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ANTISTHENES' THEORY OF UNIQUE ENUNCIATION: SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND POSSIBLE INFLUENCES

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Introduction

In this paper I will focus on Antisthenes' theory of unique enunciation, and will then discuss its similarities and differences with, and/or possible influences on, other theories on language that flourished around the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. I showed elsewhere that Antisthenes' theory of language is a practical application or a strategy that has direct implication for his ethical project.¹ My aim here is merely to highlight the originality and relevance of Antisthenes' theory by presenting it and contextualizing it, before assessing relevant similarities and differences between certain positions of Antisthenes and those of some Skeptics, Sophists, Cyrenaics, and Megarians.

Antisthenes² flourished around 420-370 B.C.E. He became a close friend and associate of Socrates after reportedly studying with Gorgias of Leontium (fl. 440 B.C.E. and visited Athens around 427 B.C.E.) and had many "sophist" friends, such as Prodicus and Hippias. Although wealthy enough not to worry about his livelihood, he professed extreme austerity—to the point where Socrates supposedly criticized him for showing off his torn cloak.³ To categorize Antisthenes and describe him in relation to a particular philosophical orientation would be a very difficult task since he had affinities with many of his contemporaries. While he was traditionally considered to be the founder of Cynicism, contemporary scholarship agrees that he was not but was a precursor and/or a major influence on the Cynic movement.⁴ describe him as the Cynics

¹ Cf. Fouad Kalouche, "Antisthenes' Ethics and Theory of Language" in *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* XVII/1, 1999, pp. 11-41.

² Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VI, 1-19, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1991-1925, 1931) and Xenophon, *Banquet* IV, 34-45, trans. O. J. Todd (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1947-1922), as well as Donald R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967-orig. 1937), pp. 1-15, and Farrand Sayre, "Antisthenes the Socratic" in *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung*, edited by Margarethe Billerbeck (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1991), pp. 73-85. For primary sources, refer to F. D. Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milano-Varese: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpina, 1966).

³ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 8 and Aelian, *Var. Hist.* IX, 35 (Caizzi 148A).

⁴ Following Diogenes Laertius (VI, 2) and Cicero (*De Orat.* III, 17), E. Zeller (*Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, trans. O. J. Reichel, NY: Russel & Russel, 1962-orig. 1885), G. Grote (*Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, vol. III, London: Theommes Press, 1996-orig. 1865), H. Maeier (*Sokrates*, Tübingen, 1913), T. Gomperz (*Greek Thinkers*, vol. II, trans. G. G. Berry, London: John Murray, 1931-orig. 1905), and A. J. Festugière ("Antisthenica" in *Etudes de Philosophie Grecque*, Paris: Vrin, 1971, pp. 283-314) continued to consider Antisthenes as the founder of Cynicism. Dudley, after Dupréel, tried to prove that Antisthenes had no "direct connexion" with the Cynics and found in the need to trace a Stoic lineage or "succession" going back to Socrates the reason why he was ascribed this role. Sayre also attempted to show that Antisthenes had nothing to do with the Cynics and joined Swartz and Wilamowitz-Möllendorff in rejecting any connection of Antisthenes to the Cynics. Nowadays, following Joël and von Fritz, Giannantoni, Goulet-Cazé and Long agree that Antisthenes was not the founder of Cynicism but that he influenced Cynicism to a great extent. Cf. R. Dudley, op. cit., pp. 1-15; E. Dupréel, *La Légende Socratique et les Sources de Platon* (Bruxelles, 1922); F. Sayre, op. cit., pp. 73-85; E. Schwartz, "Diogenes der Hund und Krates der Kyniker" in *Charakterköpfe aus der Antiken Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1911), vol. 2, pp. 1-23; U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Platon* (Berlin: Weidemann, 1920), vol. 1, pp. 259ff, vol.

deleted.] He could very well be described as a Sophist (as Guthrie describes him) and one can detect many similarities with Prodicus and Protagoras.⁵ Some might call him a Megarian (as Gomperz does) and would have no problem showing some closeness between his positions and the (later) positions of Stilpo of Megara and of Diodorus Kronos, while others (such as Festugière) consider him a Parmenidean. Antisthenes' positions are almost impossible to summarize under one heading; it might be worthwhile, in order to situate them, to analyze their interconnectedness with various Sophist and Socratic so-called "schools."

Antisthenes Theory of Unique Enunciation

One of the most important aspects of Antisthenes' theory of language⁶ is his "theory of unique enunciation" which affirms that every enunciation is unique and that it cannot be contradicted. The English word "enunciation" probably doesn't carry the same connotations as the French word "*énonciation*," which is Festugière's translation of "*logos*" in Aristotle's *Met.* 1024 b 26 – 1025 a.⁷ Although I am not questioning the translation of *logos* by "account" (Ross' replacement of "conception" in the 1928 edition, over the 1908 original), or "formula" (as preferred by Gillespie)—or elsewhere "statement" or "assertion" (as used by Dooley and Hicks)—, I prefer to use this transliteration here in order to stay closer to "articulation" and to

