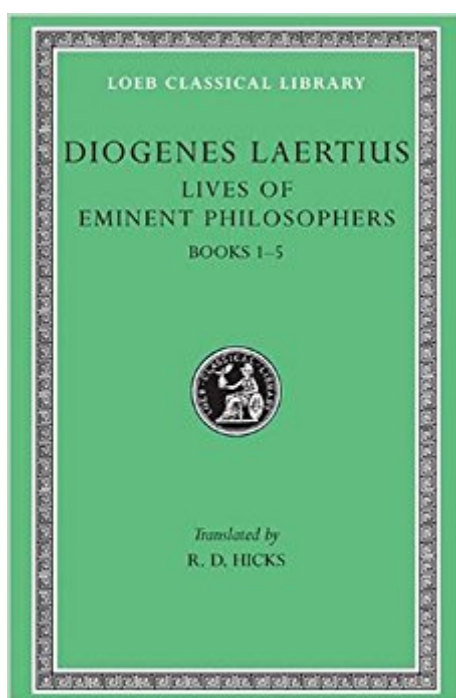


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Diogenes Laertius: Lives Of Eminent Philosophers, Volume I, Books 1-5 (Loeb Classical Library No. 184)



Synopsis

This rich compendium on the lives and doctrines of philosophers ranges over three centuries, from Thales to Epicurus (to whom the whole tenth book is devoted); 45 important figures are portrayed. Diogenes Laertius carefully compiled his information from hundreds of sources and enriches his accounts with numerous quotations. Diogenes Laertius lived probably in the earlier half of the 3rd century CE, his ancestry and birthplace being unknown. His history, in ten books, is divided unscientifically into two 'Successions' or sections: 'Ionian' from Anaximander to Theophrastus and Chrysippus, including the Socratic schools; 'Italian' from Pythagoras to Epicurus, including the Eleatics and sceptics. It is a very valuable collection of quotations and facts. The Loeb Classical Library edition of Diogenes Laertius is in two volumes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Good book. But it's a pity that the condition is not very ideal.

Good reading!

This opening line from Diogenes Laertius (as translated by Robert Drew Hicks) neatly sums up the approach of Diogenes in compiling this amazing amount of material about the ancient philosophers. Some of the material is valuable, some is stuff...but even the "stuff" is pretty interesting coming from such an "ancient" compiler (one dating for Diogenes is (ca. A.D. 225-250). According to Herbert S.

Long in his "Introduction" to Vol. 1 (there are 2 volumes in the complete set of the Loeb Classical Library Diogenes published by Harvard Univ. Press -- Vol. 1: ISBN 0-674-99203-2 and Vol. 2: ISBN 0-674-99204-0) -- Diogenes ranges from being a source of valuable information about the lives of the ancient philosophers to a source of highly readable, even entertaining, but sometimes unreliable thoughtbites. A few things Long has to say are: "His account of Plato, one of his longest, clearly shows how superficial and unreliable he was [sigh...]." "The tone of his work as a whole suits better a man of the world who happened to be interested in philosophers, but more as men and writer than as philosophers in a technical sense." Which means that Diogenes can appeal to the general reader who is interested in anecdotes and fascinating out-of-the-way puns and "gossip" about the philosophers (as compiled from tomes of secondary and tertiary sources) -- as well as to the scholar interested in seeing the effect of a compiler/synthesizer as a source of information. According to Long, again, "Diogenes has acquired an importance out of all proportion to his merits because the loss of many primary sources and of the earlier secondary compilations has accidentally left him the chief continuous source for the history of Greek philosophy." Volume I of the 2-volume set includes Books I through V, containing a "Prologue" and going from the beginning with Thales in Book I to Aristotle at the beginning of Book V. Volume II begins with Book VI and goes through Book X, with Antisthenes at the beginning of Book VI and ending with the entire Book X devoted to Epicurus. Diogenes starts out his work by taking to task those who claim that philosophy arose among the barbarians, who rest their claims with the Persians and their Magi, the Babylonians and Assyrians with their Chaldaeans, the Indians with their Gymnosophists, and the Celts and Gauls with their Druids. But Diogenes assertively states: "These authors forget that the achievements which they attribute to the barbarians belong to the Greeks, with whom not merely philosophy but the human race itself began." [!!!] One example of his interesting material concerns the ancient figure of "Linus": "Linus again was (so it is said) the son of Hermes and the Muse Urania. He composed a poem describing the creation of the world, the courses of the sun and moon, and the growth of animals and plants. * * * Linus died in Euboea, slain by the arrow of Apollo, and this is his epitaph: Here Theban Linus, whom Urania bore, / The fair-crowned Muse, sleeps on a foreign shore." Very provocative... certainly worth deeper investigation... so, why not plunk down your dollars and have a go at Diogenes!

Diogenes Laertius' Lives of the Philosophers is a flawed work by an uninspired thinker and poetaster. His work is, however, indispensable to the student of ancient western thought and writing, as his quotations of many earlier philosophers, poets, and miscellaneous writers, whose works have

perished, have left a large body of fragments for the historian to collect and analyze. The organization of Diogenes' work into successions of philosophers and schools of thought provided the foundation for the subsequent organization of the history of ancient philosophy. Interspersed throughout his fascinating book, full of legends and tidbits about the lives of individual philosophers, Diogenes Laertius has preserved entire bibliographies, reports of raging philosophical controversies, as well as poetry (including his own very mediocre compositions). This work is a must-read for the serious student of ancient western thought.

We know but very little, if not almost nothing about Diogenes Laertius. However, this book, written, compiled by him is of tremendous, by far even underestimated IMPORTANCE FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY. The shortage of biographical data is rather remarkable while he wrote no less than 82 biographies of the antique thinkers and their theories. In his work one can easily distinct an inexhaustive passion for "COMPLETENESS", which turns out quite HUMORISTIC ... This tune makes it a real delight to read this superb collection of his "memories", the result of the tremendous MEMORY (and work, research) he must have had. He wrote down EVERYTHING HE KNEW and almost didn't note any differentiation in his own "communications". LAERTIUS STANDS FOR THE ENCYCLOPAEDIC AUTODIDACT, a man who always excels in zeal ... and lack of being fastidious and scepis towards his subject. His so IMPORTANT, MARVELOUS LIFEWORCK contains - in 10 books - the description of the lives of about 80 philosophers, from the "SEVEN WIZARDS" until Epicure. While the vast majority of the sources out of which Diogenes Laertius collected his knowledge have definitely dried up, are destroyed, HIS COMPILATION about the life and the doctrines and theories of all the famous Greek thinkers that were known to him, IS OF INVALUABLE IMPORTANCE up until today for life itself, for history and of course for philosophy. We very probably would never have known now about "his protagonists", about Greek philosophy. What is more, thanks to the many anecdotes, epigrams, letters, citations, testaments, etc... THIS OEUVRE IS EASILY READABLE ... WITH A LOT OF HUMOR !! However this is a book of REFERENCE (for philosophy), I RECOMMEND IT WARMLY TO ALL READERS: AN OUTSTANDING OEUVRE that is very RARE in its genre. YOU DO NOT AT ALL HAVE TO BE A PHILOSOPHER TO READ THIS: IT IS AS IF YOU READ A NOVEL ABOUT WHO DID WHAT. A BOOK THAT YOU WILL ENJOY (sic!) AND NEVER EVER IN YOUR LIFE WILL FORGET ABOUT!

VERY GOOD--REF. BOOK

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