘arrogance’ — a favourite target of the Cynics) is Bion’s own.

This description is followed by the collection of Bion’s sayings (many of which I shall consider later); then at chapter 51 Diogenes returns to his life, giving the account of his studies already discussed. The second assessment of character follows. He was, says Diogenes, θεατρικός (‘playing to the gallery’ is the exact translation, according to Tarn, and he is probably right); he would ‘dissipate’ things with a smile (διαφορήσαι; the metaphor seems to be medical), and he used vulgar language. It was his use of all styles together that inspired Eratosthenes’ criticism (if it was a criticism). His skill at parody is illustrated by two Homeric-inspired hexameters attacking Archytas. From this point (chapter 53) the tone of the Life descends, and it degenerates into little more than scurrilous abuse, though it may as well be briefly considered. Even here the information given by Diogenes can often be interpreted more favourably. 1. He despised music and astronomy. Naturally, being a man with Cynic sympathies, for whom the practicalities of life were all. 2. He was extravagant and ostentatious. Probably a justified criticism — though φαντασία, which Hicks renders ‘a great show’, could well have originally described his style, with reference to his vivid use of images. In any case it seems perverse to criticise him, as Diogenes appears to, for converting the Rhodian seamen to philosophy. 3. He adopted young men for purposes less than honourable. This may be mere abuse (I shall come later to Bion’s views on sex) and is hardly supported even by the immediate context. 4. He was selfish, and insisted, to his own advantage, on the saying ‘friends have things in common’. 5. No disciples are recorded of him. Not surprising; Bion was a preacher, not an original thinker, and Diogenes admits that he had large audiences. 6. He was a professed atheist, but relapsed into extreme superstition on his deathbed. In all likelihood this is a malicious fabrication, of the sort that is common in ancient biography.

28. Tarn, op.cit. (n.19), 236 and n.49.
29. LSJ give an alternative meaning ‘make sport of’, which could suit our passage admirably; however, the only citation is Theophrastus, Characters 23, 3, where Ussher in his edition wisely insists that it must mean ‘take advantage of’.
From all this a picture emerges of a tough-minded and outspoken character, with considerable personal drawing power, depending largely on his gift for forcible expression; a well developed sense of his own worth coupled with a conviction that he owed his success to no-one but himself; an honesty that appealed to the blunt Antigonus and was not ashamed to admit what others might conceal. But it is time to look at the surviving remains.

We have nothing complete of Bion; there are extant a number of sayings quoted mainly by Diogenes, Stobaeus and the *Gnomologium Vaticanum*, and some more substantial fragments embedded in the remains of Teles preserved by Stobaeus. It is possible to suggest titles for individual diatribes, such as self-sufficiency, avarice, exile; but such classification of fragments would be entirely speculative (we have, for example, no evidence that a complete diatribe was even confined to a single topic), and it is preferable to take them one by one, if vaguely grouped according to subject.30

To classify Bion philosophically is impossible and to attempt to do so is mistaken, for he was an ethical teacher, and an unsystematic one, rather than a philosopher. But one may see certain tendencies in his teaching, and without doubt the main influence was Cynic. Whether or not we agree with Oltramare 31 in postulating something of a conversion to the atheistic hedonism of Theodorus, the result, Cynic asceticism sweetened by *Aristippi praecepta*, seems to be a blend of these two ways of facing life. Of Cynic ideas we find in Bion the ideal of self-sufficiency, contempt for riches and for other conventional 'goods', readiness to face death and acceptance of what life brings; from Theodorus came perhaps the taking of fees (a thoroughly unCynic procedure), the willingness to enjoy what pleasures (perhaps including sexual) are offered, and the contempt for superstition and conventional religion (though Diogenes the Cynic and Crates certainly had no great respect for these).

