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**Willis, Gordon Wayne**

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF ISOCRATES**

*The University of Oklahoma*

**PH.D. 1982**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF ISOCRATES

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
GORDON WAYNE WILLIS

Norman, Oklahoma

1982

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF ISOCRATES

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**DEDICATION:**

To my lovely wife, Melinda, whose devotion has made this work both economically possible and emotionally gratifying, and who in the process of providing my education has educated herself.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is in one sense the culmination of a long and arduous task and in another sense the first step on a long and hopeful journey. It is the completion of many years of formal education, the last five of which have required considerable sacrifice from both my wife and me. We are happy that graduation is nigh and the task complete. On the other hand, this work is but a beginning. It is my initiation into the world of scholarship. Though not an easy initiation, it has been a pleasant one, and I hope to follow it with many substantial writing projects in the future.

I would like to express my appreciation to all who have made this project possible, including my parents who years ago instilled in me a love for books and ideas, my teachers who showed me how to use those books and ideas, and my friends who discussed them with me. Among my friends I am happy to count Dr. Cliff Schimmels who has encouraged me from afar, Dr. Tom Gallaher who has encouraged me from across the hall, Dr. Hugh Jeffers who has provided much thoughtful conversation, and fellow graduate student Dave Yaden who has endured this initiation with me.

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life. These two men with whom I have worked closely for three years have provided outstanding examples of scholarship and pedagogy for me to follow. I hope my career will reflect their inspiration. The contributions of other committee members, Dr. Chipman Stuart, Dr. John Catlin and Dr. Don Udell have been substantial as well. They have forced me to think, introduced me to books, and offered friendship and encouragement.

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"How much better to get wisdom than gold,  
to choose understanding rather than silver!" (Proverbs 16:16)

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

For most of the history of western civilization philosophy and education have been dominated by the absolutistic, transcendental approaches to life represented by Platonic idealism and traditional Christian theology. Since the Renaissance there has been a shift to a more "this-world" orientation intellectually and educationally. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of this trend in American education came with the pragmatic thought of John Dewey and progressivism early in the twentieth century.

This shift toward pragmatism, with its relativism and emphasis on empiricism, has not come without a fight. Traditionalists like William Bagley and Herman Horne have waged war against pragmatism in education ever since Dewey published Democracy and Education in 1916. Perhaps Dewey's most vigorous opponents, and the staunchest supporters of traditional educational philosophy, were Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler. In the 1930's and 40's they launched an attack on progressive education that threatened to tear the educational world apart. For three decades pragmatism had been gaining ascendancy, but by the 1950's it appeared that Hutchins and Adler were turning the tide against Dewey. Despite appearances and a great deal of national publicity, the tide did not turn. The revival of traditional educational

philosophy was short-lived, and pragmatism re-established its dominance over educational philosophy.

This important debate in modern educational philosophy has an equally important but neglected precedent in antiquity. In the fourth century B.C. Athenian educational thinkers waged a similar war. On one side were the Socratics, idealists and realists like Plato and Aristotle, who later were dominant influences in traditional educational philosophy. Upon their thought Hutchins and Adler have founded their modern educational philosophies. On the other side of the issue was the Rhetorical School, which has much in common with modern educational pragmatism. Its this-worldly philosophy was popular in antiquity, especially among the sophists, but was eventually overshadowed by Platonic and Christian idealism.

The leader of the Rhetorical School and the greatest spokesman for its educational ideal was Isocrates. The ancient writer Dionysius of Halicarnassus described Isocrates as the most illustrious teacher of Athens.<sup>1</sup> Modern classicist Moses Hadas referred to him as nothing less than "the greatest educationist of antiquity."<sup>2</sup> Despite his fame in antiquity and his role in the development of western education, Isocrates has been virtually forgotten by modern educators. This is unfortunate for at least three reasons: 1) Ignorance of Isocrates gives modern educators a warped picture of ancient Greek educational thought, slanted far too heavily toward the Socratic approach. 2) Knowledge of Isocrates could provide a broader understanding of the modern traditionalists vs. pragmatists debate by showing its ancient antecedents. 3) Knowledge of Isocrates could broaden the modern educator's understanding of the currently dominant philosophy of education, pragmatism, by showing the depth of its historical roots.

### Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe the educational views of Isocrates, the leader of the Athenian Rhetorical School. More specifically, this study will describe the cultural situation in fourth century Athens as it relates to Isocrates' educational thought, describe and criticize his educational philosophy and method, consider his influence, and compare his views to modern pragmatic educational thought.

### Sources

Since this study is concerned with the educational thought of Isocrates, the most important sources are the writings of Isocrates himself. He may have written more, but there remain thirty authentic publications of Isocrates, according to Norlin.<sup>3</sup> Six are speeches for the law courts, which Isocrates wrote before he opened his school: Against Lochites, the Aegineticus, Against Euthynus, the Trapeziticus, the Span of Horses, and the Callimachus. He later regretted the experience and even denied having done such writings. Soon after opening the Rhetorical School he wrote Against the Sophists, which defended his pedagogy and served as an advertisement for the new school. The Busiris and the Helen were eulogistic works also written soon after the school's opening, and they were intended to display the style of oratory being taught.

The Panegyricus, which was completed in about 380, was also for display but was political in nature. Later Isocrates wrote To Nicocles, Nicocles and Evagoras. The first two were hortatory while the third was eulogistic. Other political writings followed, including the Plataicus, the Archidamus, the Areopagiticus, On the Peace, and the Philip. Isocrates' longest work, an autobiographical and educational text called Antidosis, was written when he was 82 years old. He completed his last work, the Panathenaicus, when he was 98 years old.

In addition to these works tradition attributes to Isocrates nine Letters, including: to Dionysius, two to Philip, to Antipater, to Alexander, to the Sons of Jason, to Timotheus, to the Rulers of Mytilene, and to Archidamus. The authenticity and dates of these letters are less certain than the other works. Norlin also includes in his list of works by Isocrates To Demonicus, but Lesky rejects it as spurious.<sup>4</sup>

Norlin's translation of Isocrates' writings in the Loeb Classical Library served as the basic text for this study. The two educational works of Isocrates, Against the Sophists and Antidosis, were used most heavily and are quoted frequently in the following discussion.<sup>5</sup>

Other ancient sources on Isocrates are Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Pseudo-Plutarch.<sup>6</sup> Plato's Phaedrus has a brief reference to Isocrates,<sup>7</sup> and Aristotle quotes him extensively in his Rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Hermippus wrote a treatise on Isocrates' pupils,<sup>9</sup> and later Cicero referred to him a number of times.<sup>10</sup>

In the Middle Ages little was written about Isocrates. Photius, a devoted teacher and leader in the Eastern Church in the ninth century, read and borrowed from his writings.<sup>11</sup> In the fifteenth century Guarino of Verona translated Evagoras and Nicocles,<sup>12</sup> and Demetrius Chalcondyles of Athens produced the editio princeps of Isocrates.<sup>13</sup> In the sixteenth century Aldus Manutius published Orationes Rhetorum Graecorum,<sup>14</sup> which included works by Isocrates, and humanist Hieronymus Wolf of Augsburg translated and edited his works as well.<sup>15</sup>

More recently a number of editions of and works about Isocrates have been published by such notable scholars as Gustav Eduard Benseler and Engelbert Drerup. Most modern works on Isocrates are concerned primarily with his rhetorical style or political views rather than his pedagogy. One

notable exception is August Burk's Die Pedagogik des Isocrates.<sup>16</sup> This classic study has never been published in English. Fortunately for Americans who do not read German, an enterprising graduate student named William Boast included an English translation as an appendix to his dissertation.<sup>17</sup>

Though few studies of Isocrates deal with him as an educational philosopher, a number of articles are helpful. The most notable of these is Costas M. Proussis' "Isocrates" in The Educated Man, edited by Paul Nash, Andreas Kazamias and Henry Perkinson.<sup>18</sup> A useful article by W. I. Matson, "Isocrates the Pragmatist," is more philosophically than pedagogically oriented.<sup>19</sup> Two doctoral dissertations study Isocrates as an educator: George S. Capernaros' study entitled "Literary Humanism in the Educational Theory of Isocrates" and the previously mentioned study by William Boast, "The Pedagogical and Rhetorical Concepts of Isocrates as a Classical Communication Methodology."<sup>20</sup>

Several books on larger topics include helpful sections on the pedagogy of Isocrates, including Frederick Beck's Greek Education, 450-350 B.C., W. K. C. Guthrie's The Sophists, Kenneth Freeman's Schools of Hellas, Werner Jaeger's Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, R. C. Jebb's The Attic Orators, and H.I. Marrou's A History of Education in Antiquity. Other valuable references include M. L. W. Laistner's A History of the Greek World From 479 to 323 B.C., Gilbert Highet's The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature, Albin Lesky's A History of Greek Literature, and Sir John Sandys' A History of Classical Scholarship.

