

## Ariston of Chios' Meeting with Polemon and Zenon's Illness: An Exegetical Note on Diog. Laert. 7,162

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### *Abstract*

Diogenes Laertios (7,162), citing the late Hellenistic biographer and doxographer Diokles of Magnesia, reports that the 'dissident' Stoic Ariston of Chios, after meeting the Academic Polemon, left his master Zenon of Kition when the latter was suffering from a protracted illness. We argue that this anecdote, which is not attested in other ancient sources, is to be interpreted in the light of the doctrinal debate concerning the concept of the preferable indifferent that arose between Ariston, Zenon, and Polemon.

### 1. Introduction

As is well known, biographical anecdotes of ancient philosophers are often based on the philosophers' doctrines and sometimes even reflect or allude to doctrinal debates<sup>1</sup>. In the present article we would like to draw attention to a somewhat neglected biographical anecdote, originally reported by the biographer and doxographer Diokles of Magnesia and transmitted by Diogenes Laertios, which may be interpreted in the light of doctrinal disputes that arose between the early Stoa and the Academy and involved Zenon of Kition, Polemon, and Ariston of Chios.

### 2. The anecdote and its source

The anecdote under examination is preserved in the short *bios* that Diogenes Laertios devotes to the 'dissident' Stoic Ariston of Chios (7,160-164), which is preceded by the *bios* of Zenon of Kition and a long Stoic doxography (7,1-160) and is followed by the *bioi* of two other 'dissident' Stoics, namely Herillos of Carthage and Dionysios the Renegade (7,160-167). In the *bios* of Ariston, Diogenes Laertios cites Diokles of Magnesia in order to explain under what circumstances Ariston deviated from the 'orthodox' Stoic doctrine professed by his master Zenon and, teaching in the Kynosarges, founded a sect of his own (7,162 = *SVF* I 333 = *FDS* 139 = Diocl., *FGrHist* 1039 F 12)<sup>2</sup>:

Παραβαλὼν δὲ Πολέμωνι (F 93 Gigante), φησὶ Διοκλῆς ὁ Μάγνης, μετέθετο (sc. Ἀρίστων), Ζήνωνος ἀρρωστίᾳ μακρᾷ περιπεσόντος.

After meeting Polemon – says Diokles of Magnesia – he (sc. Ariston) changed his mind, when Zenon was suffering from a protracted illness.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is the result of the joint work of the two authors; more specifically, Pietro Zaccaria wrote the first two sections, while Francesco Verde is responsible for the third and fourth one. The authors are very grateful to Anna Maria Ioppolo and Stefan Schorn for their very valuable remarks on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. DORANDI, *Diogenes*. The citation is preceded by the quotation of a verse of Timon mocking Ariston's successful teaching (F 40 Di Marco) and is followed by an anecdotic section focusing on the polemical relationship between Ariston and other philosophers, namely Persaios, Arkesilaos, and another unnamed member of the Academy.

Diokles, who probably lived between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD, is the author of at least two works, namely the *Lives of the Philosophers* (Βίοι τῶν φιλοσόφων) and the *Summary of the Philosophers* (Ἐπιδρομή τῶν φιλοσόφων), probably of biographical and doxographical character, respectively<sup>3</sup>. In the case of this fragment, as for many others, we do not know whether it comes from the first or the second work, although its biographical character makes the first a good fit. Be that as it may, we know that Diokles was particularly interested in the history and doctrines of Cynicism and Stoicism and that he probably defended the line of philosophical succession running from Sokrates via Antisthenes, Diogenes, Krates, Zenon, and Kleanthes, through to Chrysippos, and considered Cynicism and Stoicism to be in continuity with each other<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth recalling that Diokles claimed that another ‘dissident’ Stoic, Dionysios the Renegade, was first a pupil of Herakleides Pontikos, then of Alexinos and Menedemos, and eventually of Zenon<sup>5</sup>. It comes therefore as no surprise that Diokles also treated the life of the ‘dissident’ Stoic Ariston, whose positions were notoriously close to Cynicism, and specifically discussed the circumstances that prompted him to leave his master Zenon.

The original meaning of the anecdote reported by Diokles, however, is difficult to recover in so far as this fragment is, to the best of our knowledge, the only extant text speaking of a meeting between Ariston of Chios and the Academic Polemon. Following Ioppolo and others, the most natural interpretation of the passage seems to be that, according to Diokles, Ariston ‘changed his mind’ (i.e. he left the Stoic ‘orthodoxy’) after meeting Polemon, when Zenon was suffering from a prolonged illness<sup>6</sup>.