2, pp. 162ff; K. Joel, *Geschichte der antiken Philosophie* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1921), vol. 1, pp. 862-925; K. Von Fritz, "Antistene e Diogene" in *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 5 (1927), pp. 133-149; G. Giannantoni, *Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Roma: Edizioni Dell'Ateneo, 1983), vol. III, pp. 203-211 and "Antistene Fondatore della Scuola Cinica?" in *Le Cynisme Ancien et ses Prolongements*, edited by R. Goulet and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (Paris: PUF, 1993), pp. 15-34; M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *L'Ascèse Cynique* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), pp. 140-150 and "Who was the first Dog?" in *Le Cynisme Ancien et ses Prolongements*, op. cit., pp. 414-415; and A. A. Long, "The Socratic Tradition" in *The Cynics*, edited by R. B. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁵ Cf. Livio Rossetti's "la certitude subjective" in *Positions de la Sophistique*, edited by Barbara Cassin (Paris: Vrin, 1986), pp. 195-209, where one form of the relativism of Protagoras is described in terms similar to how I will describe Antisthenes' privileging of the "lived experience." This article also discusses briefly the attribution of *ouk estin antilegein* to Prodicus. Rossetti uses the papyrus of Tura (attributed to Didymus) and the *Dissoi Logoi* in support of his interpretations. For more on Protagoras' and Prodicus' theories on language, see below, and refer to Dupréel, Guthrie, Kerferd, and Untersteiner, but also to C. J. Classen, "The Study of language Amongst Socrates' Contemporaries" in *Sophistik*, edited by C. J. Classen (Darmstadt, 1976), and Timothy M. S. Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 147-156.

⁶ The earliest direct sources for Antisthenes' theory of language are references in Aristotle's texts, particularly the *Metaphysics* [1024 b32 (Caizzi 47A); 1043 b23 (Caizzi 44A)], and *Topics* [104 b20 (Caizzi 47C)], as well as various commentaries of these texts by Alexander of Aphrodisias [*In Arist. Met.* 1024 b26 (Caizzi 47B) and 1043 b23 (Caizzi 44B)]; *In Arist. Top.* 101 b39 (Caizzi 46), 104 a8 and 104 b19 (Caizzi 47C)]. Other references can be found in Proclus [*In Plat. Crat.* XXXVII (Caizzi 49)], in Simplicius [*In Arist. Cat.* 8 b25 (Caizzi 50A and 50B)], in Ammonius [*In Porph. Isag.* p. 40, 6 (Caizzi 50C)] and of course in Diogenes Laertius [VI, 3 (Caizzi 45) and IX, 53 (Caizzi 48)]. Numerous scholars (Dupréel, Festugière, Gomperz, Grote, and Joël, just to cite a few) have speculated on indirect references to Antisthenes' theory of language in Plato's work, particularly in the *Euthydemus* (283e-284a; 285d-286c; and 286c-d), the *Cratylus* (385b-386a and 429c-430a), the *Sophist* (251a-252c) and the *Thaetetus* (201e-202b; and 205c). Schleiermacher conjectures that the *Cratylus* was in great part directed against Antisthenes, while Zeller thinks that Plato is referring to Antisthenes in *Parmenides* 132b. Also cf. A. Brancacci, *Oikeios Logos: la filosofia del linguaggio di Antistene* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1990); A. J. Festugière, "Antisthenica," pp. 283-314; H. D. Rankin, *Antisthenes Sokraticos* (Amsterdam: Adolf Hakkert, 1986); Centre de Recherche Philologique, Université de Lille III (Blaise, Cherki, Crubellier, Dauthieu, Hecquet, Lernould, Monet, Wieczorek), "Sophistique et Cynisme" in *Positions de la Sophistique*, pp. 117-147; and Louis Ucciani, *Ironie et derision* (Paris: Diffusion les Belles Lettres, 1993), pp. 143-197.

⁷ Cf. "Antisthenica", note 2, p. 283.

the physical act of utterance. After all, one of the main tenets of Antisthenes' theory of knowledge is his rejection of abstract universals and general categorization and his privileging of acts and deeds over formulation and conceptualization.

Antisthenes' theory of language shares his ethics' desire for the palpable and empirical, while at the same time privileging what is specific and particular. By affirming that every name, utterance, or enunciation (*logos*) designates something unique and particular, and thus cannot be contradicted, he was trying to establish a simplicity and directness that will not take away from the singularity of each situation nor lose the specificity of the lived experience in a web of linguistic constructions that build on associations moving away from the particular to the general. Antisthenes' stance is that every enunciation or utterance is a singular existent, and one should not privilege the signification of the enunciation but its singularity. This theory was complemented by the claim that one cannot predicate since the only thing one can say of A is that A is A. At the same time, Antisthenes affirms that one can describe an existing thing, by comparing it to other things, the distinction between description and predication being that the first, unlike the second, is based on comparing concrete and existing things to other concrete and existing things—such as tin to silver. These two positions will not be seen as contradictory if they are supposed to apply to two different realms or domains of life. I will try to argue that Antisthenes is making a distinction between a realm of existence, which is always true by nature (*phusei*), and a realm of convention (*nomos*) where truth and falsity are arbitrarily attributed to things through conventional means of communication.

It is obvious that, from a starting point of anti-universalism, Antisthenes would not support a “definition” that signifies a Platonic form or an Aristotelian essence. The reference in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1024b32-34 presents Antisthenes as rejecting any definition for a description or explanation in terms of comparison. One cannot define “what a thing is,” however one can say what a thing “is like.” What Antisthenes is affirming is the singularity of things as their mode of existence, and that cannot be subsumed under an essential “being” of any sort, but is rather linked to what exists at a particular “real” (for him, the absolutely singular is the real, as Zeller says) moment.⁸ What would distinguish a definition that describes what a thing is or was, or what continues to be (as Paquet puts it)? A thing is or was, at the moment of the lived experience. Definition is still a description or explanation, but the time is put in context. The future is nowhere in sight, the past is omnipresent but not as something continuous—as a matter of fact it could be claimed otherwise, that it is discontinuous. It is the question of the moment, the singular present that presents itself or presented itself at a particular moment.⁹ The definition in question is not a definition but a description of the moment the thing was or is. If a definition

⁸ Many scholars consider ontology and the question of being at the basis of Antisthenes' theory of language. Of these, Festugière and the researchers of the Centre de Recherche Philologique, Université de Lille III, contend that Antisthenes was Parmenidean (or Eleatic) in his affirmation of being as unique, where being is existence (or rather existent) and does not have any essence (*ousia*), and where the unicity of being in question, at least for Festugière, is based on the existent's identity with itself. The difficulty in this kind of analysis lies in the interpretation of particularity or singularity in terms of oneness. After all, that every existent is unique does not mean that its being is one. Being itself is reduced to existence since it cannot carry the abstract notion of essentiality. Cf. “Antisthenica,” pp. 303, 311, and 314; and “Sophistique et Cynisme,” pp. 122-125.