The primary sources used for modern educational pragmatism were John Dewey's Democracy and Education and Experience and Nature, Boyd Bode's Democracy as a Way of Life and Progressive Education at the Crossroads, and John Child's American Pragmatism and Education, and Education and the Philosophy of Experimentalism.

### Delimitations

This study is aimed primarily at discovering the educational philosophy of Isocrates. It is not intended to be a study of Greek history or education, though it includes aspects of each of these. These topics are studied only to provide background and are considered only as they relate to Isocrates' educational thought. Neither is this primarily a study of modern pragmatism. The educational wing of pragmatism, which is represented by the thought of John Dewey, is surveyed generally and briefly to provide a basis for comparison with Isocrates. No thorough analysis of either ancient Greek education or modern pragmatic education is intended.



## REFERENCE NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Isocrates, 3 vols., trans. George Norlin (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928-1945), 1: xxix.

<sup>2</sup>Moses Hadas, Ancilla to Classical Reading (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 268.

<sup>3</sup>Isocrates, 1: xxxi.

<sup>4</sup>Albin Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, trans. James Willis and Cornelis de Heer (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966), p. 587.

<sup>5</sup>References to these two frequently quoted sources are included in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Lesky, pp. 583-584.

<sup>7</sup>Isocrates, 1: xvi.

<sup>8</sup>John E. Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship, 3 vols. (New York: Hafner, 1964), 1: 81.

<sup>9</sup>Lesky, p. 596.

<sup>10</sup>Cicero, Vol. 5, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>11</sup>Sandys, 1: 401.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 50.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 65.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 103.

<sup>15</sup>Lesky, p. 584.

<sup>16</sup>A. Burk, Die Pedagogik des Isokrates (Wurzburg: C. J. Becker, University Press, 1923).

<sup>17</sup>William M. Boast, "The Pedagogical and Rhetorical Concepts of Isocrates as a Classical Communication Methodology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1960).

<sup>18</sup>Costas M. Proussis, "Isocrates," in The Educated Man, ed. Paul Nash, Andreas M. Kazamios and Henry J. Perkinson (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965).

<sup>19</sup>W. I. Matson, "Isocrates the Pragmatist," Review of Metaphysics 10 (March 1957): 423-427.

<sup>20</sup>George S. Capernaros, "Literary Humanism in the Educational Theory of Isocrates" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1970).

## CHAPTER II

### FOURTH CENTURY ATHENS

#### Introduction

Insofar as any man is a product of his environment, to that degree one must understand the environment to understand the man. Philosophers and psychologists may argue whether man has any true freedom from his environment, but all agree that he is affected by it. Human beings live in historical, political and social contexts that produce the jobs they pursue, the hobbies that interest them, the kinds of relationships they enjoy, and the problems they face. To understand a person's decisions, values and ideas one must understand the world in which he lives. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the world of Isocrates in order that the reader can better understand his life and thought. In order to provide the cultural context, this chapter surveys the history of the Greeks from Homer to Alexander, the social conditions of Athens in the fourth century B.C., the state of education at that time, and the major intellectual and educational issue of the day.

#### Historical and Political Context

Though the roots of Greek life go back beyond Homer to the Mycenaean Age and the Minoan civilization of Crete, for our purposes it will be sufficient to begin with Homer. This is a sensible place to start because Homer is one of the marks of the beginning of the "historic" period in Greek history

and his writings play a central role in the development of Greek culture and education. Werner Jaeger has gone so far as to call Homer the educator of Greece,<sup>1</sup> and H. D. F. Kitto has referred to his writings as "the Bible of the Greeks."<sup>2</sup>

Actually, little is known about Homer except that the two most influential writings of early Greece, the Iliad and Odyssey, were attributed to him. Whether or not either of the two works was composed by one author is not known, though behind both there no doubt lies a long oral history. In any case the name Homer has come to represent those two works and the world they describe. Both works were composed around the eighth century B.C., but they describe a much earlier period in Greek history. Both of the works are permeated with Greek mythology, making it extremely difficult to determine what life was actually like. We can say that life was built around a warrior ideal and was dominated by an aristocracy of warriors. Life was violent, and military values like strength and valor were exalted. Those values described in Homer had an enormous effect on Greek life since the two poems served as the basis of Greek education for centuries.<sup>3</sup> The fact that this warrior culture found literary expression shows that it was beginning to wane and that a literary, scribal culture was dawning.

A second major development in Greek history and culture was the development of the polis. For most of early Greek history, life had been rural and agrarian, as described by Hesiod, but sometime after Homer that began to change. A new form of social organization, the polis, began to develop. The polis, or city-state as we often refer to it, was a politically independent city or fortress whose citizens usually participated in the management of its affairs.<sup>4</sup> It usually had one main leader or king whose power was based on lineage. An

advisory council made up of the heads of important families was also common. These elders were powerful men who the king had to take seriously, both as advisors and rivals.<sup>5</sup>

Two of the most famous of the poleis were Sparta and Athens. Sparta was a conservative culture committed to maintaining the old warrior ideal. The society and education were thoroughly militaristic and authoritarian. Intellectual life, creativity and independence were neglected or even discouraged in favor of stability created through forced conformity.

Of greater interest for this study is Athens. It was the largest polis, and in cultural importance the greatest. In fact, Chambers wrote of Athens "in both politics and culture the history of Greece in the classical period is largely a history of Athens and its relation with others."<sup>6</sup>

In its earlier days Athenian political structure was very similar to that of other poleis. For example, Athens was ruled by a series of kings, at least until about 683. The king was then replaced by a magistrate who served for a one year term. Later this gave way to an administration of nine archons who also held office for one year. The most famous among the archons was Solon, the law giver. At a critical period in Athenian economic history, when it appeared destitute peasants would revolt, Solon was given the task of arbitrating a solution to the crisis. He seems to have been effective in temporarily restoring stability, and he is given credit for establishing a legal system and distinguishing property classes. There is further evidence that he may have expanded the government to include, in addition to nine archons, a four hundred-member council.<sup>7</sup>

Solon's solution to the economic crisis was only temporary, and the recurring struggle eventually led to a new era in Athenian politics, the era of

tyrant rule.\* An Athenian military man named Pisistratus first gained the support of the peasants and made himself a tyrant. For almost a half a century afterward Athenian politics consisted of tyrant rule (by Pisistratus and his son) and struggles for power by would-be tyrants.<sup>8</sup>

In 510 Pisistratus' son was overthrown, and Cleisthenes came to power. Concerned to cement his political power in place, Cleisthenes united the common people of Athens into a supporting coalition. This turned out to be the decisive step toward democracy. Cleisthenes promoted participation by the citizens in the political process and helped organize them for such participation. He divided the polis into ten tribes, each consisting of three trittyes (or thirds), and each tritty consisting of one or more demes (or villages). More importantly, he established a ruling council of 500 citizens selected by lot, fifty from each tribe. This gave Athenian citizens a level of political participation without precedent.<sup>9</sup>

The next major crisis Athens faced was a military one. While Athens had been developing a democracy, Persia had been building an empire that united the entire Middle East, including Egypt and Asia Minor. In 500 Athens provoked the wrath of Persia by assisting a revolt in some Greek cities in Asia Minor. Darius, the Persian king, retaliated with an attack on Greece at Marathon in 490. In this famous battle the Greeks, against all odds, won. Instead of ending the conflict, however, the battle intensified the Persian animosity toward Greece, and in 480 Persia attacked again - this time under the leadership of a new king, Xerxes. This sea battle at Salamis turned into a rout of the Persian forces and, in conjunction with the land victory at Plataea, guaranteed the Greeks freedom from Persia.