The second of Hense’s *Teletis Reliquiae* (and the longest) is an extract, according to the manuscripts of Stobaeus, from Teles’ discourse on self-sufficiency (*περι αὐταρκείας*). Teles himself appears to have been a third century schoolmaster of small literary talent and less originality; for much of what he says he acknowledges Bion, and much of the rest, even when it can be traced ultimately to an earlier source, may come through Bion. The present extract is a cento of borrowings with little continuity – though in Teles’ defence it must be said that his native incompetence has been further magnified by the mediation of an epitomator, an otherwise unknown Theodorus, who is probably responsible for the worst confusions. Self-sufficiency in the Cynic/Stoic sense covers a wide area, and the key to much of it is the acceptance of what fate or

30. Most of them can be found in Appendix II of F. Sayre, *The Greek Cynics* (Baltimore 1948); but see below p.80.
chance brings. The extract opens with the famous simile of the actor, which is certainly owed to Bion:

As the good actor must play well whatever character the playwright gives to him, so must the good man play the part that fortune casts him in. For she, says Bion, like a playwright, creates sometimes a leading part, sometimes a supporting one, now a king, now a beggar. So if you have a supporting part, do not ask for the lead, for that is inappropriate.32

This is good Cynic advice, acceptable too to Stoics; more interesting to many will be the subsequent history of the image; it may well have been Bion who first saw life as a drama in which men act, but the idea recurs in Greek literature and in other literatures at least from Cicero to Shakespeare.33 A slightly different version occurs at 52, 1 ff.:

Fortune like a playwright creates characters of all sorts, a shipwrecked sailor, a beggar, an exile, a man famous or obscure. So the good actor must play well whatever she gives him...

The actor appears again at 16, 4 ff., where the subject of the discourse is moving towards the acceptance of death. This too is likely to come from Bion:

As the good actor plays well the prologue, the middle and the catastrophe, so the good man plays well the beginning, the middle and the end of life.

In the Hellenistic world the less pleasant elements that Fortune might write into one's part were many. Perhaps the commonest was poverty, which Greeks, like most other peoples, regarded for the most part as both objectionable and dishonourable, though occasionally lone philosophical voices would protest. The Cynic acceptance of poverty can be traced through Antisthenes to Socrates, and it seems to have been one of Bion's main themes. A memorable passage, adapted memorably by Lucretius, shows man's independence of circumstances in general and poverty in particular:

If circumstances (says Bion) were to speak up, the way we do, and could justify themselves, would they not say, like a slave at sanctuary justifying himself to his master, 'Why fight against me? Have I stolen anything from you? Do I not do everything that you order? Do I not regularly hand over the money I make for you?' And Poverty would say to anyone who brought a charge against her, 'Why fight against me? Are you deprived of anything good through me? Of self-control? Of justice? Of courage? Are you without anything you need? Are not the roads full of herbs and the wells of water? Do I not offer you a bed wherever there is earth? And leaves for bedding? Can you not enjoy yourself with me? Don't you see old women chattering as they eat their barleycakes? Don't I offer you hunger as a cheap and simple sauce? Doesn't the hungry man enjoy his food most and least need a relish? And the thirsty man most enjoys drinking and least needs to wait for what is

32. Teles, 5, Iff.
33. Hense, CVIIff.
not there? Does anyone hunger for cake or thirst for Chian? Isn’t it because of luxury that people want things like these? Don’t I give you houses free and for nothing — the baths in the winter and temples in summer? . . . If Poverty said this, what could you say in return? I think I should remain speechless.

But we blame anything rather than our own bad temper and unhappiness — age, poverty, someone we meet, the day, the season, the place.  

Quite how much of this actually comes from Bion is open to question; certainly the two sentences beginning ‘Doesn’t the hungry. . . ’ are quoted almost verbatim from Xenophon (though Bion may even so have been an intermediary source). I suspect also that someone, whether Teles or his epitomator, has conflated two originally separate passages of Bion, one about circumstances (τα πράγματα) and one about poverty; there might even have been more than one passage about poverty. But the extract shows well both the matter and the manner of Bion’s teaching as it has come down to us — the simple Cynic ‘virtue’ that needs nothing external, and the direct rhetorical style, with its personifications, its questions, its repetitions, balances and assonances. It must have appealed to popular audiences.