⁹ This is close to Diodorus Kronos' notion of time, at least in what relates to motion: he would allow for “it has moved” but would not accept “it is moving” (Sextus Empiricus' *Adv. Math.* X, 85-133). This paper will briefly discuss Antisthenes and the Megarians.

has eternity ascribed to it, or if it carries with it an expectation or a projection of a sort of continuity embedded in some “essence,” this definition is impossible.

Aristotle’s reference to Antisthenes in *Metaphysics* 1024b32-34 presents the *oikeios logos* as the proper utterance that uniquely describes something. Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his commentary of this passage, clarifies further by stating that “each of the things that exist is described only by its own *oikeios logos*, and that there is one *logos* for each thing, namely the one proper to it.”¹⁰ The starting point for Antisthenes seem to be that every *logos* is unique and there can be no relation between one *logos* and another, such as predication. It is difficult not to take Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias seriously when they talk of Antisthenes claiming that to one predicate corresponds one subject. One may wonder though whether Alexander is not using his own logic—where signification is not put into question—to make sense of Antisthenes’ claims. Let us stop for a second: “*oikeion* is the name that belongs most fitly and accurately to something; or as an adjective it describes that which especially belongs or is appropriate to something.”¹¹ What if Antisthenes was not talking of the adjective, what if he wasn’t talking of any predicate or attribute to the “proper” or “particular” *logos* in question? Proclus’ comment on Antisthenes’ theory, in his analysis of Plato’s *Cratylus*, attacks Antisthenes by name for asserting that every *logos* tells the truth.¹² Those confronting Antisthenes attest that he does not distinguish between “what is” and “what is being talked about.”¹³ Maybe he is affirming that every *logos* tells the truth or is true, but he does not say that every *logos* represents the truth or represents anything period. Did Antisthenes question “representation” as one would understand the term nowadays? Epictetus attributed certain Stoic themes to Antisthenes in his *Discourses* of which the belief that *phantasiai* are all one properly owns.¹⁴ But it is obvious that Epictetus is using Antisthenes to promote his own themes, since nothing else in the few fragments we have of him would support such an interpretation.¹⁵ Antisthenes seems to be affirming an *oikeios logos* that does not concord to the existing thing through a theory of truth of any sort but, since in society one needs to communicate about existing things, the most appropriate action would be to describe these existing things by comparing them to other existing things. What belongs to things are only their unique existence, and the *oikeios logos* is most proper when it uniquely belongs to this existence. If a *logos* attempts to simply designate something concrete at a particular time, and this *logos* is not foreign or alien (*allogros*) to the experience of the thing in question, it is the most proper to it. A predicate, as a quality or attribute, designates something through communicative means, using conceptual linguistic frameworks that have no direct relation to the lived experience involving the thing in question, and thus is a separate and unique existence by itself that can only be attributed properly to its own lived experience. That is why contradiction and predication are impossible. The enunciation, as an existent, is an utterance that cannot have truth or falsity attributed to it. Falsity and truth come into the picture only when an enunciation is considered as a signifier and is no longer a singular existent as such—but rather a sign or a symbol that carries a meaning associated with other existents, real or imagined.

¹⁰ Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In. Arist. Metaph.* 1024b26, 435.1-15 (Dooley’s translation).

¹¹ Cf. Rankin, *Antisthenes Sokratikos*, p. 35.

¹² Cf. Proclus, *In. Plat. Cratylum* XXXVII (Caizzi 49).

¹³ Cf. Rankin, *Antisthenes Sokratikos*, p. 34.

¹⁴ The use of the term *phantasiai* is attributed to Antisthenes only by Epictetus and for his own purposes. Cf. Epictetus, *Discourses* III, xxiv, 67-70 (Caizzi 118).

¹⁵ Cf. Léonce Paquet, *Les Cyniques Grecs* (Paris: Librairie Générale de France, 1992), p. 83ff.

Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias seem to associate *oikeios logos* with a certain kind of belonging that concords to existing things. But Antisthenes is distinguishing between existing things and the utterances associated with these things. Existing things are unique and always true, for the only property they have is that existence. Utterances also are unique and true as existents, but once these utterances are used in a communicative situation, where they are supposed to express something about things, or act as meaningful propositions, they should be approached differently and from a more practical—or strategic—perspective. The Proclus commentary mentioned above criticizes Antisthenes for claiming that to tell something is to tell the truth, since Antisthenes doesn't seem to take into consideration the fact—unquestionable for Proclus—that someone can also tell the false. This confirms what we have argued above, that truth for Antisthenes is to be considered in relation to existence and to existing things, but this existence has to be concrete and singular. This domain of existence is one where, by nature, all things exist as unique and singular, and where no properties are attributed to things except this existence. But furthermore, Proclus criticizes Antisthenes for not allowing that someone always talks about something. To talk about something, to allow for signification and meaning of words and propositions, is part of another domain, the domain of convention, where language and communication shape what we call true and false, good or bad. Although Antisthenes fought universals for taking away from the lived experience, he seems to acknowledge the necessity of a limited usage of words for practical communication with others. He would make of all speech designating something concrete, simple, and present, and would not allow for universals or general descriptions that are not specific enough to the situation at hand.