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\* The term tyrant referred to one who had taken power by force. It did not necessarily mean that the ruler was cruel or oppressive once in power.

The Greek allies who successfully defended against Persia decided to continue their alliance and in 478 established a league called "The Athenians and Their Allies." Because the alliance met on the island of Delos, it is often referred to today as the Delian League. The League began as a corporate project but soon came under the dominance of its most powerful member, Athens. In 454 the League's treasury was moved from Delos to Athens, and thereafter Athens considered the League its own. Thus, the Delian League became less and less an alliance and more and more an Athenian empire.<sup>10</sup>

During the period from the establishment of the Delian League to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in 431, Athens reached its political and cultural zenith. The highest point came during the rule of Pericles (461-429), and its intellectual creativity continued for most of a century after its social collapse. During its prime, Athens produced much memorable architecture (Pericles diverted league defence monies to city-beautification projects), philosophy, poetry, drama and history.

In 431 the allies of Sparta, fearing Athens' growing power, persuaded Sparta to attack Athens. This began the Peloponnesian War (or Wars) and brought to a close Athens' Golden Age. Though Athens defended itself successfully until 404, it was unable to maintain social stability. In 404 Sparta won the war and set up an oligarchic government. The following year the Spartans reinstituted a limited democracy in Athens.

The period after the Peloponnesian War has become known as the age of hegemonies. All of Greece was so weakened by the war that no city-state could gain ascendancy. Sparta and Thebes tried. Athens even attempted to rejuvenate the old Athenian league but without success. Not until the latter part of the fourth century was any one power strong enough to unite all of Greece,

and that power was not Greek. It was Macedonian. In 359 Philip II came to power in Macedon and began to build an empire. In 338 his forces won the Battle of Chaeronea, effectively bringing the Greeks under his control.<sup>11</sup>

Two years later Philip was murdered and his son, Alexander, took charge of the new empire. Alexander was no less ambitious than his father and was an even more capable military leader. Within nine years he had formed a great empire that included all of the old Persian empire from Asia Minor to Egypt and extended eastward from Palestine to India. Upon his death in 323, Alexander's empire was divided among his generals. Three independent kingdoms emerged. The Ptolemies ruled Egypt, the Seleucids ruled Syria, and the Antigonids ruled Asia Minor. Thus ended the Hellenic age and began the Hellenistic age.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, Greece was at the time described by Homer a primitive, rural, violent land dominated by a warrior aristocracy. With the composition of Homer it took a long first step toward becoming a literary culture. Eventually the people of Greece began to congregate into urban areas known as poleis. There they gradually developed higher and higher levels of citizen participation in government. Significant steps were taken in that direction in Athens under the influence of Solon and Cleisthenes. Within a generation after Cleisthenes, Athens and all of Greece faced a military threat from Persia which they successfully repulsed. Afterwards Athens helped establish a naval league with its allies and then turned that league into an empire. For many years afterwards Athens flourished militarily, culturally, intellectually and socially. This Golden Age of Athens was brought to an end by the Peloponnesian War. After the war, which Sparta and its allies won, neither Athens nor Sparta could establish a hegemony over Greece. In 338 all attempts ceased when Philip of



Macedon won the Battle of Chaeronea and set the stage for his son, Alexander, to build an empire.

### Social Context

The lifespan of Isocrates (436-338) covers just less than a century of Greek history — a century of chaos and crisis. We shall consider the social situation of that period in a little more detail. Isocrates was born at the end of the Golden Age, just five years before the first blows of the Peloponnesian War. He was thirty-two years old before it finally ended. He lived not only through the period of the war, but also through the period of the hegemonies, the rise of Philip of Macedon, and the fall of Greece to Philip at Chaeronea.

One can readily see that the social conditions in Greece during Isocrates' life were less than ideal. War is always socially destructive, and the Peloponnesian War was no exception. It broke down the Athenian economy, disrupted education, destroyed political leadership, turned democracy into chaotic mob rule, encouraged disease and deprivation, and generally wreaked havoc on social life. It ended the great Athenian political empire, but more importantly, it dimmed the bright light of cultural leadership that Athens had carried for so long.

Isocrates was five years old when the war broke out and must have had some recollection of the Age of Pericles. Even if he had little recollection, the quality of life and events of the day would have shaped his outlook. In fact, if Kenneth Boulding is right, these first few years of Isocrates' life and last few years of the Golden Age would have been the most important in the formation of his "image" of the world.<sup>13</sup> In any case the early years of the war had relatively little affect on Athenian life. The empire was so strong that the first

few attacks by Sparta and its allies were hardly a threat. One reason for this was that Athens had built walls, the Long Walls, that extended all of the way from the Acropolis to the sea. Behind these walls the Athenians could wait in safety almost indefinitely, receiving supplies by sea.

Later Athens did not fare so well. A major blow came when a plague swept through the city in 430. Because of the crowded conditions behind the Long Walls, the disease, which modern scholars have not been able to identify despite vivid descriptions in Thucydides' The History of the Peloponnesian War, produced a high fever for about a week, often followed by death. Those who survived the initial fever were so weakened that many soon died of other complications. The disease sometimes settled in the extremities, and some survivors lost fingers and toes. Many of the dead were left unburied, and this encouraged further disease. Most animals and birds fled from the area, but those that stayed and ate the diseased carcasses often died immediately. The plague ended within the year, but recurred at least twice afterward, and in 429 it took the life of the empire's greatest leader, Pericles.<sup>14</sup>

The losses to disease somewhat equalized the strength of Athens and Sparta, and neither could score a clear victory. The struggle continued until the battle at Amphipolis in 422 when both sides became so tired of fighting that they agreed on a fifty-year peace treaty. The Peace of Nicias, as it was called, brought some degree of calm back to Athenian life, and inspired Aristophanes to write the play The Peace in 421. The truce actually lasted only six years, for in 415 Athens attacked Syracuse, the leading city of Sicily. This marks the second stage of the Peloponnesian War. Due to a lack of good leadership, Athens clearly lost this phase of the war. And yet, war continued. This time the fighting was in Ionia, prompted by the succession of Ionian allies from the

Athenian empire. Again because of poor leadership, and the weariness of a long and destructive war, Athens lost. In 405 the Athenians lost their fleet, and without it they could not import supplies and food to the Long Walls. The following year they surrendered, and Sparta set up an oligarchic government. Its unpopularity caused Sparta to reinstitute democracy in 403.

Throughout the war Athens was faced with mounting social problems. The war produced a financial burden the city could not bear. War itself was expensive, plus the destruction of crops, flocks and cattle made the situation even worse. Taxes on allies were increased, and money was borrowed from the religious treasuries. Still a great financial burden was placed on the wealthy citizens of Athens. These were the citizens who were already skeptical of democracy, and the added financial burden it placed upon them produced a growing anti-democratic spirit. That spirit went beyond the wealthy, for it became widely apparent that the democracy was too inefficient to function successfully in an emergency situation. Decisions came too slowly, and they often represented the whims of an emotional and fickle mob rather than careful reasoning.