Not only is wealth unnecessary; it is transient: ‘Fortune has not given money to the rich but lent it (an aphorism that Lucretius transformed into his sombre Roman uitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu). It is useless unless it is being spent, so that misers, who ‘take care of property as if it belonged to them’, actually ‘get no benefit from it, as though it were someone else’s’. Indeed, ‘men are ridiculous who are serious about wealth, which fortune provides, meanness preserves and good nature dissipates.’ Avarice (φιλαργύρια) ‘is the mother-city of all vice’. Not surprisingly money is valued below a good reputation, in a saying that shows more interest than usual in worldly matters: ‘Bion says that a good magistrate leaving office should have become not richer but more honoured.’ But even wealth itself may have more value than the wealthy man: ‘Just as bad purses, even if they are themselves valueless, are worth as much as the coins they contain, so the worthless rich have the use of the worth of their possessions.’ It brings worries, not content: ‘When asked who suffered most anxiety, he said “He who is most ambitious of success.”’ And money does not bring satisfaction:

34. Teles, 6, 8ff.; cf. Lucretius 3, 931ff.: denique si uocem rerum natura repente/mittat. . .
35. Mem. 1, 6, 5. Oddly enough the word ἀναμένει (for Xenophon’s ἐπιθυμεῖ) is found in Diogenes’ version of the same saying of Socrates (2, 27).
36. Stobaeus, 4(5), 105(105), 56, p.943; Lucretius 3, 971 — in Munro’s famous version, ‘Life is granted to none in fee-simple, to all in usufruct’.
42. D.L. 4, 48.
If anyone wants to be relieved himself of want and need, or to relieve someone else, he should not seek money for him. As Bion says, it is as if one were wanting to relieve the thirst of someone suffering fromdropsy, and instead of treating the dropsy were to bring springs and rivers to him. He would drink until he burst without being free from his thirst. So the other would never be satisfied, since he is insatiable, longing for notoriety and superstitions.\textsuperscript{43}

(The inconsequentiality of the last few words may perhaps be blamed on the epitomator.) Horace remembered this:

\begin{quote}
\textit{crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops,}
\textit{nec sitim pellit, nisi causa morbi}
\textit{fugit uenis et aquosus albo}
\textit{corpore languor.}\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Finally, wealth will be master, not slave: 'He said of a rich miser, "He has not got the fortune — the fortune has got him."'\textsuperscript{45} And the paradox of the poor rich man is summed up in another passage from the same lengthy Teles fragment 'On poverty and wealth', of which considerably more may be attributable to Bion than is evident (certainly Horace, whom we may assume to have been a reader of Bion rather than of Teles, seems to have been familiar with its subject matter):

As long as he is insatiable, ungenerous, a cowardly braggart,\textsuperscript{46} he will be in want and need. And how can these people be short of what they have? But how, says Bion, can bankers be short of money, when they have it?\textsuperscript{47}

Such contempt for and independence of money is a prominent ingredient in the self-sufficiency that Bion, as one of largely Cynic attitudes, preached. One imagines there was a ready audience for him in the large and growing cities of the Hellenistic world, indeed much the same sort of audience as that which accepted a similar reversal of values in Christianity a few centuries later.

But it would be a mistake to regard Bion as pure Cynic. In the first place a \textit{mot} recorded by Stobaeus shows that he charged for his teaching:

Bion said, after Hesiod, that there were three races of students, gold, silver and bronze; gold, who paid and learned, silver, who paid and did not learn, and bronze, who learned but did not pay.\textsuperscript{48}

This fits in with the extravagance reported by Diogenes (4,53) and connected by him with moving from city to city, and it may be because of this that Plutarch

\textsuperscript{43} Teles, 39, 1ff. The image is not originally Bion's; for a version by Aristippus, speaking merely of excessive thirst, see Plutarch, \textit{de cup. div.} 524a-b, and for Diogenes' introduction of the \textit{bdpcjnuiK\textlsq} see Stobaeus 3, 10, 45, p.419.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Odes}, 2, 2, 13-16. See Kiessling-Heinze ad loc. for further references; see also \textit{Epistles}, 2, 2, 146f.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{D.L.} 4, 50.

\textsuperscript{46} Some of these epithets, if correctly transmitted, seem to have lost precision of meaning and to have become mere words of abuse.