Other interpretations are less convincing. Reale translates our passage as follows: «Dopo aver incontrato Polemone... Aristone si convertì allo stoicismo, proprio mentre Zenone era caduto in una lunga malattia»<sup>7</sup>. This interpretation, however, does not take into account the context in which the fragment of Diokles is preserved (the problem under discussion is why Ariston left Zenon, not the way he became a Stoic) and fails to recognize the circumstance under which Ariston abandoned his master during Zenon’s illness. It does not seem probable that Diokles

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<sup>3</sup> An edition of the fragments of Diokles of Magnesia is in preparation by Pietro Zaccaria for the series *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker Continued, Part IV*. The numbering of the fragments refers to this forthcoming edition. The traditional chronology of Diokles (first half of the first century BC) is based on a far-fetched hypothesis by MAASS, *Biographis*, 18-20: see ZACCARIA, *Diocle*. A renewed examination of the evidence suggests that Diokles’ life probably spanned between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD. The Βίοι τῶν φιλοσόφων are explicitly mentioned in Diog. Laert. 2,53-54 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 3) and 2,82 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 4) (in the latter passage with the alternative title Περί βίων φιλοσόφων); the Ἐπιδρομή τῶν φιλοσόφων is cited in Diog. Laert. 10,10-11 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 1) and 7,48 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 2). On Diokles, see also ZACCARIA, *Citazioni*. POHLENZ, *Grundfragen*, 25, FESTA, *Stoici*, II 2, and GOULET-CAZÉ, *Livre VI*, 93-109 speculatively attribute to Diokles other sections of Diogenes Laertios’ *bios* of Ariston.

<sup>4</sup> See Diog. Laert. 6,12-13 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 5); 6,20 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 6); 6,36 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 7); 6,103 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 8); 6,87-88 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 9); 6,90-91 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 10); 6,99 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 11); 7,179 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 14); 7,181 (*FGrHist* 1039 F 15). Cfr. GOULET-CAZÉ, *Livre VI*, 3934-3936; GUGLIEMINA, *Diogène*, 170-175; ZACCARIA, *Citazioni*; ZACCARIA, *Diocle*. On the problem of the Cynic legacy in Stoicism, see especially GOULET-CAZÉ, *Kynika*.

<sup>5</sup> Diog. Laert. 7,166 = *SVF* I 422 = *FGrHist* 1039 F 13.

<sup>6</sup> HÜBNER, *Diogenes*, II 199; COBET, *Diogenis*, 194; HICKS, *Diogenes*, II 265; POHLENZ, *Grundfragen*, 25; IOPPOLO, *Aristone*, 121; IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 19; HÜLSER, *Dialektik*, I 133; ISNARDI PARENTE, *Stoici*, I 284; GOULET in GOULET-CAZÉ, *Diogène*, 885 n. 5; GIGANTE, *Diogene*, I 298. Cfr. also BROUWER, *Sagehood*, 207. See also HAHM, *Diogenes*, 4138, who considers our anecdote a «further clarification of Ariston’s career as founder of a new sect». Diogenes Laertios often uses the verb παραβάλλειν + dat. with the meaning of ‘to meet’, ‘to approach’, ‘to become a pupil’: see 2,126; 4,28; 5,9; 5,86; 6,2; 6,21; 7,2; 7,32; 7,168; 9,34.

<sup>7</sup> REALE, GIRGENTI, RAMELLI, *Diogene*, 881.

had Ariston formally become a pupil of Polemon either, as interpreted by Kühn, Festa, Apelt, Mansfeld, Bredlow, and Mensch<sup>8</sup>, because no other sources testify to such a discipleship and because of the doctrinal distance between Ariston and the Academy. The anecdote seems rather to imply that Ariston's meeting with Polemon exerted a certain influence on Ariston's change of mind with respect to Zenon's doctrine<sup>9</sup>.

But how are we to interpret such an influence, as no other sources directly put Ariston and Polemon in direct connection? In what follows, we argue that the anecdote, as it stands, may reproduce, in a biographical context, a doctrinal debate on the nature of the goods that first involved Polemon and his alleged pupil Zenon<sup>10</sup>, and at a second stage the same Zenon and his 'dissident' pupil Ariston.

### 3. Interpretation

Since, as noted above, this is the only testimony explicitly connecting Ariston with the teaching of Polemon, the present interpretation of the anecdote is necessarily partly speculative, but it seems to us to be fundamentally consistent with the other testimonies we have on the thought of Ariston, Polemon, and Zenon.

