

Why Ancient Greece Also Had Hippies

It is often remarked that history repeats itself; that there is a cyclicalality about human life. The movements and types we encounter today often had antecedents in previous ages. The past had its conservatives and liberals, its jocks and its hedonists.

And apparently, it also had its hippies.

A celebrated [Time article in 1967](#) first made a link between the hippie movement and the Cynics of Ancient Greece. The Cynics – whose most famous founder and radical practitioner was Diogenes of Sinope (d. 323 B.C.) – rejected much of the mainstream culture of the time in favor of a minimalist lifestyle devoted to virtue and oneness with nature. They often lived on the city streets where they could offer a public witness to another way of life.

The name “cynic” (*kynikos*) comes from the Greek word for “dog,” and translated means “dog-like.” This was a derogatory term directed at the Cynics for their hygiene and mannerisms, but one that they later embraced due to the virtues of the dog that they esteemed, i.e., indifference, discernment, etc.

The [basic principles of the Cynic movement](#) were as follows:

- One should seek to live a simple life in accord with nature.
- Living the simple life is necessary to achieve true virtue.
- One should shirk most societal conventions and detach oneself from most of those things that are commonly valued.

So what engendered both of these movements, i.e., ancient

Cynicism and modern-day hippies?

In part, of course, both respond to a recurring human desire for simplicity and a closer connection with the natural world.

Yet, both also arose in a context in which people increasingly felt a loss of freedom and power.

Cynicism was most popular in a Hellenistic world that had recently been conquered and centralized by Alexander. It later reemerged in the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. under similar conditions, as historian [Donald Dudley](#) notes:

“The growth of Cynicism after the death of Alexander were being reproduced in the early years of the first century A.D. The Imperial system, though an enormous gain in efficiency of administration, had taken the interest out of politics.”

And in the modern world, the hippie movement (including its more recent manifestations) has come about in a time when power has become more centralized, technology intrusive, and dependence on government has grown. Some of the particulars of context have changed, but not the basic forms.

Nothing new under the sun, huh?