Communication is the practical application of language, and Antisthenes' main concern with language lies in its practicality. For him, the value of meaning or sense is not set in "truth" or in the "concordance" of word to thing, but in the particularity of the lived experience itself.¹⁶ But even if a *logos*, as existent, corresponds to a lived experience that is privileged, the part of the "meaning" or "signification" ascribed to it—that may be communicated—is always already embedded in a conventional understanding. The theory of unique enunciation, described above, seems to relate to language "naturally." By nature (*phusei*), words as utterances are existents. There are no relations between words (contradiction, predication) or between words and things (correspondence, truth and falsity) outside of convention (*nomos*). The distinction that we are making between "nature" and "convention" seems to correspond obliquely to a distinction between a "natural world" that is unlimited (an *apeiron* of a sort, that is neither ontological nor epistemological but lies at the basis of *praxis*) and a "conventional world" where dealing with others (morals, communication, generalizations, etc.) not only limits the unlimited but always takes away from the singularity and practicality of lived situations and replaces it with a *tuphos* (based on evading *ponoi* and on hiding behind constructed realities dealing with possessions, desires, etc.) that has nothing to do with the natural world which one could call "reality." The fact that *logoi* do not correspond to the "reality" of things does not make communication impossible but rather misleading. For if the lived experience cannot be communicated, it cannot be so in its singularity but it always is—to whatever limited extent—in its conventional understanding. Keeping the abyss between word and thing is part of being closer to a "nature" that is never defined but always described as a distancing from norms and conventions. But in society, since convention requires some kind of communication, the most strategic way of dealing practically with the issue is to circumscribe the possibilities of reducing the singularity of

¹⁶ Cf. André Comte-Sponville, "la volonté cynique" in *Valeur et vérité: Etudes cyniques* (Paris: PUF, 1994), pp. 25-53; and "Sophistique et Cynisme", pp. 117-147.

the lived experience. For Antisthenes, this strategy will entail requiring specificity and limited usage of terms. He is attempting to undermine communication, by making it limited to direct references or present *designata*, as depicted in reported anecdotes (see Appendix). What Antisthenes is aiming at is to eliminate conceptual abstractness and to cripple “communication” as an illusory mean of expressing the lived experience and one of the main tools of generating *tuphos*. His approach is rather a strategy of containment that affects the practical use of language in everyday’s life—and is intricately related to his ethical outlook.¹⁷

Antisthenes and the Pyrrhonian Sceptics

Antisthenes’ approach to “signification” or “meaning” is related to conventional understanding and thus has nothing to do with epistemological or ontological speculations dealing with “representation” or with theories of truth. The issue of the “reality” of things is not addressed by Antisthenes in the same way Pyrrhonian Sceptics addressed it, for example. While Pyrrho might have privileged the “lived experience” in relation to a phenomenal reality, where the only “reality” is that of the phenomena or of appearances, Antisthenes doesn’t even acknowledge the distinction between “appearance” and “reality,” for he would base such a distinction on *tuphos* and on general conceptualization. That is why his approach could be described as “pragmatic” (affirming the reality of *pragmata*), as long as this entails the rejection of any analysis of the nature, essence, or meaning of *pragma* outside of conventional communication. The question of definition for Antisthenes is totally conventional, and if he ascribes “description” or “designation” to it, it is mainly out of necessity in a conventional setting. That is why his approach to communication is “strategic.” The Pyrrhonian Sceptic’s approach could be interpreted epistemologically (e.g., Brunschwig)—as affirming that for human beings all things (*pragmata*), which include human sensations and judgments, appear equally indifferent (*adiaphora*), immeasurable (*astagmata*), and undecidable (*anepekrita*)—or metaphysically (e.g., Conche and Mates)—as affirming that things themselves, including sensations and judgments, are indifferent (*adiaphora*), immeasurable (*astagmata*), and undecidable (*anepekrita*).¹⁸ These interpretations confirm that the only acceptable “reality” or “truth” is embedded in an aporetic¹⁹ “nature” of either sensations and judgments or the world, leaving things in suspense and making of the Pyrrhonian Sceptic’s *kriterion* for action an indifference (*adiaphora*) that does not want to contest the norms and traditions of the time.²⁰ Even if we were to reject the epistemological and metaphysical interpretations of Pyrrhonian Scepticism and find similarities between Antisthenes’ and Pyrrho’s practical approach to living,²¹ one cannot ignore that Antisthenes’ stance is inherently anti-conventional and would be opposed to a Pyrrhonian-like acceptance of things as they are—where the *ou mallon* is applied to action.

¹⁷ Cf. Kalouche, op. cit., pp. 33-36.

¹⁸ For the interpretation of Pyrrhonian Scepticism adopted here, refer to: Eusebius of Caesaria, *Praeparatio evangelica* XIV, 18, 1-4; Jacques Brunschwig, “Once again on Eusebius on Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho ...” in *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Marcel Conche, *Pyrrhon ou l’apparence*, (Paris: P.U.F., 1994); Benson Mates, *The Sceptic Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Jean-Paul Dumont, *Le scepticisme et le phénomène* (Paris: Vrin, 1972). Also Victor Brochard’s *Les sceptiques grecs* (Paris: Vrin, 1923-orig. 1887) and Léon Robin’s *Pyrrhon et le scepticisme grec* (Paris: P.U.F., 1944), are still useful.