Religion also played a significant role in the social context of the day. During the war there was an increased emphasis on religion for which Laistner gives a two-fold explanation. First, the emphasis on Athenian religion may have been a deliberate attempt to impress the rest of the world with the glory of it. Second, it may have been hoped that religion would serve as a distraction for the masses, to take their minds off of criticizing the leaders and provide "scapegoats to popular discontent or war hysteria."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the popular emphasis on religion, intellectuals grew skeptical of it. In about 416 Protagoras published his work On the Gods in which he took

the agnostic philosophical position that man cannot by rational process demonstrate either the existence or non-existence of supernatural beings. Given popular sentiment, Protagoras was prosecuted and condemned for atheism, and his book was suppressed. The following year the poet and philosopher Diagoras was similarly accused and had to flee the country.<sup>16</sup>

An even greater religious turmoil was created in the summer of 415 when vandals in the night mutilated most of the busts of Hermes which were located throughout the city in shrines and in the entry-ways of homes. The most bizarre sorts of explanations of omens and conspiracies were entertained. Some believed the oligarchic faction in Athens was responsible for the vandalism as a preliminary to attempting revolution. Others believed traitors did it, hoping the bad omen would cause Athens to abandon plans to attack Syracuse. In any case, many tried to take political advantage of the uproar but were unsuccessful. Finally the blame was placed on members of an oligarchic club led by one named Euphiletus.<sup>17</sup>

Such was the world in which Isocrates grew up and lived—a once happy and stable world gone mad. Isocrates lived in and was shaped by Athens past its prime, Athens in destruction and chaos, not the Athens of the Golden Age which modern classicists often extol. Though the war did finally come to an end, things were not the same. The old power was gone, the old glory was gone, even the old values were gone. Athens was confronted with the dilemma of redefining its role in Greek life, stabilizing life in the polis, and re-establishing culture. Isocrates was one among many seeking ways to do that.

#### Educational Context

In twentieth century America, education has to a large degree become identified with schooling, a fact that many educational critics lament loudly.

When we think of education, we think "schools." Such was not the case in early Athens. Education was not a state-run bureaucratic institution with prescribed materials and methods. Education was the informal transmission to the young of all of Athenian life. It included all of the intellectual, aesthetic, religious and moral culture. It occurred, not in a formal specialized institution, but in the context of everyday life. Education was culture. In fact, the Greek term *paideia*, which is often translated education can also be translated culture. It actually implies more than either of the two English terms. It implies all that made Athenian life what it was, as well as the ideals it hoped to achieve.

Early Athenian education was a function of the community, not of organizations. It was seen as a natural result of life in the community. In those matters where it did seem necessary for the young to have some kind of systematic instruction, that task fell to their fathers. So, early Athenian formal instruction was parental, and thus hardly formal at all. As years went by, many fathers surrendered their educational duties, at least in part, to a servant, a *paidagogos*, who acted as companion, guardian and instructor to the young sons.\*

Later in Athenian history formal schooling did emerge. By the time of Solon it began to take the general form of a three-tiered system: primary, secondary and military. Primary education usually began when the boy was around six years old, though it was the parents' decision, and they could vary it according to their needs. Less wealthy citizens often started their sons in school later and took them out earlier so they could help with the support of the

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\* Education in ancient Athens was for the sons of Athenian citizens. Females were socialized and learned household skills informally at home. Members of the two lower social classes, which constituted most of the population, were not considered citizens and could not share in benefits of Athenian education.

family. Wealthier families might start their sons in school very young and allow them to stay longer.

Primary education consisted of three major subject areas taught by three instructors: grammatistes, kitharistes and paidotribes. The first, as the name suggests, taught language and literature, as well as some arithmetic. The kitharistes taught music - more specifically, how to play the lyre and sing the works of the lyric poets. The paidotribes were the physical education instructors of Athens. They taught in a special courtyard called a palaestra and trained their students in such exercises as wrestling and boxing as well as those events we associate with track and field. Freeman argues that all three of these aspects of education occurred simultaneously, though the evidence is not conclusive.<sup>18</sup> Typically primary education could be expected to last until the boy was about fourteen, but this varied. For the poor, formal schooling ended with the termination of primary school. For the children of the wealthy it could continue, though for many it did not.

In the early days secondary education may have consisted largely of further musical studies. Freeman suggests, however, that by the time of Pericles, knowledge had increased to the point that music was left entirely to the primary schools and new subjects were taken up by secondary education. In this latter, democratic period of Athenian politics, the role of persuasion in community life grew and gave to rhetoric a central role in the curriculum. Other areas of study included mathematics, literary criticism, Athenian law, and perhaps some natural history, science, and philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

This second stage of education might last until the boy was eighteen years old, at which time he was required by law to submit to two years of military training and service. This latter stage of education consisted almost

entirely of physical education, with little time for intellectual pursuits. The epheboi (as these trainees were called) served the first year in Athens and the second in forts outside the city. Normally they only served defensively to protect the frontier, though in 458 they assisted in an invasion of the territory of Megara. This last stage of education was the only stage required by law and supported by public funds.

For the purposes of this study the most important part of Athenian education is the secondary level. The leading figures in secondary education as it had developed by the time of Isocrates included the sophists, Protagorus, Gorgias of Leontini, Socrates, and Plato.

Because of changes in the political, social and intellectual life of the polis, there arose in the fifth century a group of secondary educators known as sophists. These were professional, itinerant teachers who claimed to educate for leadership and social success.<sup>20</sup> Traveling around Greece they sold their instruction (sometimes at very high fees) and in return claimed to give their students the keys to success. They formed no society of sophists or union, but plied their trade individually and competitively.

The sophists tended to be practical in orientation and uninterested in abstract intellectual exercises and the pursuit of Truth. They saw human nature as maleable and believed that through their knowledge human character could be improved. They were concerned with morality, but saw moral principles as products of society rather than descriptions of fixed virtues.<sup>21</sup> The sophists were seen by many as economic opportunists, philosophical heretics, and intellectual charlatans. Despite the negative image of sophistry that began in Greece and continues today, many of the sophists were very successful, very famous and highly sought after.

The most famous of all of the sophists was Protagoras. He was also probably the earliest. Protagoras was born around the turn of the fifth century and died at the dawn of the Peloponnesian War. He thus lived in Athens at its prime, the Age of Pericles. Protagoras apparently was able to maintain a good reputation because of his personal integrity, while other sophists were creating public prejudice against themselves. In fact, in 444 Protagoras' reputation gained for him the job of composing a constitution for Thurii — a job to which he was appointed by Pericles himself.<sup>22</sup>

Philosophically, Protagoras was a relativist. He argued that no concept could be shown true or false on an abstract, metaphysical level. Since no one can demonstrate the existence of absolutes, then one must view values as relative. On another level, however, Protagoras said we can have knowledge, knowledge of the external, physical world. That external world does exist and can be known through sense experience. We have knowledge when our sensations conform to the objects that cause them. The external world exists, not because man affirms it, but because it has the qualities that make it knowable.<sup>23</sup>

Protagoras' rejection of absolute values is not a rejection of all values. Though we cannot distinguish which values are better in the metaphysical realm, we can prioritize values on the basis of experience. The determining criterion is the advantage to the community. Values are given importance on the basis of the way they contribute to the community. The determination is made by consensus, not on knowledge of Truth. This submission of values to the standard of community welfare is an expression of Protagoras' famous statement, "Man. . .is the measure of all things."<sup>24</sup>

One of the reasons for Protagoras' emphasis on the community was his view of human nature. Man is fundamentally social. This attribute is inherent



in human nature, as are divisions of labor. They are inborn rather than learned. This is not to say that man cannot learn what is not innate. In fact, with regard to virtue, Protagoras believed just the opposite. Virtue is not limited to aristocratic families, to the elite, as traditional Greek thought had assumed. Rather, all of the virtues are open to all and can be taught.<sup>25</sup>

The educational method of Protagoras was built on three aspects of the learning process: study, practice and instruction. Though it did involve exertion by students, he argued that it did not involve "the sort of drudgery with which other sophists are in the habit of insulting their pupils."<sup>26</sup> Protagoras also emphasized the importance of personal interaction between the teacher and his students. The students were seen as disciples who were to spend much time with their teacher and emulate him.

