

The Unshod Lover: Philosophical Views of Poverty in Theocritus' *Idyll 14*

Idyll 14 is unique in the Theocritean corpus for including a description of a philosopher, but scholars have generally ascribed this to the influence of comedy (e.g. Gow 1950, Dover 1987, Hunter 1996). I contend, however, that Theocritus is engaging more closely with the philosophical tradition. *Idyll 14* pushes against the Cynic idea that gods have no wants and doing so, it opens up the possibility for a human, such as Ptolemy, with whose praise the poem ends, to attain divine status. By focusing on the history of the adjective ἀνυπόδητος ('unshod'), one of the words used in *Idyll 14* of the impoverished philosopher, I notice that Plato made special use of it in his erotic dialogue, the *Symposium*. There, this typical characteristic of Socrates' poverty is attributed to Eros, a symbol of desire and a divine entity. In contrast, the Socrates of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1.6.1.2) claims that to have no wants is divine - a view of poverty also associated with the Cynics of the Hellenistic period. *Idyll 14* engages with these contrasting approaches to poverty by associating a forsaken lover, Aeschinas, with an impoverished philosopher, as Plato did. It reminds the reader that Eros, a divinity, also had desires, ultimately allowing Ptolemy, a man of divine aspirations, to want things (he is described as *erotikos*) and still make progress from the status of human to that of god, from the perspective of a Platonic dialogue. Moreover, Whereas Teles (perhaps quoting Bion at Stobaeus 4.33.31) gives the advice that a son should not be sent to Ptolemy in the hopes of putting an end to his wants, Aeschinas of *Idyll 14* is persuaded to forget beloved Kyniska (little cynic) by going off to serve as a mercenary under Ptolemy. Hence, while Ptolemy exacerbates the problem of poverty for the Cynics, Theocritus converts Ptolemy into a 'cure' for love, that is, a better, perhaps more divine, object of desire.

Bibliography

Gow, A.S.F. *Theocritus, edited with a translation and commentary, 2 vols.* Cambridge, 1950.

Hunter, Richard. *Theocritus and the archaeology of Greek poetry.* Cambridge. 1996

Dover, Kenneth. *Theocritus: Select Poems.* Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers. 1987