¹⁹ Cf. Mates’ distinction between *aporo* and *dubito* in *The Sceptic Way*, pp. 30-32.

²⁰ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, IX, 61 and IX, 62-66.

²¹ For example, cf. Marcel Conche, *Pyrrhon ou l’apparence*, p. 94 and p. 138.

Antisthenes and the Sophists

The specificity in the use of words that Antisthenes opts for and advocates, although influenced by the *orthoepia* of a Protagoras or a Prodicus, is not used to facilitate communication or to convince people and build irrefutable arguments. It is not the power of language that is at issue here but rather its powerlessness. Nor does the problem of “correctness of names” concern Antisthenes—as it concerned Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias, and Antiphon.²² Rather than wondering whether names are conventionally or naturally attributed to things, he resolves that, naturally, all enunciations are unique existents that cannot be predicated. Thus things do not correspond to words, because naturally, words are things, and it is only through/from convention that one can consider the “meaning” or “signification” of words—thus the need to keep the abyss between the word and the thing open, between the presentation and the object represented unresolved. This position might be closer to that of Democritus than to that of Protagoras, of Prodicus, or of Gorgias. Democritus considered language a product of convention and rejected any natural relation between names (*onoma*) and things denoted (*pragma*).²³ Since names cannot properly have any intrinsic meaning, Democritus kept on inventing and coining new words.²⁴ Protagoras, on the other hand, shared with Prodicus a belief in, and a fascination with, choice of precisely correct words or “appropriateness of expression” (*orthoepia*). Both Protagoras and Prodicus believed that one could, through varying methodologies, arrive at a precise meaning of words. Protagoras searched for “the most accurate knowledge of the meaning of each particular word, since possession of such knowledge was the only sure means by which a speaker could avoid unnecessary ambiguities.”²⁵ His method was to attain clear and precise expressions that cannot be attacked and thus could be safely used in convincing people. This method entailed strategies such as evading metaphors, ignoring or highlighting the context of words, and questioning the relation between grammatical and natural genders.²⁶ Prodicus followed Protagoras, without adhering to the latter’s phenomenalism. He developed a method that sets two words against each other and tries to indicate their points of difference and similarity. This method (called “*synonymik*” by Meyer and “*synonymique*” by Dumont) aims at a certain clarity of expression that relates to Prodicus’ disposition to “truth” which is not purely linguistic and is not only concerned with natural meanings of words. Prodicus’ theory of language concords with his theory of virtue and both are based on his rejection of “seduction” and affirmation of a “truth-value” that lies in the person’s character.²⁷ This brings him closer to Antisthenes’ positions, in the sense that he was attempting to teach a

²² Cf. Plato’s *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus* 277e, and *Hippias Major* 285b. Antisthenes’ assertion that the scrutiny of names (*onomaton episkepsis*) was the basis of learning, although reported in Epictetus’ *Discourses* I, 17, 10-14 (Caizzi 38), could find support in Diogenes Laertius’ attribution of the books *On education, or on names* and *On the use of names: a controversial work* to Antisthenes. The “scrutiny” in question seems to be controversial or confrontational and not a serious study of an etymological character.

²³ Cf. particularly Diels Kranz, B XXVI.

²⁴ Cf. Carl Joachim Classen’s “The study of language amongst Socrates’ contemporaries” in *Sophistik*, pp. 215-247.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 224-226; Plato’s *Protagoras*, esp. 338 e and *Phaedrus*, esp. 266d; and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 1407 b6.

²⁷ Cf. Jean-Paul Dumont’s “Prodicos: Méthode et Système” in *Positions de la Sophistique*, pp. 221-232, and “Prodicos” in *Les écoles présocratiques*, edited by J.-P. Dumont (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 943-945; H. Meyer, *Prodikos von Keos und die Anfänge der Synonymik bei den Griechen* (Paderborn, 1913); and C. J. Classen, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-237.

virtue related to character formation, and may explain the attribution of *ouk estin antilegein* to him as well as the “rapprochement” of his theories to those of Antisthenes.²⁸

Gorgias used language in order to appeal to intellect and emotion, and he used rhetoric and the irresistible powers of figures or tropes as tools of persuasion. He never considered that language might contain truth about things, for truth about things may never be conveyed by words.²⁹ It may very well be because of a belief in this in-communicability of things that Gorgias attempted to defend multiple aspects of various arguments accentuating the importance of language in this search for “justice.” If Gorgias was putting into question the possibility of communicating anything related to real things (*pragmata*) in order to present language—discourse or communication—as the only “reality” that humans share,³⁰ Antisthenes would be clearly disagreeing with his reported master. While agreeing with Gorgias’ premise, Antisthenes would reject any primacy ascribed to language or communication that would make of conventionality the basis of human “reality.” Gorgias’s relativism is quasi ontological, not necessarily cultural but embedded in language. It is based on a “nothingness” that seeks equal refutation in order to keep itself in balance, and thus he rejects the possibility of reducing difference but associates that difference with language. Language is that ontological terrain where difference is created and put into play. For Antisthenes, difference is always already irreducible: not to culture or a particular tradition, laws or societal mores, nor to language where difference could be embedded. Difference is both at the cultural level and at the particular (singular) level: knowledge cannot breach the difference and reduce the alterity, nor can the command of language help. Antisthenes’ discourse is not concerned with control or practical command: it is a constant practice of re-affirming the difference at the level of singularities, and of engaging in a way of life where *ponos* is all over the place, mainly because of the rejection of subsuming difference. Singularity rather than generality is the aim, and if general knowledge is considered “practical” what Antisthenes is calling for is another kind of *praxis* that doesn’t need to be reductive or breach differences. Although this *praxis* cannot rely on communication, it could allow for simple communication where references are always concrete and singular.

