

Classical Athenian Citizenship: An Antisthenic Analysis

Steven Jewkes, MacEwan University

This paper performed an analysis of Classical Athenian citizenship through an Antisthenic lens, comparing ideas and laws surrounding citizenship to Antisthenes’ viewpoint on what a citizen should be. While none of his own works survive, his philosophy and ideals survive in quotations, anecdotes, and stories in works such as Xenophon’s *Symposium* and those of Diogenes Laertius.

Using these resources, as well as similar arguments made by Lysias in the same period in his own works, it argues that Antisthenes would have classified many in Athens as citizens who would not, traditionally, be considered or eligible as such – anyone who worked hard, educated themselves, and applied the concepts of justice, virtue, and goodness to their everyday lives. Thus, the typical citizens of Athens would have found much less favor in his definition of citizenship than metics, as these metics lived and worked harder than many citizens, and even fought and died for a polis they had limited status in.



Antisthenes, Roman copy after a Hellenistic original, c. 1774, marble bust from the Villa of Cassius at Tivoli, Vatican Museums

While the laws of Solon and Pericles codified stricter legal requirements for citizenship, earlier periods saw a much more open attitude towards “outsiders” – refugees such as the Gephyraioi fleeing Boeotia were granted limited Athenian citizenship, and marriages to foreign women were not uncommon.

Antisthenes valued the wealth of knowledge and a dedication to bettering oneself rather than pursuing material wealth and “enduring much labor, much danger by which they may profit” – essentially, pursuing wealth at all cost. Those educating themselves to the point of true understanding and applying that knowledge to benefit the world were better citizens to Antisthenes and Lysias.

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