

## ANTISTHENES: CYNIC OR ARISTOCRAT?

Review of: Kennedy, William John, ed. (2017) *Antisthenes' Literary Fragments: Edited with Introduction, Translations, and Commentary*. A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.  
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Abstract. The review deals with a thesis by William John Kennedy devoted to Antisthenes. The authors of the review are chiefly interested in the first part of the work where Kennedy is attempting to substantiate his controversial view on Antisthenes' philosophical affiliation, asserting that he had nothing to do with the Cynics and in his ethical judgment abided by traditional tenets of Athenian aristocracy. The review is focusing on those hermeneutical devices, including rather biased translations that allow the author to come to a conclusion that breaks so starkly with the standard position in modern Classical studies.

Keywords: Antisthenes, the Cynics, Diogenes Laertius, Socrates, ethics, aristocracy, *demos*.

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A doctoral thesis defended at the University of Sydney in 2017 “deals with a significant portion of the most important fragments of Antisthenes” (7), and does this in a rather controversial manner, to say the least.

On the one hand, the author's main intention is to edit a collection of Antisthenes' fragments complete with translation and commentary for scholarly uses. On the other hand (and this seems to be his substantial purpose), the author intends to exclude Antisthenes completely from the “Cynical context”, which clashes with conventional assumptions on the subject among scholars: “in so far as Antisthenes was a philosophical figure, he was a Socratic through and through, holding ethical values consistent with the elite class he kept company with, and undeserving of his reputation as a founder of Cynicism” (8).

Such a bold challenge to the well-established view obliges one to look closely at the grounds on which the author makes his main claim about Antisthenes as a philosopher who actually had nothing to do with the Cynics and in his ethics adhered instead to traditional values of Athenian nobility.

The thesis splits into two main parts: the Introduction, where the author explicates his vision of Antisthenes as philosopher and writer (12–119), and a selection of Antisthenes' texts with translations and commentaries (120–320); attached are three Appendices (322–335). We are going to discuss the first, 'ideological' part of the work (the Introduction).

Kennedy supplies a brief review of Antisthenes' editions (16–18) and scholarly literature on the subject (18–23), pointing out the standing consensus among the majority of modern scholars on the relationship of Antisthenes to the Cynics as their forerunner or the founder of the school. A number of scholars (Wilamowitz, Dudley, Sayre, Tsouna McKirahan) do not fit in with this mainstream, but their views remain uncommon (34, n. 72).

Kennedy himself believes that Antisthenes' relationship with Cynicism is highly overrated, his principal argument being that all the relevant testimonies derive from later sources, and that there is no direct evidence for this affiliation in earlier texts. "An examination of evidence," argues Kennedy, "reveals that throughout antiquity Antisthenes was *not* known as a Cynic, but was actually known as a Socratic. The notion that he was connected to Cynicism first emerged only centuries after his death." (35) Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, the emperor Julian all refer to him as 'the Socratic'; by the middle of the fourth century A.D., Epiphanius states that "He was first Socratic, then Cynic"; "even Diogenes Laertius (who caused centuries of confusion by going on to discuss Antisthenes 'among the Cynics') states: 'Of those who succeeded him (Socrates) and were called Socratics the most important leaders were Plato, Xenophon, and Antisthenes' (2.47)." (ibid.) In the following discussion, the author intends to investigate how this 'curious transformation' came about.

At this point already, quite a natural question arises: why should it astound us if one of the Socratics is considered a precursor of the Cynics? Believing that such an association is impossible, the author implies that there exists the only one 'correct' image of Socrates, which has nothing in common with the ideology of the Cynics, but rather, as we'll see further on, is aligned with ways of living and thinking typical for a highborn aristocrat.