²⁸ Refer to Gerhard Binder and Leo Liesenborghs, “Eine Zuweisung der sentenz *ouk estin antilegein* an Prodikos von Keos” in *Sophistik*, pp. 452-462. Classen, von Fritz, and Momigliano accentuate the influence of Prodicus’ διαπέσεις on Socrates, Antisthenes, and Plato (cf. Classen, *ibid.*, p. 238).

²⁹ Cf. Sextus Empiricus’s *Adv. Math* vii, 65-86, esp. 83-85; Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* 267a8, 271c10; and Classen, *ibid.*, pp. 226-231.

³⁰ Cf., for example, Dupréel, *Les Sophistes*, pp. 65-69.

Antisthenes and the Cyrenaics

Antisthenes' affirmation that no singular "meaning"—of and as a lived experience—is communicable is close to Gorgias' positions, but it doesn't carry the trust in language that Gorgias had. It is closer to the Cyrenaics' theory of *pathe*, attributed to Aristippus and developed later by Hegesias, which claims that sensations are unique and could not be communicated.³¹ The Cyrenaics' theory of *pathe* highlights the proper (*idion*) or non-shared (*ou koinon*) character of sensations or affects (*pathos*).³² As presented by Sextus Empiricus, in particular, this theory is based on the impossibility for the singular person to communicate the nature of one's *pathos* (or *phenomenon* in Sextus' terminology) or to experience another person's *pathe*.³³ Not only one cannot communicate one's experience or affect, but one can never know, feel, or even relate to how another person may experience an affect, an emotion, or a sensation—even if this affect may result from "shared" conditions or causes. What is affirmed here is the primacy of "sensation" or "affect," and the singularity of the experience that cannot be communicated. One can talk of a situation or a condition that may create an affect, but one can never compare affects themselves, since they are inaccessible to communication and are only "real" or "true" as singularly experienced—for there is no way to affirm or deny whether events or things are "real" or "true." Sensations or affects are always unique and non-communicable through words or any other means of communication. This is what Hegesias built on to affirm a certain insignificance of existence and an *adiaphora* that doesn't even distinguish between life and death, pleasure or pain. It could be argued that Hegesias pushed Antisthenes' views on *ponos* to the limit, affirming that all life is suffering (and that *tyche* always disappoints).³⁴ His attack on opposites could be inspired, if not directly influenced, by Antisthenes. What is almost certain though is that Antisthenes, in a way very similar to that of the Cyrenaics, believed that "meaning" (of and as a lived experience), like feelings, emotions, ideas, or understanding of particular situations, cannot be communicated.

Antisthenes and the Megarians

For Antisthenes, enunciation is unique and cannot be communicated but what of this "enunciation" is unique? One may speculate on the "intentional" aspect, especially since Antisthenes' privileging of *ischus* allows for the consideration of the particular "will" as an important aspect of his ethics.³⁵ Some of Antisthenes' positions are very close to those of Diodorus Kronos and of Stilpo of Megara. Diodorus' Master argument dealing with time and possibility affirmed that one could consider only events that happened and not events that are happening, and that it is impossible for an event to happen differently from how it has happened. Potentiality in that sense is reduced to possibility, and possibility doesn't carry a present but only a past (what is actual or rather what has already been actualized) which can be transposed as

³¹ Cf. Gabriele Giannantoni, editor and translator, *I Cirenaici: Raccolta delle fonti antiche* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1958), and *Socraticorum Reliquiae*, edited and translated by G. Giannantoni (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1983), vol. I, IV A-H, pp. 185-315; as well as Zeller, *Socrates and Socratic Schools*, trans. Oswald Reicher (NY: Russel & Russel, 1962-orig. 1885) and Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

³² Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* VII, 190-200, but also refer to Plutarch, *Adversus Coloten* XXIV, 2, and Cicero, *Academica priora* II, 46, 142 [Giannantoni, *Soc. Rel.* IV, A 209].

³³ Cf. Jean-Paul Dumont, *Le scepticisme et le phénomène*, pp. 229-233.

³⁴ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, II, 94-95.

³⁵ Cf. Kalouche, op. cit., pp. 15-19.

future (as what will be actualized).³⁶ But what is most relevant to this discussion are Diodorus' affirmations about the meaning of words. He affirms that no word is meaningless (with no specific meaning ascribed to it) or ambiguous (with many meanings possibly attributed to it), since each word has always one particular meaning and that is the one the speaker is aware of.³⁷ He thus highlights intentionality in the process of signification, and puts the particularity of meaning in the singular intention which cannot be falsified by the word, or the interpretation of the word, since the identity of the intention will not be affected by it. This argument could very well be used in support of Antisthenes' theory of unique enunciation and how every enunciation is a unique existent, proper to itself. If the "*oikeios logos*" is *oikeios* because of the singular intention that is unique and cannot be communicated, Antisthenes' theory is safe and sound and is based on some kind of phenomenological approach before the letter. Diodorus could easily be considered as carrying out the theories of Antisthenes to their logical outcome, even though the latter may have a different approach to communication. Besides the fact that Stilpo of Megara³⁸ was greatly influenced by Cynicism, his positions on language were directly connected to those of Antisthenes. He went beyond the affirmation attributed to Antisthenes that the only thing one could predicate of A is A, by stating that no predication at all is possible—not even predicating A to A. Stilpo's rejection of universals pushed him to reject the significance of names, even conventionally, on the basis that although things change, names are always the same, and a word such as "vegetable" could not indicate all the vegetables that have been around for thousands of years. The same applies when one talks of "Man": no particular individual could be meant by that word, for what would make it designate one man and not another, or how would one know that it is this man rather than that other who is indicated by it?³⁹ Although Antisthenes would have accepted the thrust of Stilpo's argument, he opted for a practical approach to communication, and that is why he tried to limit the use of words in the context of direct referentiality or specific designation (as the examples in the Appendix show).