Gorgias of Leontini was also a particularly prominent sophist. He was apparently about a decade younger than Protagoras and was born into a notable Athenian family. Tradition says he lived one hundred and nine years. If so, he contributed to the intellectual life of Athens for most of a century. He is particularly important for this study because of his direct influence on one of his pupils, Isocrates.

Gorgias' philosophy is fundamentally agnostic. He, like Protagoras, rejected as useless any attempt to gain knowledge of metaphysical reality. Man cannot, they both argued, know truth in any fixed, absolute sense. But whereas Protagoras believed man could know physical phenomena, Gorgias rejected this knowledge as well. Man can know nothing with certainty.<sup>27</sup>

Does this agnosticism eliminate all value and all education? If one were strictly logical and consistent, it might, but Gorgias does not want to push the reasoning that far. He does not want to lose the idea of value. He does

want people to stop thinking of values as eternal principles and rather view them as appropriate forms of behavior. Gorgias thereby developed a relativistic concept of value akin to what we call situational ethics. Nothing is inherently right or wrong, but depending upon the circumstances, one form of behavior might be more appropriate than another.<sup>28</sup>

This brings us to the epistemological problem — How do we know which is more appropriate? It might appear that given his philosophy, it would be impossible to evaluate and make such a decision. Gorgias argues otherwise. We may not have sure knowledge, he says, but we can have something superior to mere opinion, doxa. What we can have is logos, which may be roughly described as an ability to make judgments. It is better than opinion, but it is not truth.<sup>29</sup>

For Gorgias, logos has three integral parts: deception, persuasion and kairos. Deception, ironically, is a form of philosophical creativity that has to do with the development of those ideas that are more than opinion but less than truth. Persuasion is the verbal expression of that deception. Kairos is a Greek term that refers to the right or critical moment. According to Gorgias, there is in decision-making a factor of timing, a critical moment at which one must choose, and he must make that choice on the basis of what is right at the given moment and in those particular circumstances. He cannot fall back on fixed ethical principles. His decision is situational. Thus, logos is a combination of philosophic creativity, the desire and attempt to persuade others, and the sense of timing to say and do just the right things at the right time. Here we have, according to Gorgias, a way of decision making superior to mere opinion, but not presuming to rely on eternal verities.<sup>30</sup>

What does this imply for education? Without access to knowledge need there be education at all? Gorgias' answer is yes. There must be

education, but of a different sort. Education is not to teach truth, since we cannot know truth, nor is it to develop virtue. We cannot know what virtue is, much less teach it. For Gorgias, education must settle for a much less noble and more utilitarian goal, like social and political success. This can be achieved by training men to be great orators. Here we have the goal of Gorgias' education — to help students become socially and politically successful by teaching them the art of rhetoric.<sup>31</sup>

This teaching process includes memorization of the master's speeches for emulation, the study of language and figures of speech, and the development of broad understanding. The latter is necessary, for the good orator must be able to speak well on most any subject. A crucial quality that must be developed during this process is the ability to adapt one's speech to the immediate situation. This is the ability to distinguish the kairos. Through this educational process, Gorgias thought he could produce highly successful Athenian citizens.<sup>32</sup>

A third Athenian educator of great importance was Socrates. He was born in 469 and was executed in 399, having been convicted of corrupting the Athenian youth. Socrates is not usually considered a sophist because he traveled little, and he did not accept money for teaching. Neither does his philosophy of educational method agree with those advocated and practiced by the sophists.

It should be said at the beginning that little can be known of Socrates with a high degree of certainty. No extant writings are attributed to him, and those writings by others that speak about him have their biases. Most of our information about him comes from Plato, his student, who always put Socrates in the best light, and who used Socrates in his dialogues to represent Plato's

views. Therefore, when we read a statement by Socrates in Plato's works we can never be sure if that statement accurately reflects Socrates' views, or rather just those of Plato. Beck has argued that usually those statements reflect areas of agreement between Plato and his teacher, especially in the earlier works.<sup>33</sup>

If we can know anything of Socrates, we can know that his philosophy was other-worldly and absolutistic and that his educational method was what we would call an inquiry method. Socrates apparently rejected the relativism of Protagoras and Gorgias, as well as their agnosticism. He argued that there is fixed reality apart from the natural world and that reality consists of universal ideas—ideas like justice and virtue. These ideas can be discovered only through reason (through conception rather than perception). By thinking rationally man can develop definitions of these concepts that are universal. Upon completing this process, one has discovered truth, for truth consists of universal concepts.

The application of this to education created a method which emphasized rational inquiry and discussion. This ancient inquiry method emphasized the learning process, but without neglecting content. Whereas many modern educators emphasize inquiry because of their rejection of fixed truth, Socrates emphasized it as a means of attaining truth. Thus, the process of inquiry was not an end in itself, rather, the goal of the process was a knowledge of fixed truth.

It should also be noted that Socrates believed that virtue could be taught. Plato attributes to him the famous equation, knowledge equals virtue, which implied that if knowledge can be taught, then so can virtue. For to know what is right is to do it. This reflects the fundamentally moral nature of Socrates' education. He sought not to produce orators nor social and political

successes. He sought to produce moral men who would do, not what seemed appropriate, but what was right. It is ironic that Socrates, whose commitment to morality far exceeded that of his sophistic contemporaries, was convicted by his fellow citizens of corrupting the youth and was sentenced to death. Responding consistently with his belief in the authority of the polis, Socrates willingly drank the poison and died.

A fourth major figure in the era of Isocrates was Plato, Socrates' greatest student. He was born in 427, in the early days of the Peloponnesian War, and the chaos of Athens during the first third of his life shaped his perspective immeasurably. Plato longed for a restoration of the Golden Age he had missed. In this sense he was conservative, even reactionary. He wanted to restore stability to Athens and make it what it used to be, with some exceptions. The exceptions were necessary to assure that the new polis would not be susceptible to the sort of collapse that followed the previous Golden Age.

The necessary preventive measures were for Plato philosophical ones. The problem with the old Athens was that its values had been undermined by the this-worldly relativism and utilitarianism of the sophists. The way to establish a new Golden Age and to guarantee its stability would be to build it upon an accurate understanding of reality. What is real? For Plato, reality consists of those things which are eternal and unchanging. And what is there that meets the criterion? Ideas. Plato said that reality consists of an unchanging, non-physical world of ideas, or forms. There we find fixed truth and absolute values. This other-worldly reality can be known through reason and intuition, according to Plato, and must be the basis for any good, stable society. Thus, at the core of Plato's educational thought is an attempt to

construct a society built upon absolute values, with the guarantee that those values would never be abandoned.

In the Republic Plato describes this ideal society. It is a class society, based on the assumption that all people are not born equal. Some are fundamentally appetitive, suited only for providing goods and services for society; some are fundamentally courageous, suited to protect the society; some fundamentally rational, suited to rule the society. A just society is not a society of equality, but one in which each person is in his proper place. The proper place, though innate, is not related to parentage and therefore must be discovered by some other means. That means is education. Education is a sorting process to determine who is destined for the working class, the guardian class, and the ruling class.