\textsuperscript{47} Teles, 36, 5ff.

\textsuperscript{48} Stobaeus, 2, 31, 97, p.218.
refers to him as a sophist on a number of occasions; certainly Plutarch shows familiarity with him and nowhere calls him a cynic. In fact the other main influence (apart from that of Theophrastus, which is likely to have been mostly stylistic) seems to have been Theodorus of Cyrene, known as the atheist. The result of this was a softening down of the rigid Cynic approach to life, and a consequent approval of the taking of pleasure where it was offered; one thinks of Aristippus' reputation that 'he could always turn the situation to good account'. The hedonism of Theodorus was of a certain refinement, in that χαρά ('joy', 'cheerfulness') was a mental state dependent on wisdom; he too insisted on self-sufficiency, and it may have been the wish to be independent of external influences that impelled him to reject traditional views of the gods. He also believed that the wise man was entitled, when he thought fit, to disregard conventional standards. What sort of an atheist he was we cannot tell: Diogenes, less than plausibly, reports that Epicurus owed to Theodorus most of what he wrote on the gods, while Cicero three times affirms that he denied the existence of the gods altogether. It certainly seems likely that Bion whether or not he was taking his views from Theodorus concentrated on ridiculing the traditional gods rather than denying their existence.

There are a number of passages that may show the influence on Bion of Theodorus (though caution is to be advised in a field where the nihilism of the Cynic tradition may also have had something to offer). His apparently ambiguous attitude to sexual indulgence, insofar as it can be separated from remarks in Diogenes' life that are mere scandalmongering, should be considered here. Two sayings refer to the tyranny of youthful beauty and its removal by the growing beard; there is also a remark that beauty is 'another's good'. Another treats epigrammatically of marriage: if you marry an ugly wife you will have trouble (ποινήν); if a beautiful one, you will have her in common (κοινήν). Alcibiades, he said, in his youth drew husbands from their wives, and later wives from their husbands. Also epigrammatic, but implying a more Thoerorean approach to sex (or one akin to Cynic ἄναιδεα) is his criticism of Socrates: 'if he wanted Alcibiades and forebore he was a fool, if he didn’t want him he was doing nothing remarkable.' But immediately before this Diogenes has assured us that Bion used continually to say that 'it was preferable to grant

49. For references see Hense, LXXV.
50. For Theophrastus see Dudley op.cit. (n.11), 92; for Theodorus see D.L. 2, 97-103 and von Fritz in RE (Theodoros 32).
52. D.L. 2, 97.
53. Cicero, De natura deorum, 1, 2 etc.; see also Dudley, op.cit. (n.11), esp. 105f.
56. ibid.
57. D.L. 4, 49.
58. ibid.
favours to someone than to enjoy someone’s favours; for one was harmed both in body and in soul’ — a principle that seems far more Socratic, even if one not observed by Bion himself, according to Diogenes’ own account.

His remarks on conventional religion are a little more substantial. At 2.135 Diogenes tells us that on one occasion Bion condemned soothsayers; and Plutarch acknowledges him as the author of some pithy words with which he concludes a description of the superstitious man which Hense (LIX f.) would attribute to Bion as a whole: this man, a mild case of superstition, sits inside, fumigated and smeared, and old women ‘bring anything along and hang it round him and pin it on him as if he were a peg’.59 It was ridiculous to take seriously the gods of legend; so, Clement of Alexandria writes:

These are your gods, these ghosts and shadows, and on top of them those “lame and wrinkled ones, crosseyed”, the Prayers, daughters of Thersites rather than Zeus, so that I think Bion expressed it neatly when he asked how men could reasonably ask Zeus for fine children, which he could not even provide for himself.60 Here again Hense (LXXVI) could well be right in attributing to Bion more than the actual acknowledged quotation; the flippant reference to Iliad 9,502f. looks entirely in character. Two further quotations ridicule traditional ideas about divine vengeance. One is cited by Plutarch: ‘Bion says that in punishing the children of the wicked a god is more ridiculous than a doctor giving medicine to a grandson or son for a disease of the grandfather or father.’61 The other comes in Diogenes: ‘He used to say that those in Hades would be more severely punished if they carried water in sound jars, not leaky ones.’62 And two more pieces of casuistry suggest that Bion’s argumentative ancestry included Protagoras. After quoting the amusing story of the painter who was asked for a picture of a horse rolling but then drew one running, which on complaint he then turned upside down, Plutarch remarks: ‘Bion says that this happens to some arguments when they are turned upside down; so some will say not that oracles are good because they come from the god, but that because they are worthless they do not come from the god.’63 And Seneca quotes a two-sided argument ‘proving’ that people commit sacrilege either never or all the time.64 But perhaps the most interesting of possibly ‘atheistic’ remarks comes in Diogenes’ life of Stilpo: Bion when asked if there were gods replied in the hexameter

οὐκ ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ σκεδάσεις ὤχλον ταλαπείμε πρέσβυ;
(Will you not scatter the crowd from me, much-enduring old man?)65

59. Plutarch, De superstitione, 168d-e.
60. Clement, Protrepticus, 4, 56, 49P.
61. Plutarch, De sera numinis umindicta, 561c.
63. Plutarch, De Pythiae oraculis, 396e.
64. Seneca, De beneficiis, 7, 7, 1-2.
65. D.L. 2, 117.
The implication here is that Bion, for reasons of caution or principle, preferred to keep his more extreme views for his intimates, a preference confirmed in the life of Bion: 'He said many things in a more atheistic spirit to his associates, getting this from Theodorus.' While it may have been wise from a practical point of view not to profess a disbelief in the gods too openly, it may well be that Bion had better reasons than this for his reticence, considering that a belief in the gods was a good thing for the masses. If so, he may have got his attitude from Theodorus, who held similar views about conventional moral restrictions.

Also Theodorean in inspiration, in all probability, is the following:

You rule well and I am ruled; you rule over many and I over this one, being a tutor; you being rich give generously, and I receive from you confidently, without cringing or mean behaviour or complaint about my lot.

This is in the mainstream of Aristippian doctrine, the *Aristippi praecepta* to which Horace at times relapsed, an important part of which was the proper approach to a patron; as Aristippus himself remarked of Diogenes the Cynic,

*si sciret regibus uti, fastidiret holus qui me notat.*

Writers on Bion have naturally surmised that the remarks quoted above were addressed to Antigonus.

That Bion should have something to say on the superiority of wisdom to folly is to be expected whatever his audience. Two such sayings (three if a doublet is to be counted) speak of progress (προκοπή; a term familiar to us from the Stoics), saying that folly (or false opinion) is an obstacle to it and that one may identify progress when one accepts abuse with equanimity (typically expressed in Homeric quotation). Another saying that might recall Stoic ideas is: ‘Good slaves are free, but bad free men are the slaves of many desires’ — but rather than postulate actual Stoic influence (there is after all evidence for hostility between Bion and the Stoa) it is better to refer such a common-place to the mainstream of ethical thought descending from Socrates. And Athenaeus reports him as saying that one should get one’s pleasures not from the table but from the mind. Socratic also perhaps in inspiration is: 'If you are silent because you are educated, you are uneducated; if because you are uneducated, you are educated' — a sort of Cynic Catch 22. Another Socratic-Platonic echo may be heard in ‘Wisdom is as much superior to the other virtues as is sight to the other

68. Teles, 6, 1ff.
69. Horace, *Epistles* 1, 17, 14ff.; cf. 1, 1, 18ff. The anecdote recounted by Horace is told by D.L. at 2, 68.
70. Stobaeus, 3, 4, 87, p.239; D.L. 4, 50; Plutarch, *Quomodo quis...* 82e.
72. Athenaeus, 10, 421e.
73. GV 159.
senses’. Hense quotes *Phaedo* 69a as a parallel for ‘Bion said that wisdom is the general market (παντοπώλιον) for good things but self-control is military training’ (if this is what ἀποστηροφία means). And an indication that Bion considered himself a philosopher may be found in Diogenes’ anecdote: ‘When the Athenians were practising rhetoric he taught philosophy at Rhodes; when someone blamed him for this he said, “I brought wheat with me — shall I sell barley?”’