Conclusion

If Antisthenes didn't deny the necessity of communication *per se*, which would have been the logical outcome of Stilpo's positions, he did try to make of communication something that always relates to the lived experience while, at the same time, undermining it by reducing its role to the strictest sense of "designating." It is important to circumvent and circumscribe what language can do and to make sure that one uses definite and concrete forms of communication—if one may still call that "communication." For Antisthenes, communication will have to be reduced to the bare minimum in order to be practical, efficient, and expedient, and it will have to be limited to direct referentiality in order to evade empty concepts and general

³⁶ Cf. Diodorus Cronos, *Socraticorum Reliquiae*, vol. I, II-F, pp. 73-95 and vol. III, nota 7, pp. 69-76; Jules Vuillemin, *Nécessité ou Contingence: l'aporie de Diodore et les systèmes philosophiques* (Paris: Minuit, 1984); Michael White, "Diodorean Fatalism" in *Agency and Integrality* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985); as well as Zeller, *op. cit.*, and Rankin, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* XI, 12, 1-3 [Giannantoni, *Soc. Rel.* II, F 7].

³⁸ Cf. Stilpon Megareus, *Socraticorum Reliquiae*, vol. I, II-O, pp. 109-128; Zeller, *op. cit.*, and Rankin, *op. cit.* On the relation between Antisthenes and Stilpo, refer to Giannantoni, *Soc. Rel.*, vol. III, nota 9, pp. 95-96, and for the Megarians, in general, refer to K. Doering, editor and translator, *Die Megariker: Kommentierte Sammlung der Testimonien* (Amsterdam: Gruener, 1972), and H. Ritter, "Bemerkungen über die Philosophie der Megarischen Schule" in *Rheinisches Museum* II (1828), pp. 229-259.

³⁹ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, II, 119.

(mis)understanding. While naturally, the word can never reduce the thing as the thing will never be signified by the word, one needs, conventionally, to refer to designated things, objects, events, and put them in context through description or comparison. Humanity, an empty concept, is not what one should talk about. Only an individual human, in a particular time and place, could be talked about, but as something designated and pinpointed. This strategy would be the best compromise between rejecting “communication” altogether and believing that communication works and that meanings conveyed by words represent “truth” or “reality.”

APPENDIX: SUPPORTING STORIES

The dagger story

The most appropriate story for our purpose is the report about Diogenes of Sinope handing Antisthenes a dagger. Diogenes Laertius reports that as Antisthenes was complaining about his suffering, saying: “who could relieve me from these pains?,” Diogenes handed him a dagger, and said: “this.” Antisthenes replied: “I said from my pains, not from life.”⁴⁰ Being specific about what one is talking about is the best recourse in order to circumscribe communication. All language is conventional, the point is not to develop an alternative way of relating that wouldn’t be conventional, nor to affirm that signification is always subjective, but rather to relate to the signified as directly as possible. The signifier here is not put into question, since it is used in a conventional way, but this use or usage is supposed to be limited to the direct reference in question. The direct reference was the actual pains that Antisthenes was experiencing, and the issue was to eliminate these designated pains. To end one’s life would end these pains but only indirectly, and through associations and projections that take away from the circumscribed situation at hand. Antisthenes did not ask how to end one’s life, to which an appropriate answer would be the handing of the dagger. It is building on these pains, associating with them unbearable suffering, imagining an abstract outcome that replaces the specificity of “pains” with the generality of “life”—with the assumption that life is not worth living—that Antisthenes is attacking. And that process of abstracting, associating, and generalizing built in conventional communication, is what he is trying, in part, to undermine through this strategy of containment.

The dried figs story

Many of the stories attributed to Antisthenes have also been attributed to Diogenes. Other stories, although not attributed directly to Antisthenes, could be used in support of Antisthenes’ theory since they reveal a structural similarity with those attributed to him.⁴¹ Diogenes is reported to be eating dried figs when he encountered Plato. Diogenes told Plato that he could take some of what he was eating, and the latter took a few and ate them. Diogenes said then: “I told you to take them and not to eat them.”⁴² Diogenes could have asked Plato to take some dried figs, and he could have then asked him to give them back or to give them to someone else. The fact that Plato associated the situation of Diogenes eating and offering him something to eat with a conventional understanding that Diogenes was inviting him to eat as well is what is at stake here. The conventional inherent to Plato’s action was not put into question and was accepted and acted upon blindly. The strategy of Diogenes in this anecdote—most probably as stand-in for Antisthenes—is to undermine the conventional that is at the basis of most communication and try to put these conventional pre-suppositions at check in every communicative situation. Specificity plays a reductive role where each particular instance contributes to the undermining of communication and the destruction of the ease by which concepts, associations, and other conventional indirect commands could

⁴⁰ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 18-19 (Hicks’ translation).

⁴¹ One may also conjecture that anecdotes involving Diogenes and Plato may have been a projection or continuation of the reported Antisthenes-Plato feud involving a transposition of the major differences between them.

