

Classical Athenian Citizenship: An Antisthenic Analysis

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Citizenship in Classical Athens may seem like a relatively straightforward concept if one considers it through the lens of Pericles' citizenship laws of 451/0, which primarily focused on your parentage. However, the reality was often less clear cut for many Athenians, and this paper will focus on one in particular: Antisthenes. Utilizing primary sources and secondary interpretations, this paper will argue that through an Antiesthnic lens, citizenship in Classical Athens was not being applied to those who should have had it granted, such as the metics, and was instead being wasted on those who did not deserve it.

To begin, we must consider the ideas surrounding citizenship, both before the laws of Pericles and after. Earlier periods saw a much more open attitude towards 'outsiders': refugees from other areas of the Aegean, such as the Gephyraioi fleeing Boeotia, were granted a slightly limited Athenian citizenship, and marriages to foreign women were not uncommon, such as that of Pisistratus marrying a woman from Argos, and Miltiades marrying into the same Thracian family from which Thucydides' father hailed.¹ Others were granted Athenian citizenship because of some benefit they could offer the city, whether economically, militarily, or in bringing something the polis could utilize, such as a new craft.² The language surrounding the ideas of citizenship were much more flexible as well – *astos* and *polites* saw mixed usage in Homeric literature and general ideas surrounding citizenship, and often had more to do with a sense of place or interpersonal relationship than a firm definition of being a "citizen".³

¹ Josine Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 250

² *Ibid*, 251

³ Stefano Frullini, "The Language of Citizenship in Herodotus and Thucydides" In *Citizenship in antiquity: civic communities in the ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jakub Filonik, Christine Plastow, and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2023), 413

Citizenship had more to do with the *polis*, the citizens benefits and obligations from the polis, and how those obligations fulfilled the contract the *polis* held with the gods.⁴ Solon's laws saw some forms of strict legal requirements surrounding Athenian citizenship, which would later be set into a legal framework under Cleisthenes and codified into law by Pericles, but even then non-citizens could still be, in essence, "adopted" into a *polis*.⁵ In his *Funeral Oration* to commemorate the first deaths in the Peloponnesian War, Pericles provides us with several descriptors that he felt applied exclusively to Athenians: Athenians "cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth [they] employ more for use than for show"⁶; Athenians are daring, deliberate, and generous, and would rather "choose to die resisting, rather than to live submitting"⁷, and are capable of winning their fights against an enemy by themselves, rather than relying on others like the Lacedaemonians (the Spartans).⁸

What of Antisthenes? How would he define citizenship, who deserved it, and how the community should utilize it? Unfortunately, it is difficult to say definitively, as the majority of his original works did not survive, however, what does remain of his philosophy exists in quotations, anecdotes, and stories in the likes of Xenophon's *Symposium* and in the works of Diogenes Laertius.⁹ The wealthy son of a famous father and a mother who was potentially Thracian or descended from Thracians, Antisthenes

⁴ Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens*, 249

⁵ Ibid, 253

⁶ Pericles, *Funeral Oration*, c. 431 BCE. Translation by Richard Crawley, edited and abridged by Lisa Cox in *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 BCE*, ed. Mark C. Carnes, Naomi J. Norman, and Josiah Ober (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 92

⁷ Ibid, 93

⁸ Pericles, *Funeral Oration*, 91

⁹ Debra Nails, *The people of Plato: a prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*, 1st ed. (Hackett, 2002), 36

served with distinction at the Battle of Tanagra, and spent much of his later adult life learning, debating, and discussing with Socrates and others in the intellectual class of society.¹⁰ His philosophy is one of simplicity – eschew material goods, and apply the concepts of truth, virtue, goodness, and justice to everyday life, rather than simply lounging around (as Socrates would have us do) discussing and defining them to no end and no benefit to anyone but themselves. He argued that Socrates’ utopia, while good in some regard, still focuses too much on the material goods, the luxuries and benefits of a civilization obsessed with them, which Socrates says should be watched over by “guardians” who will forgo the material goods and spend their days studying philosophical ‘truths’ to guide their actions. Antisthenes knows that those who have power will always seek to benefit from it, and a society founded on material wealth will inevitably be corrupted by it. He regarded *paideia* (education) and *ponos* (‘effort’, ‘exertion’) as good things and what society should be focused on, citing the works of Heracles and Cyrus in their accomplishments and dedication to bettering themselves, and had no love for the democracy of Athens, comparing the raising of soldiers to generals simply by a vote to the raising of donkeys to horses by a vote.¹¹

In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, he is quoted several times voicing his opinion on several matters, primarily criticizing individuals for their lack of true knowledge, their boastfulness of only having and chasing after material wealth and looks, and commenting on what ‘true wealth’ is. It is from these quotations that this paper will regard the concepts of citizenship through an Antiethnical lens. For example, he says that

¹⁰ Information here is a mix from Nails’ *The people of Plato*, 36, and the character sheet used in RTTP

¹¹ P. A. Meijer, *A new perspective on Antisthenes: logos, predicate, and ethics in his philosophy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 21; 107; 109

