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Abstract

The book examines the role the so-called 'sophists' on the one hand and Socrates on the other played in fifth-century Athenian intellectual life. It draws attention to their various contributions to philosophy. Following a current interpretative trend, the authors choose to treat Socrates as one of the many fifth-century teachers of wisdom, whom the historiography of philosophy, following the distinction between philosophy and sophistry that Plato and Aristotle introduced, presented unfavourably. The structure of the chapters is thematic. Based on the extant evidence, the authors aim to draw attention to the questions which are raised by the sophists and to their possibly original contribution to philosophy. The first two chapters deal with the social and historical background that gave rise to the so-called Sophistic Movement in fifth-century Athens and discuss questions of nomenclature. Chapters three to eight focus on individual questions: Language

and communication; the implementation of argumentative skills in politics and its implication for theorizing politics; the criticism of pleonexia or greed; the criticism of traditional religion; theorizing language; Protagorean relativism. Chapters eleven to thirteen (as well as the Appendix) shift the discussion to Socrates. Chapter eleven draws attention to elements of Socrates' argumentative practice that justify treating him as one of them and explains the need for Plato and Xenophon to 'apologise' to their teacher. By contrast, chapter twelve focuses on some typically Socratic and rather 'non-Sophistic' ideas that could justify his distinction from the 'other Sophists' (or invite us to reconsider our categories). Lastly, chapter thirteen and the appendix focus on two aspects of Socratic practice (the quest for definition and the role of *aporia* in philosophical investigation) that explain Socrates' undisputed importance in the philosophical canon.