Having listened to the lectures of the Academic philosopher Polemon, Ariston changed his thinking and decided to abandon the 'orthodox' Stoic school. This means that, in the frame of Diokles' account, Polemon had a rather remarkable influence on Ariston's philosophy. According to Ioppolo's interpretation it is possible that Ariston was struck by Polemon's criticism of Zenon's concept of the indifferent-preferable (προηγμένα), although the philosophical positions of Polemon and Ariston are not identifiable at all<sup>11</sup>. As mentioned above, some sources state that Zenon was himself a disciple of Polemon for a period of time<sup>12</sup>. Although we do not know in detail the contents of Polemon's philosophy, we know from Cicero that there was a doctrinal debate between Polemon and Zenon<sup>13</sup>. To Polemon we can confidently attribute the introduction of the expression τὰ πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν, literally «the first things according to nature», which would seem to be those natural goods close to virtue<sup>14</sup>. These goods are defined as πρῶτα because nature itself directs us to them. Accordingly, to Polemon not only virtue itself but also the πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν are necessary for an authentically virtuous life (i.e. according to nature). As is well known, Zenon could not share this position because for him the only good coincides with virtue alone; the founder of the Stoa, therefore, could not consider other goods as 'first' (πρῶτα), because the possession of them does not guarantee the acquisition of virtue at all.

Despite this, Zenon, believing that the conformity to *human* nature was the authentic *telos* to be pursued, recognized that certain things were preferable (προηγμένα) over others: health, for example, was preferable to disease, even though health, being an indifferent, remained in any case subordinate to virtue<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> KÜHN in HÜBNER, *Diogenes*, IV 656; FESTA, *Stoici*, II 2, 5; APELT, ZEKL, REICH, *Diogenes*, II 73; MANSFELD, *Diogenes*, 323-324; BREDLOW, *Vidas*, 283; MENSCH, *Lives*, 369.

<sup>9</sup> See especially POHLENZ, *Grundfragen*, 25; IOPPOLO, *Aristone*, 121; IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> See Polemo F 85-91 Gigante.

<sup>11</sup> IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 21-22. Cfr. also POHLENZ, *Grundfragen*, 25. GUÉRARD, *Ariston*, 402 argued that Ariston might have joined Polemon because the latter, just like Ariston, was only concerned with ethics (Diog. Laert. 4,18).

<sup>12</sup> See § 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Cic. *Fin.* 4,45 = Polemo 128 Gigante; for Polemon's (polemical) relation to Zenon, see SNYDER, *Ethics*.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 146-149.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Sext. Emp. *M* 11,59 = *SVF* III 122; see IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 149-154.

Ariston criticized this Zenonian position, but from the opposite perspective to Polemon: for Ariston the intermediate things between virtue and vice have absolutely no moral value<sup>16</sup>. From this point of view, health is not always and absolutely preferable to illness for the attainment of virtue and vice versa, but may or may not be so, depending on the circumstances<sup>17</sup>. According to Ariston, therefore, Zenon's preferable indifferents are an intrinsically contradictory notion because, after all, Zenon, while considering the προηγμένα to be indifferent to the acquisition of virtue, nevertheless attributes a certain value to them. Thus, while Ariston firmly reaffirmed the absolute and unitary value of virtue, considering the intermediate things between virtue and vice completely indifferent because they are not in compliance with nature, Zenon, at least according to Ariston's point of view, actually assigned a certain moral value to the προηγμένα, thus counterfeiting their status of indifferents. One might conclude that Ariston's criticism of Zenon's προηγμένα is similar to that which he could have moved to Polemon's πρώτα κατὰ φύσιν, with the decisive difference, however, that Polemon was an Academic philosopher while Zenon was the founder of the Stoa to which Ariston himself belonged.

We can assume that even to Polemon the notion of preferable indifferent was captious and ultimately senseless, since what is preferable cannot be at the same time indifferent. Polemon probably defended the consistency of his position, declaring that things κατὰ φύσιν are πρώτα and, therefore, have a certain moral value that Zenon instead denied to the προηγμένα, considering them indifferent. On the basis of this criticism, we argue that for Diokles (or his source) Polemon played a role in Ariston's polemic against Zenon on the προηγμένα: after the meeting with Polemon, Ariston would have understood the purely 'fictitious' character of Zenon's indifferents and would have been induced thereby to abandon his master.