⁴² Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 25 (Hicks’ translation).

creep into communicative situations. No abstract connection should be allowed in this view of communication, only direct and specific references, and all this in order to evade (mis)understanding based on speculation. One could speak of evading “understanding” here because conventionality is not located at the level of the words but at the level of associations and connections between a variety of significations and meanings, direct or indirect. Reducing communication to specific “ask and give” or “question and answer”⁴³ would fit in this scheme of de-mystification, if one may say so. This will reduce the content of communicative exchanges to the superficial and leaves the lived experience locked in. The resistance to language and communication is in a way keeping these two from claiming to represent (truly or not), but also, to take away from the *tuphos* created by them—with all the baggage carried along with signification, through conventional pre-suppositions and the like.

The motion story

Another story attributed to both Antisthenes and Diogenes is the one where they react to the Eleatic affirmation that motion is impossible by getting up and walking.⁴⁴ To talk of motion without a specific reference exemplifies to what extent humans could become deluded with general notions and concepts. To walk is to situate the conversation that was going nowhere—talking of motion in general with nothing specific designated as the reference for it.

The plucked fowl story

Last, but not least, a report states that, in response to Plato’s definition of Man as “an animal, biped and featherless,” Diogenes plucked a fowl and let it loose proclaiming: “Here’s Plato’s man.”⁴⁵ Not only does this exemplify a critique of definition, but it is a proof that unless words referred to are specifically designated one is in a lot of trouble. The words used in Plato’s definition could designate a plucked fowl as well as a man. They are not specific enough, first, but they also are too general since they aim at defining and not describing or comparing. Once again, the resistance to generalizations that erase the singularity of things and events is what explains the behavior of Diogenes—or of Antisthenes. Antisthenes’ attempt to make limited usage of language, where the use of universals or empty concepts (i.e., concepts that do not have limited and direct references) is circumscribed, is supposed to undermine convention and what is conventionally embedded in communication. As long as communication refers to something specifically designated the conventional command over communication is undermined.

⁴³ Cf. Diogenes Laertius VI, 26, where a second slightly different version of the dried figs story is recounted. Diogenes asks for some dried figs and Plato sends him a whole jar full, prompting Diogenes to tell Plato: “So, it seems, you neither give as you are asked nor answer as you are questioned” (Hicks tr.)—just before the text interjects his calling Plato a “big mouth,” or someone who talks without end or without measure (*aperantologon*).

⁴⁴ Cf. Elias, *In Aristotelis Categoria* 22 b 40, p. 109, 18-22 [Giannantoni V A 159] for Antisthenes, and Diogenes Laertius VI, 39, for Diogenes.

⁴⁵ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 40 (Hicks’ translation).

ANTISTHENES' THEORY OF UNIQUE ENUNCIATION

SOME RELEVANT TEXTS

TEXT A- Aristotle, *Met.* 1024b 32-34

“Hence Antisthenes was too simple-minded when he claimed that nothing could be described except by the account proper to it *{oikeios logos}*—one predicate to one subject; from which the conclusion used to be drawn that there could be no contradiction *{me einai antilegein}*, and almost that there could be no error.” {Ross’ translation}

TEXT B- Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Aristot. Metaph.* 1024b 26 (435.1-15)

“Antisthenes , however, thought that each of the things that exist is described only by its own proper statement *{oikeios logos}*, and that there is one statement for each thing, namely the one proper to it; but that a statement signifying something [else], one that is not a statement of the thing about which it is said to be, is obviously alien *{allogrios}* to that thing. From this premise he would even attempt to conclude that *contradiction* is impossible *{ouk estin antilegein}*. For, [he argued], those who contradict one another ought certainly to be making different statements, but different statements cannot be made about the same thing because there is [only] one statement for each thing, that proper to it, for there is one statement for one thing, and a person who talks about that thing ought to make only [this one statement], so that, if [two people] are talking about the same thing, they would be making the same statements to each other (for there is one statement about one thing), and if they are making the same statements they would not be contradicting each other. But if, on the other hand, they are making different statements, they would no longer be talking about the same thing, because there is [only] one statement about the same thing, and those who are contradicting each other ought to be talking about the same thing. And thus he concluded that there could be no contradiction, and almost that there could be no falsity, because it is impossible to make any statement about a thing other than the one that is peculiar and proper to it.” {Dooley’s translation}

TEXT C- Aristotle, *Met.* 1043b 23-28

“Therefore the difficulty which used to be raised by the school of Antisthenes and other such uneducated people has a certain timeliness. They said that the ‘what’ cannot be defined (for the definition so called is a ‘long rigmarole’ *{makros logos}*) but of what *sort* a thing, e.g. silver, is, they thought it possible actually to explain, not saying what it is, but that it is like tin.” {Ross’ translation}

TEXT D- Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VI, 3

“He was the first to define statement or (assertion) by saying that a statement is that which sets forth what a thing was or is.” {Hicks’ translation}

“Il fut le premier à définir ce qu’est un concept (*logos*): le concept, dit-il, est ce qui exprime ce que la chose est et n’a pas cessé d’être” {Paquet’s translation}

“Ein Begriff ist die Bezeichnung von etwas, was war oder ist” {Nestle’s translation}

“Fu il primo a definire il discorso così: il discorso dimostra che cos’era o è una cosa” {Gigante’s translation}

TEXT E- Proclus, *In. Plat. Cratylum* XXXVII (Caizzi 49)

“Antisthenes said that it is impossible to contradict yourself. For every *logos* tells the truth, for the one who tells, tells something; and the person who tells something, tells what is; and the person who tells what is, tells the truth. One wants to respond to him that the false also exists and nothing prevents someone from telling something that is false (or tells the being that is false). Besides that, the one who is talking talks about something and he doesn’t say something” {Anthony Preus’ translation}