“mankind maintains its wealth and poverty not in its homes, but in its souls. For I see many individuals who have a lot of money but think themselves so needy that they endure much labor, much danger by which they may profit.”¹² Earlier in the *Symposium*, several individuals are asking each other what they are most proud of, what defines them – for Antisthenes, he answers “Wealth”, but not material wealth, instead the wealth of knowledge and knowing that the endless pursuit of material wealth is an “extremely harsh sickness”.¹³ When Niceratus answers that he is proud of being able to recite the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from memory, Antisthenes comments that all trained in rhapsody and rhetoric would be able to do so, but that there is not “a tribe more foolish than rhapsodes”, and Socrates agrees that “these men don’t understand the deeper meanings” within those or other works.¹⁴ For Antisthenes, then, being a good citizen was not simply about having what is necessary for a good simple life, but about knowing what to truly value: knowledge (although not simply for knowledge’s sake, but actual understanding that can and should be applied), justice, and when having enough is enough. Those putting in the effort to continually educate themselves to the point of true understanding and using that knowledge to improve not only their lives but those around them, these are the qualities that this paper argues Antisthenes would highlight as defining an Athenian citizen. The men who claim to have knowledge, those voting to raise soldiers to generals who possess no real qualifications, those chasing after wealth by “endur[ing] much labor, much danger“, simply for a profit, what benefit is Athens gaining from these men? And why should those who live, work, fight, and die alongside

¹² Xenophon, *Symposium* IV, 34-38; translation in Donald F. Jackson, *Symposium of Xenophon of Athens: A New Critical Edition with a Facing-Page English Translation* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 59-63

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Xenophon, *Symposium* III, 4-7

Athenian citizens, but do so to the benefit of a *polis* they cannot even fully participate in, not be granted citizenship and the rights and benefits it brings with it?

One of the most prolific groups in that regard were the *metoikoi*, or metics who were residents of Athens, differentiated from the *xenoi*, which were metics who were simply passing through.¹⁵ By definition, these individuals were non-Athenian, that is, non-citizens, and could be either simply free non-citizens (more likely to be Greek) or freed former slaves (almost exclusively non-Greek due to how Athenian conquest worked), a distinction that was made clear in the works of Aristotles, Xenophon, and other writers.¹⁶ These individuals, while non-citizens, were expected both to follow the laws of the city, and were obligated to perform military service when called upon; they also paid both a special metic-specific tax, the *metoikion*, and, if sufficiently wealthy, a high property tax, the *eisphora*.¹⁷ Despite having no rights to own land, limited legal rights, and excluded from most cult practice, the Athenian economy, as argued by Deborah Kamen, depended on the metics for much of the labor power they needed, particularly as traders and craftsmen, as attested to in Xenophon's works.¹⁸ As noted, they served in the military, typically as rowers for the navy or hoplites for the army, meaning they fought and died alongside full-right citizens much the same, although they were unable to serve in the cavalry and may have existed, at least organizationally, within segregated units comprised of fellow metics – the realities of war, however, meant a hoplite was a hoplite was a hoplite, so long as they were trained.¹⁹

¹⁵ Deborah Kamen, *Status in classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 75-76

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid, 78

¹⁹ Ibid, 85

Similar sentiments to the arguments made in this paper exist in Classical literature in the works of Lysias, specifically Lysias 12 and 31. As argued by Geoff Bakewell, these speeches utilize the rhetoric of judging individual's actions against that of metics, noting that some metics tended to act better than some citizens, and, from the point of view of the *polis*, they would rather have good metics than bad citizens. He also argued that some Athenian citizens saw the classification of 'citizenship' based on birthrights as being shortsighted, and Lysias specifically states that it alone is insufficient.²⁰ In Lysias 31, he attacks Philon by comparing his conduct to that of the metics who had fought alongside Thrasyboulos, while Philon had fled to Oropos and thus, abandoned his civic duty - a duty which the metics upheld despite it not being their own, and realistically gaining nothing from it directly.²¹ Antisthenes' philosophy, stressing virtue, goodness, and justice, certainly aligns with the problems pointed out by Lysias, and given Antisthenes' own questionable heritage to qualify for Athenian citizenship, he would have had some commonality with the metics that lived and fought alongside him and his fellow Athenians.

Based on the interpretations from quotations associated with Antisthenes, and what few surviving ideas we do know of his philosophy, it is clear through the evidence discussed that he would have classified many in Athens as citizens who would not, traditionally, be considered or eligible as such – those who worked hard, educated themselves, and applied the concepts of justice, virtue, and goodness to their everyday lives in Athens. Additionally, much like Lysias, he would have argued that many of the

²⁰ Geoff Bakewell, "Lysias 12 and Lysias 31: Metics and Athenian Citizenship in the Aftermath of the Thirty," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40 (1999), 5-6

²¹ *Ibid*, 8

“citizens” of Athens were of much less benefit to the city, particularly if they continually worked to selfishly serve themselves, and only educated themselves at the most basic level without bothering to gain a true understanding of the subject. Metics, both freeborn and freedmen, would have found favor in his definition of citizenship, as they lived and worked harder than many Athenians, and fought and died for a *polis* they had limited legal and social rights within. From an Antiethnic viewpoint, then, citizenship in Athens should have had more to do with your character and your work ethic than with your lineage or your wealth, a viewpoint held by at least a few others in Antisthenes’ time, although the Periclean law shows it was not held by the majority.

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