As Kennedy points out, the earliest usage of the term *κυνικός* to designate the meaning of 'Cynic' is attested in Strabo and Philo of Alexandria (1 c. B.C. – 1 c. A.D.), in both cases when referring to Diogenes of Sinope, and the earliest surviving association of Antisthenes with the term 'Cynic' is made by Clement of

Alexandria and Diogenes Laertius (beginning of the 3 c. A.D.). Kennedy finds a succinct explanation for this connection in Cicero (De or. 3. 61–62):

“For, because of the many schools that had virtually originated from Socrates, since, from his various and diverse discussions, ranging in all directions, with one student seizing on one aspect, and another on another, there were generated, just like families dissenting among themselves, schools greatly separated and unlike, and yet all philosophers desired to be called ‘Socratic’ and thought of themselves as such. And firstly, from Plato himself, came Aristotle and Xenocrates, of whom the former acquired the name of ‘Peripatetic’ school, the latter acquired the name of ‘Academy’, then from Antisthenes, who especially admired the persistence and rigour in Socrates’ discussion, came first the Cynics, then the Stoics.” (38)

“Here,” infers Kennedy, “Cicero clearly identifies the desire of all philosophers to be able to trace their philosophical lineage back to Socrates and thus to be called ‘Socratic’. Because Antisthenes admired the persistence and rigour of Socrates, the Cynics and then the Stoics found him to be a natural link allowing them to connect back to Socrates.” (ibid.)

However, why exactly might have Antisthenes been seen as a fitting forerunner or even forefather of the Cynics? Kennedy aptly refers here to Diogenes Laertius’ report on the Cynics as “living frugally, eating food only for nourishment, and wearing a single garment. Wealth and high birth they despise,” they “do away with Logic and Physics and devote their whole attention to Ethics,” deeming the most important aspiration to live according to ἀρετή (6.103–105). It is understandable, then, why the Cynics felt that Antisthenes was the most suitable of the Socratics to provide them with a link back to Socrates, since Antisthenes himself was heavily preoccupied with ἀρετή, and despised superfluous luxury, as well as wantonness and greed (39).

At the same time, Kennedy refers to Antisthenes’ speech in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (4.34–35), pointing out that his easy acceptance of the physical side of life contravenes the austere ascetic aspirations of the Cynics (39). However, what Antisthenes says here is that, feeling a natural desire, he is well satisfied even with those women, who no one else wants to consort with (4.38). This is hardly evidence of his licentiousness or hedonism: on the contrary, such an approach is fully in accordance with the ideal of simple life cherished by the Cynics, and conforms, e.g., to Diogenes’ of Sinope attitude towards τὰ Ἀφροδίτης, ‘affairs of Aphrodite’, performed by him in public (D.L. 6.69). It is worth noting that such an attitude towards sexual needs would hardly be acceptable for a noble Athenian aristocrat, even though Kennedy attempts to present Antisthenes as one.

His next argument against the connection between Antisthenes and the Cynics derives from Aristotle: the latter uses the term ὁ Κύων to describe

Diogenes of Sinope (Rh. 3.10.7), but when discussing Antisthenes' followers in the *Metaphysics* he refers to them simply as 'Antisthenians' (Metaph. 1043b) (41). It would seem the argument *ex silentio* could hardly be considered relevant in this case.

Kennedy proceeds with a discussion on how well the image of a dog is compatible with Antisthenes. "It seems well stated by Liddell, Scott and Jones, that from Homeric times calling someone 'dog' was a reproach 'to denote shamelessness or audacity' (s.v. II)" (42). Kennedy agrees that this fits extremely well with the image we have of Diogenes of Sinope, but believes it outright inapplicable to Antisthenes since the latter lacked shamelessness.

If we look into the quoted article from LSJ, we find that the term *κύων* as a word of reproach implying 'shamelessness' was mainly applicable to females, and when referring to men it implied 'recklessness'. Therefore, the inference to the inapplicability of the term *κύων* to Antisthenes based on the LSJ data is unreliable.

The Diogenes Laertius' testimony that Antisthenes called himself 'simple-dog' (αὐτός τ' ἐπεκαλεῖτο Ἄπλοκύνων, 6.13), Kennedy discards as "a very late comment". "Antisthenes also habitually associated with Socrates and his aristocrat circle of friends, and praised noble birth on many occasions", this supposedly being incompatible with shamelessness (42).

The next subsection (II.ii) is a graphic demonstration of Kennedy's method of working with texts. Speaking of "ideological values" to describe his hero, he states that Antisthenes "frequently praised nobility and high-birth and, as often, castigated baseness and, by implication, democracy" (47). This opinion appears to be the cornerstone of his whole interpretation. How does he support it?