At this point, the question arises of why Diokles mentioned Zenon's long (and serious) illness in the context of what seems to be a doctrinal polemic. For chronological reasons, it cannot be related to the philosopher's death<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, from Diogenes Laertios we learn that, although ἀπαγῆς καὶ ἀσθενῆς (7,1), Zenon died at the age of 98 (according to Persaios – Diog. Laert. 7,28 = Pers. *SVF* I 458 – at the age of 72) without being sick and after having led a healthy life (7,28: ἄνοσος καὶ ὑγιῆς διατελέσας)<sup>19</sup>. We argue therefore that the long illness reported by Diokles may be interpreted in the light of the mention, in the same context, of Polemon and Ariston.

In the sources on the debate on the preferable the concept of health regularly occurs as an example of absolute indifferent from the point of view of Ariston<sup>20</sup>. The term ἀρρώστια, moreover, could recall that of ἀρρώστημα, that is, the Stoic concept of 'infirmity'. Thanks to a passage from Didymus (in Stob. *Anthol.* 2,7,10e Wachsmuth = *SVF* III 421) and Diogenes Laertios (7,115 = *SVF* III 422) we know that the Stoics distinguished between νόσημα (disease) and ἀρρώστημα (infirmity). The νόσημα was defined as an opinion that generates a desire and is consolidated in a ἔξις; the Stoics further distinguished the ἔξις from the διάθεσις; the former concerns a condition that may increase or decrease in intensity, while the latter indicates a stable and firm condition (i.e. a disposition)<sup>21</sup>. The νόσημα, therefore, leads to the formation of an ἔξις; thanks to this ἔξις we wrongly consider some things as if they were αἰρετά (καθ' ἣν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τὰ μὴ αἰρετά σφόδρα αἰρετά εἶναι), such as φιλογυνία, φιλοινία, and

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. e.g. Cic. *Fin.* 2,43 (*SVF* I 364); 4,47 = Arist. *SVF* I 364.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. Sext. Emp. *M* 11,63 = Arist. *SVF* I 361; see IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 188-207.

<sup>18</sup> IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 20-21 sees a reference to Zenon's last illness in our passage. MANSFELD, *Diogenes*, 323-324 points to the synchronism with Polemon (death: 270/69 BC), which is not compatible with the death of Zenon (262/1 BC).

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. also *Suda* ζ 79, s.v. Ζήνων. Muson. F XVIIIa Hense = *SVF* I 287 speaks of an illness, but not in relation to his death. On Zenon's chronology, see GOURINAT, *Zénon*, 376-378.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Cic. *Fin.* 2,43 (*SVF* I 364); 4,79 (*SVF* I 368); Sen. *Epist.* 94,5 (*SVF* I 359); Sext. Emp. *M* 11,63 (*SVF* I 361). See IOPPOLO, *Piacere*, 49, 59-62.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Simplicius. *In Aristot. Cat.* VIII 237,25 ff. Kalbfleisch = *SVF* II 393.

φιλαργυρία. The ἀρρώστημα or infirmity, instead, can be considered a species of the νόσημα: both Stobaios and Diogenes Laertios define the ἀρρώστημα as a νόσημα to which a state of weakness (μετ' ἀσθενείας) is added. It is important to notice that Diogenes Laertios at the beginning of his *Life of Zenon* affirms that the philosopher of Kition, even if he was healthy, was ἀσθενής<sup>22</sup>. The most significant point is the fact that the ἀρρώστημα, being a form of νόσημα, implied a wrong evaluation of the things that have to be chosen and, therefore, preferred. Thus, one cannot rule out the possibility that the serious illness of Zenon was considered in rather polemical terms in the context of the anecdote transmitted by Diokles: Ariston, influenced by the criticism of Polemon, would have attacked the doctrine of the preferable indifferents elaborated by Zenon who, suffering from a prolonged illness, was not able to correctly establish what is to be chosen and what instead is to be rejected.

It is also worth noting that in the anecdote it is specified that Zenon's ἀρρωστία was μακρά; it is, therefore, a physical (or mental?) disease of particular gravity and significance<sup>23</sup>. This story could recall the 'conversion' of the dissident Stoic Dionysios of Herakleia, who was called μεταθέμενος<sup>24</sup> for claiming that the *telos* was to be identified with pleasure. Diogenes Laertios (7,166 = Dionys. Heracl. *SVF* I 422) reports that Dionysios believed that the *telos* was pleasure because he was suffering from an eye disease (διὰ περίστασιν ὀφθαλμίας)<sup>25</sup>. Since his pain was very acute, Dionysios refused the Stoic position that pain would be an ἀδιάφορον. Maybe we can trace a similar pattern in the two stories: in the case of both Zenon's disease and Dionysios' pain, a significant physical problem may have led to conclusions that manifestly and concretely contradict the philosophical positions held previously (in the field of genuine Stoic thought, the doctrine of *adiaphoria*).

