

Cynicism is an attitude or state of mind characterized by a general distrust of others' motives.[1] A cynic may have a general lack of faith or hope in the human species or people motivated by ambition, desire, greed, gratification, materialism, goals, and opinions that a cynic perceives as vain, unobtainable, or ultimately meaningless and therefore deserving of ridicule or admonishment. A common misapplication of this attitude involves its attribution to individuals who emotive well-thought-out expressions of skepticism. Such miscategorization may occur as the result of either inexperience and/or a belief system in which the innate goodness of man is considered an important tenet or even an irrefutable fact. Thus, contemporary usage incorporates both a form of jaded prudence and (when misapplied) realistic criticism or skepticism. The term originally derives from the ancient Greek philosophers, the Cynics, who rejected all conventions, whether of religion, manners, housing, dress, or decency, instead advocating the pursuit of virtue in accordance with a simple and idealistic way of life.

By the 19th century, emphasis on the ascetic ideals and the critique of current civilization based on how it might fall short of an ideal civilization or negativistic aspects of Cynic philosophy led the modern understanding of cynicism to mean a disposition of disbelief in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions.

Modern cynicism is a distrust toward professed ethical and social values, especially when there are high expectations concerning society, institutions, and authorities that are unfulfilled. It can manifest itself as a result of frustration, disillusionment, and distrust perceived as owing to organizations, authorities, and other aspects of society.

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