Obviously, Plato is not democratic. Those who are irrational and dominated by their appetites should not be allowed to rule. Rather, the rational, those who know truth (and will necessarily do what is right because of the Socratic equation, knowledge equals virtue) should alone rule. Plato's skepticism of democracy was philosophically based but included an emotional element, since his teacher had been executed by an irrational mob. Though politically he rejected democracy, his ideal republic was democratic in opportunity, since all children began the educational ladder as equals.

In summary it can be said that Plato's view was metaphysically dualistic, morally absolutistic, intellectually aristocratic, politically totalitarian and democratic in opportunity.

#### The Issue of Paideia

What one sees happening intellectually and educationally in Athens is the development of two very different conceptions of education and culture.

The old Athenian education had been oriented toward the transmission of traditional values that were believed to have eternal validity. With the advent of the sophists, and especially Protagoras and Gorgias, a new way of looking at those values and a new way of defining paideia was introduced in Athens. The new view was that eternal values, if they existed, could not be known by man, and therefore were irrelevant to man. The new paideia assumed that all values were products of the culture and tradition, not the gods. With a belief that education could not teach fixed truth, the sophists introduced a new goal into education — political and social success. This, it was believed, could be achieved through learning the art of rhetoric. This new conception of education was vocational, utilitarian, and this-worldly.

All of Athens did not accept this new approach to education and culture, though it was immensely popular. In fact some, Plato for instance, saw this new paideia as the root cause of all of Athens' problems. The reason the Golden Age ended, the reason for the loss of the Peloponnesian War, and the reason for the chaos of Athenian life was the undermining of traditional Greek culture by the relativism of the sophists.

These opponents of the sophists, particularly Socrates and Plato, were metaphysically oriented, viewing ultimate reality as apart from the changing physical world. This other-worldly reality is knowable and is the only solid foundation for a society's structure, values and education. Education for the Socratics, as they are often called, was intellectually oriented and abstract. Its goal was the transmission of truth and the development of virtue. Vocational and utilitarian goals played only a minor role.

Such was the central educational issue of Isocrates' day. It concerned the nature of paideia. On one side were the relativists, the pragmatists, the

rhetoricians. On the other were the absolutists, the metaphysicians, the Socratics.<sup>34</sup> By the time of Isocrates both groups were concerned with the social problems created by the war, and both groups wanted to restore Athens to the Golden Age. Their proposals for achieving this differed as much as their philosophies. In the fourth century Isocrates was the leading spokesman for the relativistic, pragmatic, rhetorical side. Chapter three looks in more detail at his philosophy, his educational views and his approach the problems of the polis.



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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>24</sup>Plato, Theaetetus, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 7, in The Dialogues of Plato (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, William Benton, Publisher, 1952), p. 517.

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<sup>27</sup>Beck, pp. 173-174.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>34</sup>For an exhaustive study of the issue of paideia, see Werner Jaeger's classic three-volume work, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF ISOCRATES

#### Introduction

Athens in the days of Isocrates had a long and illustrious history but its greatest days had passed. The Golden Age was gone, traditional values were lost, and life was unstable and precarious. Many of Isocrates' contemporaries were seeking educational solutions to the problems of the polis. Plato presented an educational plan based on absolute virtues. By building the culture on an unchanging foundation, he believed a just, stable, and lasting society could be established. Plato's opponents rejected his other-worldly absolutism and sought more down to earth educational solutions. Isocrates was the most influential of these opponents and this chapter describes his educational thought. It surveys the facts of his life, his philosophy, his educational practice, his critics and his influence.

#### The Life of Isocrates

Isocrates was born in Athens in 436 B.C. to a citizen named Theodorus and his wife, Heduto. Little is known of his parents other than the fact that his father owned a business that manufactured flutes, which apparently made him quite wealthy. Isocrates implies in Antidosis that he had been provided with a particularly good education, making him conspicuous among his peers. His father also performed expensive services for the state, further suggesting

financial success.<sup>1</sup> Isocrates was one of five children born to Theodorus and Heduto, four of whom were boys. Nothing else is known of his siblings.

In addition to traditional Athenian primary education, Isocrates apparently studied, at least briefly, with a number of the sophists who were lecturing in Athens. One of those sophists, Gorgias of Leontini, later taught Isocrates in Thessaly, according to Cicero. The parallels between the philosophies and educational ideas of these men would suggest such a relationship. There are also important parallels between the ideas of Isocrates and Protagoras, as we shall see, but alone they do not imply that Isocrates actually studied under Protagoras. Plato's Phaedrus mentions Isocrates as a companion of Socrates, implying a pedagogical relationship. If Isocrates were a student of Socrates, he seems not to have borrowed much from his teacher's philosophy.

Isocrates was fortunate to have the resources that allowed him to pursue a good secondary education, but his good fortune ran out at the end of that education. The Peloponnesian War eventually sapped all of his father's wealth and left Isocrates without an inheritance. As an adult he faced not only the social, cultural and emotional dilemmas caused by the failure of the Golden Age, but also the personal dilemma of how to earn a living. Historical evidence indicates that in the early days of his career (perhaps for as long as a decade) Isocrates earned a living writing speeches for the law courts. Aristotle specifically states that Isocrates did this, and there are six forensic speeches attributed to him. The matter is uncertain because in Antidosis Isocrates denies having ever been a part of such work. Norlin interprets this denial (and Isocrates' repeated expressions of contempt for forensic speech) as an expression of his wish that this episode of his career be forgotten. He rather

wants his readers to view the opening of his school as the beginning of his true career.<sup>2</sup> Such an interpretation may be valid, but the matter raises a question as to the consistency of Isocrates' writing.

Isocrates probably opened his school of rhetoric in 392 and began his long and illustrious career as a leader in Athenian education. It is ironic that Isocrates, the greatest teacher of rhetoric in Athens, was not an effective orator. Though he was a good writer and understood the art of oratory as well as any of his peers, Isocrates had two main deficiencies that hindered him as a practitioner of the art: a weak voice and a severe case of stage fright. In the modern days of public address systems one easily forgets the importance of a strong voice for public speaking. Technology makes up for physical deficiencies. Fourth century Athens had no such technology, and the problem was one an orator could not easily overcome. The second factor that hindered Isocrates was psychological — he was unable to stand before large audiences and speak confidently.

His oratorical deficiencies left the young literary genius one career option, teaching. In small informal groups he could teach students the literary skills he had mastered, develop communication theories, and critique the speeches of others. This he did so well that he became the most popular teacher of Athens, he attracted students from outside of Athens, his students became leaders in Athenian politics and life, and he earned a great deal of money. Dionysius refers to Isocrates as the most illustrious teacher of his time and says that he attracted the best students from Athens and all of Greece.<sup>3</sup> Among his students were the general Timotheus, historians Theopompus and Ephorus, orators Lycurgus, Isaeus and Hypereides, and the philosopher

Speusippus.<sup>4</sup> Isocrates' wealth is demonstrated by the fact that late in life he was challenged to a trierarchy and lost, thus having to bear the financial burden of outfitting a ship.

While teaching the art of rhetoric to Athens' future leaders, Isocrates also found time to write. In addition to the six forensic speeches, we have from him twenty-three other works varying in form and content. Isocrates had a long and successful career of teaching and writing which ended with his death at the age of ninety-eight in 338. Tradition says that he committed suicide by starvation upon hearing of Philip's conquest at Charonea. This seems doubtful since one of his writings was a letter to Philip encouraging him to bring Greece together under his rule.