I have kept until the last a group of fragments more generally concerned with human life and death, though clearly only an artificial distinction can separate these from other subjects as long as we are ignorant both of the titles of most of the diatribes (if not all) and of what sayings belong together. They include some of Bion’s simplest and most straightforward advice, but also some of his most picturesque language. ‘It is a great evil not to be able to bear evil’, terser in Greek (μέγα κακὸν τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι φέρειν κακὸν), may owe something to the suspiciously like-named Bias of Priene (ἀτυχή εἰσαι τὸν ἀτυχίαν μὴ φέροντα); it certainly seems to have imprinted itself on the mind of Seneca: ‘Quaeris quid sit malum? cedere iis quae mala uocantur.’ From Teles’ discourse on self-sufficiency (Bion’s may have had the same title) comes this general advice on how to approach life:

Bion says: ‘As with wild animals the bite depends on the grip (παρὰ τὴν λῃσθῇ δὴ καὶ καθὼς γίνεται) — if you take a snake by its middle you will be bitten but if by its neck you will be all right — so with circumstances the pain depends on the approach, and if you approach them as Socrates did, you will have no pain, but if otherwise you will be hurt, not by the circumstances but by your own character and false conceit. So one should not try to change circumstances but adapt oneself to meet them as they are, as sailors do. . . ’

and so on, in the same vein. It may be comforting to be told that the answer to misfortune lies in ourselves; and it may comfort some also to hear that ‘all human affairs are like their beginnings; men’s life is no more respectable or serious than their conception; born from nothing they return to nothing.’

On old age: ‘We should not find fault with old age, which we all hope to reach.’ It has its consolations: ‘We enjoy courage in our youth but in old age reach the height of wisdom’ Even so, he called old age the haven of all

75. GV 162.
76. D.L. 4, 49. It is worth remembering that he burned the rhetorical books that were left him (see p.64 above)
78. D.L. 1, 86.
80. Teles, 9, 2ff.
82. D.L. 4, 51.
83. D.L. 4, 50.
misfortunes; ‘at least they all take refuge there.’ It is a ‘relic’ (λείψανον) of life. But we should remember that sayings which seem to contradict the general tenor of Bion’s thinking may well have been put into the mouth of an interlocutor.

Like Epicurus, Bion found it necessary to fortify his hearers against the fear of death. He did this partly by joking — ‘he used to say that the road to Hades was an easy one; at least, people went along it with their eyes shut’ — and partly by stressing its natural inevitability. ‘Bion said there were two schools for death: the time before birth and sleep.’ In the same strain is one of his most memorable passages:

Just as we are evicted from a house when the landlord, not getting the rent, takes away the door, takes away the roof, shuts up the well, so I am evicted from my body, when nature who has let it to me takes away my eyes, my ears, my hands and my feet. I do not wait about, but just as I leave a feast without resentment, so I leave life when the hour comes for ‘passengers to board the ferry’. As the good actor plays well the prologue, the middle and the catastrophe, so the good man plays well the beginning, the middle and the end of life. And as when a cloak becomes worn I throw it out and do not ... spin it out and cling to life, but when I can no longer be happy I leave it.

It was this passage that inspired one of Lucretius’ most famous lines:

_ cur non ut uitae plenus conuiua recedis?_

a line imitated in turn by Horace:

_ inde fit ut raro qui se uix isse beatum_  
_dicat, et exacto contentus tempore uita_  
_ cedat uti conuiua satur, reperire queamus._

But a darker view of death can be seen in: ‘Bion said that boys throw stones at frogs in play, but the frogs die not in play but in earnest.’

After death, burial; and it seems likely that there existed a sermon by Bion on this subject. Certainly he is reported as saying that anxiety about burial has written many tragedies. These words are followed by a quotation from the Phoenissae and a comment by Teles (probably), both concerned with burial

85. GV 163.  
86. D.L. 4, 49.  
87. GV 160.  
88. Scholars are probably right to suspect a lacuna here.  
89. Teles, 15, 11ff.  
90. 3, 938.  
91. Satires, 1, 1, 117ff.  
92. Plutarch, De sollertia animalium, 965b.  
93. Hense, Ch 1ff.  
94. Teles, 30, 1f.
outside one's own native land (for the subject of Teles’ discourse is exile). Then, it is surmised, Bion takes over again:

Or if you were not buried, but thrown out without a grave, how would that hurt you? Or what is the difference between being burned by fire and being eaten by dogs? Or between being devoured above the ground by crows and below it by worms?