After making his principal statement about Antisthenes' fondness of aristocracy and disdain for democracy at the beginning of the subsection, Kennedy goes on to mention Antisthenes' insistent remarks that contrast "noble men and deeds with base men and deeds. For example, he stated: 'Noble deeds are good, base deeds are shameful' (τὰγαθὰ καλὰ, τὰ κακὰ αἰσχρὰ)" (47). Kennedy's translation of this key apophthegm related by Diogenes Laertius (6.12) is definitely biased. Compare how R.D. Hicks translates it: "Good actions are fair and evil actions foul," or M.L. Gasparov's Russian translation, "Добро прекрасно, зло безобразно ('Good is beautiful, evil is ugly')," arguably the most adequate of the three. The Greek text definitely does not contain sociological connotations that Kennedy is trying to graft on its purely ethical meaning by his choice of words, 'noble' and 'base'.

A similar crafty substitution is also discernible in the author's translation of other fragments, e.g. D.L. 6.5: "city-states will come to destruction, when the men

who hold sway are unable to distinguish the base men (φάυλοι) from the noble men (σπουδαίοι) (47), cf. 'good men from bad' (Hicks). To translate φάυλοι ('cheap, paltry') as 'base men' and σπουδαίοι ('serious, earnest') as 'noble men' is to juggle with words.

Still, Kennedy persists: "In a couple of other fragments Antisthenes is found directly praising noble men: 'a noble man deserves to be loved (ἀξιέραστος ὁ ἀγαθός)' and 'noble/excellent men (σπουδαίοι) are loved.'" (6.12) (48) The same trick here: the good (ὁ ἀγαθός) and the earnest (σπουδαίοι) are blithely turned into aristocrats.

And another one: "The following comment sums up his views on class particularly well: 'It is better to be one of a few noble men (ἀγαθοί) fighting against all the base men (κακοί), than one of many base men (κακοί) fighting against a few noble men (ἀγαθοί).'" (ibid.)

As we can see, in all these cases a bold, to put it mildly, substitution of the meaning of various Greek words with a single opposition of 'high-' and 'lowborn' is performed. This decontextualizes the fragments discussed that treat exclusively of ethics. Nevertheless, Kennedy misrepresents numerous ethical and philosophical maxims ascribed to Antisthenes as referring to conflicting social strata. Cf. the following passage from Philo: εἰς ταῦτα δ' ἀπιδὼν Ἀντισθένης δυσβάστακτον εἶπεν εἶναι τὸν ἀστείον· ὡς γὰρ ἡ ἀφροσύνη κοῦφον καὶ φερόμενον, οὕτως ἡ φρόνησις ἐρηρισμένον καὶ ἀκλινές καὶ βάρως ἔχον ἀσάλευτον; (Prob. 28). A plain contrast between foolishness (ἀφροσύνη) as instability and good sense (φρόνησις) as stability Kennedy turns into "a key component in the ideology of the old aristocracy, which held that flightiness and changeability are qualities of base men (and so the *demos*), while steadiness and intransigence are inherent qualities of the nobly born" (51).

In the section dealing with the development of *ethopoia* in Antisthenes (67–74), Kennedy continues to interpret the extant fragments of his works in the same vein: thus, in *Ajax and Odysseus* the former is represented as an old-style aristocrat never fawning upon the mob, and resembling, as Kennedy would have it, Socrates; while Odysseus, on the contrary, "adopts the pragmatically opportunistic ethics that traditional Athenian aristocrats ascribed to the *demos*" (73).

Overall, Kennedy concludes that Antisthenes had never been a Cynic and had nothing to do with Cynicism as a philosophical persuasion or a life-style. He was a noble by birth and always praised the aristocratic way of life, at the same time despising the *demos* and everything that might be associated with 'commoners'.

Paradoxically, Kennedy draws even Socrates into the same pattern, and we cannot help but be baffled with this overture, given the well-known descriptions of Socrates in Plato and Xenophon. These barefaced gimmicks the extant testi-

monies and distort the meanings of Greek words in proposed translations to favor a monochromatic 'class' implication makes one wonder: for what, and impelled by what ideology, is such a shenanigan disguising itself with all the trappings of academic research?

#### REFERENCE

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