### The Philosophy of Isocrates

Isocrates' educational ideas and practices are built upon his attitude toward certain philosophical questions. This section deals with Isocrates' answers to those questions and the implications of those answers for the aims of education. These philosophical ideas will be studied according to traditional philosophical categories: metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and theory of human nature. A fifth category, the aims of education, will also be included because of the close logical connection between one's views of those philosophical categories and the implied aims of education. Such philosophical categories were foreign to Isocrates himself, but they provide a useful framework for the modern reader. This discussion will conclude with Isocrates' definition of philosophy as a discipline.

The problem of categories becomes immediately apparent when one attempts to discover Isocrates' views on metaphysics. Of course he does not use the term (it had not yet been coined), but more importantly, he says

extremely little about the ideas implied by the term. Modern thinkers have come to associate metaphysics with the highly abstract discussions of the nature of reality found in the writings of such thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Such speculations are nowhere to be found in Isocrates. When one considers that he is a contemporary of Plato and Aristotle, this absence seems conspicuous.

One might infer that Isocrates sees such speculation as pointless. This inference is supported by a few references in Antidosis. He writes that young men should not be

stranded on the speculations of the ancient sophists, who maintain, some of them, that the sum of things is made up of infinite elements; Empedocles that it is made up of four, with strife and love operating among them; Ion, of not more than three; Alcmaeon, of only two, Parmenides and Melissus, of one; and Gorgias, of none at all (pp. 333-335).

Though we may think of these ideas as theories of physics, in Isocrates' day physics and metaphysics had not been differentiated. In any case, Isocrates' point is that such abstract speculations are not useful and are therefore without value. He further writes:

For I think such curiosities of thought are on a par with jugglers' tricks which, though they do not profit anyone, yet attract great crowds of the empty-minded, and I hold that men who want to do some good in the world must banish utterly from their interests all vain speculations and all activities which have no bearing on our lives (p. 335).

Later in the same writing, Isocrates criticizes those who, affected by the chaos of Athens, "no longer use words in their proper meaning but wrest them from the most honorable associations and apply them to the basest pursuits." Among those are some who "ignore our practical needs and delight in the mental juggling of the ancient sophists as "students of philosophy" (pp. 341-343). This may be a direct criticism of Plato's speculative approach to education.

Isocrates does not state his view of reality because he rejects metaphysical speculation as pointless. This rejection, however, does suggest something about his view of reality. Isocrates rejects metaphysics because it tends to be other-worldly and impractical, and he is very this-worldly. He is concerned with the everyday problems of human experience. This tells us that, for Isocrates, reality consists of the world of physical phenomena and practical experience. There is no need to conjure up an unseen world of form or spirit; there is a need for useful skills and practical guidance.

Isocrates' rejection of metaphysics is based on his epistemology. Concerning the process of knowing he is a bit more explicit. He addresses the matter in the second paragraph of his early work Against the Sophists, where he insists that "foreknowledge of future events is not vouchsafed to our human nature" (p. 163). Isocrates is probably not referring to soothsayers who claim to predict future events, but to those who claim to give formulas to solve all of life's problems. Norlin explains in a footnote:

There is, according to Isocrates, no "science" which can teach us to do under all circumstances the things which will insure our happiness and success. Life is too complicated for that, and no man can foresee exactly the consequences of his acts - "the future is a thing unseen."<sup>5</sup>

Isocrates gives support to this interpretation in the next paragraph in which he criticizes the sophists who claim that their students will learn what to do in life and through that knowledge be assured of happiness and prosperity. Such certain knowledge is beyond human grasp.

This brings us to the central feature of Isocrates' epistemology. For him all knowledge related to the future—future decisions and future consequences—is tentative. One cannot establish fixed axioms for future behavior and be sure of their validity. What will be the right choice or behavior at some future moment cannot be predicted. Of his opponents Isocrates writes:



. . . they pretend to have knowledge of the future but are incapable either of saying anything pertinent or of giving any counsel regarding the present. . . those who follow their judgements are more consistent and more successful than those who profess to have exact knowledge. . . (Sophists, p. 167).

Isocrates rejects certain knowledge but places great confidence in judgment. We cannot know what is best for some future situation, but we can make judgments of present problems in light of the present situation. He supports judgment over exact knowledge using the criteria of consistency and success. From his observations those who claim to have exact knowledge are less consistent and less successful than those who claim only to make judgments based on the circumstances.

On occasion Isocrates does make reference to "truth." For example, in Against the Sophists he criticizes the sophists for having no interest in the truth, and in Antidosis he says the honest men among the jurors are on a quest for truth. What does he mean by the term? It seems that Isocrates is quite comfortable using the word truth to refer to descriptions of phenomena. The truthfulness of a statement depends upon how well it corresponds to the empirical reality it purports to describe. Only when we apply the word truth to non-empirical situations do we contradict Isocrates' conception. One cannot predict the future nor discover fixed principles of behavior that will necessarily apply in the future. The immediate physical world can be known. Beyond that we can only speculate, and such speculation is without value.

This is an agnostic aspect of Isocrates' thought. We can know the world in which we live but nothing beyond it. If there is a Platonic world of forms, or any other metaphysical reality, we cannot know it. This brings us back to Isocrates' metaphysics. It is not that he denies metaphysical reality — there may be a transcendent world. But if there is, man cannot know

it, and therefore it is irrelevant to him. Given such an epistemology, it is no wonder that Isocrates is apathetic, even antagonistic, toward metaphysical speculation. It is a waste of time and thought.

Having considered Isocrates' attitude toward metaphysics and epistemology, the reader should be able to infer his axiology. In fact, infer is what we have to do since Isocrates does not address the matter of values directly. First, it may be inferred that Isocrates is not interested in highly speculative debate over the precise nature of virtue. This lack of interest can be inferred from his lack of interest in metaphysics. His epistemology rules out such speculation in axiology as well as metaphysics. If there is absolute virtue or beauty apart from the world of physical phenomena, we cannot have exact knowledge of it.

Isocrates does on occasion speak of values as though they have independent existence. In Antidosis he compares Athens' treatment of Timotheus to "the standard of pure justice" (p. 259). Even in this instance he backs off that standard because it is beyond reasonable expectation. On another occasion he writes that all of his writings "tend toward virtue and justice" (Anti., p. 223). Tending toward virtue seems to be about the most one can expect, according to Isocrates' attitude toward value. Since we cannot have exact knowledge of metaphysical reality, we have to make value judgments that may help us "tend toward" right actions. These value judgments are not moral absolutes but are tentative decisions.

For since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight (Anti., p. 335).

Values cannot be based on other-worldly speculation about the nature of justice or virtue but must be based on observation, consensus and tradition.

Isocrates writes:

I maintain also that if you compare me with those who profess to turn men to a life of temperance and justice, you will find that my teaching is more true and profitable than theirs. For they exhort their followers to a kind of virtue and wisdom which is ignored by the rest of the world and is disputed among themselves; I, to a kind which is recognized by all (Anti., pp. 231-233).

Though values may aim at some higher but unknowable ideal, they are in fact more human than divine. Therefore, they are subject to revision or rejection in a given situation, depending upon that situation. Group values are valid, not because they conform to some absolute, but because they reflect the group's recognition of what works. For Isocrates, "what works" is an important criterion in ethical decision-making. Since the other-worldly element is removed from axiology, utility becomes crucial. We need not platitudes, but practical judgments that work. For Isocrates, values, like truth, are tentative and situational.

On the matter of human nature Isocrates is a bit more explicit. First, let us consider the matter of the educability of the individual. Modern psychology, taking its lead from John Locke, has emphasized the role of the environment in shaping the human personality. Psychologists, especially those associated with behaviorism, tend to view the individual as ultimately plastic. By manipulating the environment one can mold the child any way he wants. Such a conception of human nature is relatively new. Prior to Locke philosophers generally assumed that most of one's personality was innate. This is exemplified by Plato's argument that men have pre-existent souls that pre-determine their personalities.

