

Abstract

Since its origins in the nineteenth century, the question of the historical Socrates has focused on representations of the speaking character Socrates in extant literature, principally Plato's dialogues, Xenophon's Socratic conversations, and Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Recent work has shown that these images are inconsistent in a range of respects, and many scholars have settled on understanding these representations as creative fictions of their authors, which when taken together should not be expected to reveal a historical Socrates. In this debate, Antisthenes has not figured, first, because we have no knowledge that Socrates was used in his dialogues as the major authoritative speaker, and second, because the clear evidence for any character Socrates in Antisthenes' work is very slim, amounting an undetailed report of a conversation with Alcibiades. Yet Antisthenes is widely remembered as a Socratic disciple, and Panaetius lists him as one of the authors who transmitted an authentic image of Socrates.

Rather than tracking out the anonymous anecdotal representations of Socrates that could arguably be attributed to Antisthenes, or looking deeper into passages where Socrates and Antisthenes are characters in the same story, in this paper we will step back to the level of intellectual inquiry to consider what Antisthenes contributes to knowledge of the intellectual profile of the historical Socrates. For each of the extant authors Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon, it is arguable that Antisthenes offers a better position for triangulation on Socrates than any pair of these three compared directly with each other. Antisthenes was of the same age as Aristophanes; he was comparably serious about philosophy as Plato; he was definitely known to and influential on Xenophon's idea of Socrates. In each case, we will select central topics of deepest disagreement (as I think) between the extant author and Antisthenes and consider how these disagreements can direct us toward the most likely positions of the historical Socrates. In Aristophanes, these surround scientific research. In Plato, they surround the theory of Forms and the profitability of studying poetry. In Xenophon, they surround monetized wealth, solitude, and the match between positive law and justice. Time will not allow for thorough investigation of each of these topics, but the main goal will be to establish the big idea that Antisthenes leads us to a better set of comparative questions than any match among these three authors directly.

Bio

Susan Prince is associate professor at the University of Cincinnati. She is the author of *Antisthenes of Athens: translation and commentary*, the first edition of the fragments of Antisthenes to be published in any language. Her research interests are in the history of ancient Greek thought and literature, especially the Socratic traditions. Her primary projects are on Antisthenes and the ancient Cynics. Her teaching interests cover Greek and Roman literature from its beginnings, Homer and Hesiod, to the prose authors of the high Roman Empire, especially those who wrote in Greek.