Finally, with reference to Diokles' anecdote, one cannot even reject the hypothesis of a contrast between Zenon's disease and the fact that Ariston defined virtue as ὑγίεια, considered as health of the soul. For Ariston, in fact, the health of the body is undoubtedly an absolute indifferent; however, the reference to health as the proper 'name' of virtue (which is for him the *only* moral good) is closely linked to the (Socratic) science of goods and evils and hence to the idea that the soul that cannot be virtuous is sick<sup>26</sup>. The reference to Ariston's ὑγίεια strengthens our impression that a doctrinal debate might lay behind Diokles' anecdote. For Ariston, Zenon's serious illness, just like health (of the body), is an absolute ἀδιάφορον, while for the founder of the Stoa it is an indifferent not preferable (ἀποπροηγμένον) to health.

Now, the possible interpretations of the fragment can plausibly be reduced to two: (1) either Ariston, struck by Polemon's criticism of the προηγμένα, considers Zenon a hypocrite, as he would not have been able to regard his ἀρρωστία μακρά as an ἀδιάφορον, though ἀποπροηγμένον; (2) or Zenon's serious illness (polemically) expresses the actual reason why the philosopher theorized the doctrine of the προηγμένα, just as the eye pain prompted Dionysios of Herakleia to identify the *telos* with pleasure and to prefer the Epicurean or Cyrenaic school to the Stoic one<sup>27</sup>.

Although both exegeses may be plausible, the second one may perhaps be more consistent with the entire anecdote transmitted by Diokles and with the other information we have on Ariston's philosophy and his polemic with Zenon. Thus, Zenon's prolonged illness could represent the

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. also Diog. Laert. 7,9 and Phld. *Ind. Stoic.* (*PHerc.* 1018) col. III Dorandi.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Cic. *Fin.* 2,43 (*SVF* I 364), where the wording *gravissime aegrotare* might recall the ἀρρωστία μακρά of our passage.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. the use of the verb μετέθετο in our fragment.

<sup>25</sup> See also Cic. *Fin.* 5,94 (*SVF* I 431); *Tusc.* 2,60 (*SVF* I 432); Diog. Laert. 7,37. Cfr. ERBÌ, *Dionisio*.

<sup>26</sup> Plu. *Virt. mor.* 2,440f (*SVF* I 375). See IOPPOLO, *Stoicismo*, 218-222. Cfr. also Sext. Emp. *M* 11,77, with SPINELLI, *Sesto Empirico*, 251-254 and SPINELLI, *L'ombre*, 285-288, followed by LAPINI, *Spinelli*, 177 and IOPPOLO, *Sententia*, 187 n. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Ath. 7,281d = Dionys. Heracl. *SVF* I 430; Diog. Laert. 7,167 = *SVF* I 422.

circumstance under which he decided to theorize the doctrine of the preferable and, consequently, to consider the illness as an ἀδιάφορον ἀποπροηγμένον. For Ariston all this could only sound clearly contradictory, also by virtue of the criticisms that Polemon made against Zenon on the same point, albeit from a different perspective.

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite the lack of parallel traditions, it seems possible to offer an interpretation of Diokles' biographical anecdote that can consistently explain all its components. With the necessary caution, the interpretation of the fragment that appears most consistent with the other ancient sources is the following one. Our anecdote might contain a direct reference to the debate that took place between Polemon, Zenon, and Ariston on the doctrine of the preferable indifferents. Ariston may have been influenced or simply struck by Polemon's criticism of the theory of preferable indifferents put forward by Zenon. Moreover, the serious illness of the founder of the Stoa could represent the motivation that – at least in the biographical frame of the anecdote (perhaps originally polemical towards Zenon) – led him to theorize the doctrine of the preferable indifferents, which were instead rejected by both Polemon (with his πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν) and Ariston (with the reaffirmation of virtue as the only moral good). Zenon's ἀρρωστία μακρά would have convinced the philosopher that the condition of illness was indifferent to virtue, but not preferable at all. In Ariston's eyes this sounded like a contradictory and senseless position because it undermined the absoluteness of virtue. Maybe this very aspect of Ariston's philosophy attracted the attention of Diokles, who, as said above, probably devoted ample space in his bio-doxographical work to the Cynic-Stoic succession<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Cfr. above § 2.

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