Bion probably continued his argument by pointing out the differences in burial customs between the various peoples of the world — a locus communis of probable Cynic provenance, exploited also by Chrysippus and after him by, among others, Cicero and, incongruously enough, Silius Italicus.95 (The ancestry of the idea may even be traced back to Herodotus96) but Bion himself was probably in Lucretius’ mind:

nam si in morte malumst malis morsuque ferarum
tractari, non inuenio qui non sit acerbum
ignibus impositum calidis torrescere flammis
aut in melle situm suffocari atque rigere
frigore, cum summo gelidi cubat aequore saxi,
urgeriue superne obtritum pondere terrae.97

The thought is not often memorable; the expression frequently is, and it is as a literary rather than a philosophical influence that Bion is of interest to modern readers. That Lucretius and Horace knew him and had some admiration for him seems clear (though the possibility cannot finally be ruled out that he came to them through an intermediary). The extent of their borrowings is less obvious, and not infrequently the reader of the Latin poets, tantalised by the meagre remains of Bion, is tempted to remark, in Hense’s terminology, hic locus Bionem redolet. An exemple is Lucretius’ famous simile of the cup that the doctor smears with honey to induce children to take a bitter medicine; this seems to be in Horace’s mind when he makes his more friendly comparison of the teacher bribing children with biscuits to learn their alphabet.98 The idea turns up again in Themistius, who knew no Latin and thus cannot have read Lucretius;99 the original may come from Diogenes the Cynic, or it may be later than him; in any case there is a clear example of a Greek commonplace spreading to the Roman literary tradition.100 Fiske collects no fewer than sixteen commonplaces of the Cynic tradition from Horace’s first satire alone; it is a reasonable guess that in many cases Bion must have been the vehicle of transmission.

95. Cicero, Tusc. Disp. 1, 45, 107; Silius Italicus 13, 466ff.; for other references and discussion Hense CIII.
96. 3, 38.
97. 3, 888ff.
98. Lucretius 1, 936ff. (=4, 11ff.); Horace, Satires 1, 1, 25ff.
100. Fiske, op.cit. (n.4), 222ff.
Note on sources
Anyone writing on such an obscure and fragmentary author as Bion must reach a certain level of credulity in accepting the statements of writers who may be considered less than totally trustworthy. In defence it may be urged first that without some such credulity nothing could be written about Bion at all — an excuse that might be thought something less than scholarly — and secondly that Bion's reputation in antiquity was not so great as to encourage the attribution to him of material that was not his. It is reasonable to suppose that his works were extant for a considerable period and to base on this supposition an assumption of reasonable accuracy in citation (for example Plutarch).

Diogenes Laertius' life is the main ancient source; as Hense showed, it is not all of equal value, but most of it may be accepted. Of modern writers the most important is clearly Hense, whose careful and scholarly discussion has not been bettered; all subsequent writers are heavily dependent upon it. Von Arnim's *RE* article is useful, and Oltramare makes a careful philosophical (if that is the word) assessment of Bion as well as placing him in the literary tradition. In English short accounts are given by Dudley (a lively appreciation) and Tarn. Farrand Sayre's extraordinary book is of value only because of its collection of Bion's sayings (based on Mullach) in Appendix II; even here the reader will need to consult the original Greek where Sayre has not enjoyed the assistance of a Loeb translation but has perpetrated his own renditions. For the influence of Bion on Latin satire Fiske is important; and Heinze's doctoral dissertation treated this subject, which I have barely touched upon. Bion's influence on later diatribists (here I include Plutarch as well as, for example, Musonius Rufus and Epictetus) falls outside the scope of this paper; it perhaps needs investigation.

106. *De Horatio Bionis imitatore*, Bonn, 1889.