Truth, Then and Now. Published by Fr. Leonid Schmidt on July 29, 2016 | No Comments. Hours before the crucifixion of our Lord, Pontius Pilate asked Christ a question that could just as well be asked in our time: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). This question and the cynicism which accompanies it is found over and again in the most violent eras of human history. It perfectly summarizes fallen man’s pitiable state: No matter how developed his senses and language, no matter how advanced his scientific capabilities, no matter how bright his future seems, and no matter how convinced he is that he poss

Abstract

Ancient cynicism was a moralistic school of ascetic and anti-materialistic gadflies and critics. Modern cynicism is generally understood as amoral, selfish, and manipulative. This article explores the change in meaning that led from one to the other, and what each kind of cynicism could mean for contemporary life. It is very unlikely that most people would ever adopt the values and ways of the ancient cynics, but there may still be something to be gained from the few who might engage in this mode of life: possibly more environmentalism, and if nothing else, more humor in our lives. Modern cynicism may have little of positive value to contribute to life and politics, although at least it undermines the self-righteous moralists. In any case, it is worth understanding in order to cope with it. Along the way, we learn that since Diogenes of Sinope a wide variety of thinkers from Socrates, Machiavelli, and Spinoza through Rousseau and Nietzsche to Wittgenstein have been credited with cynicism. That suggests that it may be more important to our intellectual life than many of us realize.

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