

Have you ever heard an idea and could not stop thinking about it? Did that idea make you want to learn more—maybe even make you think about your future career? Humans are unique in that we can develop a new interest and follow it until it becomes part of who we are.

In ancient Greece, a young woman named Hipparchia discovered a philosophy called Cynicism and spent her life dedicated to this philosophy. She followed her desire to live life according to Cynicism and become someone in society. She imagined a new world for herself and worked hard to achieve it.

Hipparchia was born in the Greek city of Maroneia around 346 BCE. Her family was wealthy, and she grew up living a model Greek life for a young girl. She learned to weave and do domestic chores. However, Hipparchia was very smart and did not want to be stuck doing traditional women's work like sweeping or weaving. She wanted to learn, but the Greeks thought women were emotional and not intelligent. Her younger brother Metrocles studied philosophy in Aristotle's school, the Lyceum. However, Hipparchia was forced to remain at home because most Greek women were not sent to school.



Women in ancient Greece were expected to weave or spin wool as their main pastime. Here, a Greek woman holds a handloom for weaving.

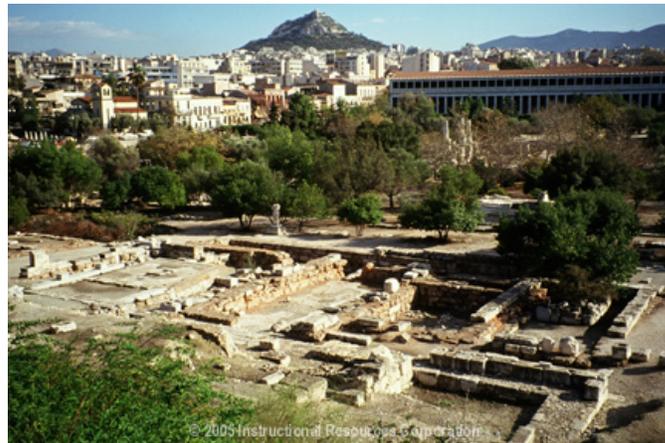
Metrocles soon left the Lyceum and began to study with a man named Crates, who was a Cynic. Cynics were a group of philosophers who followed the teachings of Socrates and believed in living an ethical life that was in agreement with nature. They valued self-sufficiency and a basic standard of living. They did not own many possessions and often lived in the street. Cynics saw themselves as applying the philosophical teachings of Socrates to everyday life. Instead of just sitting around and talking about philosophy, they lived it in the public eye. They believed the practice of ethics was essential to living a happy life. The abandonment of all material goods was a key factor in Crates's life. Even though he came from a wealthy family, he rejected his large inheritance and only owned what he carried with him. Happiness was virtue, or good behavior and morals, and not possessions.

Hipparchia heard Crates speak and wanted to follow his teachings. She was frustrated that she could not live the life she wanted to in Greece, and Cynicism offered her a way to move away from the traditional expectations placed upon her as a woman. She fell in love with Crates and began to focus all of her attention on learning from him. Hipparchia began to refuse her other suitors and chose to spend time in the streets with Crates.

Hipparchia's parents asked Crates to turn her away. They believed a woman of Hipparchia's status did not belong in the streets or studying. Crates repeatedly turned Hipparchia away, but she was too in love with the philosophy and him. Crates wanted to marry Hipparchia because he saw her as being compatible with his beliefs and intelligence. Crates wanted to be sure Hipparchia understood that being with him meant having few possessions. If she accepted his lifestyle, he would marry her. Hipparchia gave up her possessions and money, and they wed.

The marriage of Hipparchia and Crates was different than any other in Greece. They were equals in the marriage and respected each other greatly. Hipparchia attended symposia with her husband. A symposium (the singular of *symposia*) was like a dinner party. You may wonder why this is even worth mentioning, but in ancient Greece women did not go out with their husbands, and they especially did not talk about philosophy. The only women who attended dinner parties were musicians or servants. Because Cynics went against the normal way of living at the time, the couple embraced their philosophy by doing the opposite of what was expected.

Hipparchia attended a symposium where she publicly argued with the philosopher Theodorus. She said that that if Theodorus did something, Hipparchia could also do it. The example she used was that if Theodorus could discuss philosophy at a symposium, so could she. Then she went on to say that if Theodorus hit himself, she could also hit him. The logic was flawed, but Theodorus did not have a quick comeback. Instead of



The Athenian Agora. This was the center of the athletic, artistic, spiritual, and political life of the city. Hipparchia and her husband, Crates, spent much of their time in the agora discussing philosophy.

responding to her philosophical challenge, Theodorus grabbed Hipparchia by her clothes. Hipparchia calmly stood up to Theodorus, and told him there was nothing wrong with using her time to study and debate philosophy instead of sitting at a loom and just weaving. By stating this in a public place, Hipparchia confronted the limits of women in all of Greece.

Hipparchia found ways to be active in Greek society. She attended more public forums and spoke on marriage. But Hipparchia also took on the traditional Greek role of mother. She and Crates had two children together, and though they provided them with a traditional education, they treated them differently than other Greek children. For example, they encouraged their daughter to live with her fiancé before they were married, so she could be sure about her choice. This was unusual in ancient Greece, and it was very much frowned upon.

Hipparchia was the first liberated woman in Greece. She refused to be limited in life because of her gender, and she encouraged other women to move beyond the traditional woman's role of household chores. She pressed for women's rights as citizens in Greek society and continued her philosophical studies. While she did not change the role of women in Greece, she did help alter the perspective that women were not intelligent.

The later branch of Cynicism called Stoicism was founded by Zeno, who studied under Crates and Hipparchia. The influence of Hipparchia's teachings on Stoicism has long been acknowledged and recognized.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** What was the traditional role of women in Ancient Greece?
  - A.** They ran the Republic.
  - B.** They did household chores and weaving.
  - C.** They attended lectures at the Lyceum.
  - D.** They were scribes and poets.
  
- 2.** What is a symposium?
  - A.** A gathering to discuss philosophy and eat dinner
  - B.** A marketplace where musicians play and vendors sell food
  - C.** A school where mathematics and logic are taught
  - D.** A Greek gymnasium where wealthy men can exercise and bathe
  
- 3.** How did Hipparchia react to Theodorus grabbing her?
  - A.** She said that she missed the home and weaving.
  - B.** She slapped Theodorus to prove she was strong.
  - C.** She panicked and hid behind her husband.
  - D.** She remained calm and did not become emotional.
  
- 4.** Why do you think that Hipparchia's actions were looked down upon in ancient Greece? How do you think her actions would be viewed today? Use details from the passage in your answer.