Isocrates' view clearly falls in the pre-Lockian conception of innate personality. Some qualities are inborn and cannot be reversed by education. In

Against the Sophists Isocrates writes:

And let no one suppose that I claim that just living can be taught; for, in a word, I hold that there does not exist an art of the kind which can implant sobriety and justice in depraved natures (p. 177).

That is, some people are by nature depraved, and education can have only a limited effect upon them. Isocrates sounds even more like Plato in Antidosis where he summarizes his advice to Nicocles, "it ought to be revolting to his mind to see the base ruling over the good and the foolish giving orders to the wise" (p. 225). Of Timotheus he writes, "he could not lower himself to the level of people who are intolerant of their natural superiors" (Anti., p. 265).

Throughout his discussions of education, Isocrates refers to natural aptitude, native ability and talent. Neil Postman and other radical critics of modern American education have argued that when students fail, it is the teacher's fault. Isocrates puts a much tighter limit on what education can do. When students fail, it is likely because of a lack of native ability.\* Native ability alone is better than education alone, but the two together can produce "a man incomparable among his fellows." Education is of some value to those of little native ability, but there are sharp limits on what it can do. It is also possible for the talented to fail to reach their potential because of "dissolute and soft" living. Thus, there are limits to the educability of man.

This conception of human nature not only implies limits to one's educability, it also gives an aristocratic tone to Isocrates' thought. Though he professes to be democratic, in fact he is suspicious of true democracy. Isocrates longs for the days when the government was dominated by a few aristocratic families rather than by the masses. The ignorant multitudes

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\* This does not entirely relieve teachers of accountability, In fact, at one point Isocrates offers to take full responsibility for his students' failures, as we shall see later.

cannot be trusted. Consider the previously quoted comment about metaphysical speculation: "For I think that such curiosities of thought are on a par with juggler's tricks which, though they do not profit anyone, yet attract great crowds of the empty-minded. . .(Anti., p. 335). Isocrates tells Timotheus to observe

the nature of the multitude, how susceptible they are to flattery; that they like those who cultivate their favor better than those who seek their good; and that they prefer those who cheat them with beaming smiles and brotherly love to those who serve them with dignity and reserve (Anti., p. 261).

Here, as elsewhere, Isocrates reflects an elitist attitude toward the general public. He does not seem to view man as evil (in an Augustinian sense), but he does see man as weak and limited. These limitations are particularly apparent among the masses.

Despite his limitations, man does have some fundamental qualities that exalt him. We can summarize Isocrates' beliefs about human nature with these three adjectives: rational, active and communicative. First, man has an ability to reason which should be cultivated.

You will conceive that the cultivation of the mind is the noblest and worthiest of pursuits and you will urge our young men who have sufficient means and who are able to take the time for it to embrace an education and a training of this sort (Anti., p. 353).

On at least two occasions Isocrates describes man as a dualism consisting of mind and body. Both are important, but the mind is the greater of the two.

It is acknowledged that the nature of man is compounded of two parts, the physical and the mental, and no one would deny that of these two the mind comes first and is of greater worth; for it is the function of the mind to decide both on personal and public questions, and of the body to be servant to the judgments of the mind (Anti., p. 289).

History has given us two parallel disciplines for training these areas of man. To train the body there is gymnastics; to train the mind there is the study of discourse. These two disciplines are similar in method — each exercises the

man to make him stronger. This approach to learning is similar to the psychology of mental discipline which was popular early in the twentieth century.

Man is, for Isocrates, not just rational but also active. It is not enough for him to sit and contemplate, as Aristotle later suggested. Having contemplated a problem, the thinker should then act upon his conclusions. He should apply his thoughts to solving human problems. Isocrates writes ". . . I hold that men who want to do some good in the world must banish utterly from their interests all vain speculations and all activities that have no bearing on our lives" (Anti., p. 335). This utilitarian element in Isocrates' thought is reflected throughout his writings.

The third crucial aspect of human nature in Isocrates' thought is communication. Not only does man think and act, he communicates about those thoughts and actions. This ability to communicate is the single characteristic that distinguishes man from other animals. Antidosis includes the following comments:

. . .we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources, but because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech as not helped us establish (p. 327).

Not only does speech distinguish us from animals and help us with our cultural achievements, it even helps us think. Isocrates writes, ". . .the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts" (Anti., p. 327). Later in the same paragraph he adds that "in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom." Man's thoughts shape his speech, and his speech shapes his thoughts. Because of the

close connection between the two, "the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul" (Anti., p. 327).

Isocrates' views on metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and especially human nature provide the source of his aims for education. Those aims clearly would not include the discovery of metaphysical reality or transmission of fixed truth and value. His philosophy precludes such educational aims. Isocrates' thoughts can be summarized in his four major aims of education: clear thought, effective action, persuasive speech and panhellenism.

Education should produce students who have highly developed rational skills. Isocrates' school was more concerned with the development of reason and judgment than with the memorization of content (though some memorization was necessary). Students should learn to think for themselves and make judgments since man cannot know what will be true or valuable in the future. The student should develop the ability to make wise decisions based on evaluating options and considering likely consequences.

Rationality, though quite valuable, is not for Isocrates an end in itself. It is a means to an end. That end is action. A second major aim of Isocrates' education is effective action. Students should not be trained for the ivory tower but for the marketplace. They must do more than think; they must put their thoughts and judgments to work. Isocrates aimed to produce men of deeds who could lead in civic affairs, men who could solve the problems of the polis. Such this-worldly utilitarianism is far removed from Plato's preoccupation with other-worldly forms and Aristotle's infatuation with the intrinsic value of contemplation.

For Isocrates, the thing that brings reason and action together in education is speech. Speech shapes the way we think and helps us to think

clearly. Further, in the democracy of fourth century Athens, it was the way to transform thoughts into large scale deeds. The government functioned by discussion and debate. Having heard the various arguments about an issue, the citizens voted and action was taken. Thus, the means to political power was persuasion. Articulation was more than an ornament; it was a tool of power to change the society and exalt oneself. The pride of Isocrates' school, the highest achievement of his education was the effective orator — one who made sound judgments, presented them persuasively and thereby produced social action.

The fourth aim of Isocrates' education describes the social action he wanted achieved. Isocrates, like Plato, recognized that in order to restore stability and prosperity to Athens, the citizens needed some higher value to which they could commit themselves and which could unify them. Plato sought such values in the metaphysical realm, but Isocrates denied its relevance. What common goal could bring Athens together and dissolve the social crises that it repeatedly faced? Isocrates believed a political ideal could do it, and that ideal was panhellenism.

Panhellenism was the theory that the political and social problems of Greece could be solved by uniting all of Greece, with its many independent cities, into one nation. Only through such political union could long-term peace and stability be assured. Isocrates believed that such a union was possible and necessary and that education should be used to bring it about. Naturally, he believed that Athens should lead the new panhellenic state. He further argued that the divisiveness among the poleis could be overcome by identifying and challenging a common enemy. That enemy was Persia. If nothing else could bring the Greeks together, Isocrates believed their hatred of the Persians could.

To summarize Isocrates' philosophy we may consider his definition of philosophy as a discipline. Traditional conceptions of philosophy, viewing it as a



speculative study of metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and human nature, come to us from Plato. Upon reading Isocrates one soon realizes that such a definition of philosophy was foreign to him. In the fourth century B.C. the term had not yet developed a clear, widely accepted definition. Etymologically it meant "love of wisdom," but various thinkers had quite different conceptions of what it meant to love wisdom. Not surprisingly, each writer on the subject believed that whatever he did was the best means to wisdom. The Socratics claimed the term should apply to speculations about the nature of reality, truth, value and human nature. The sophists wanted the term to mean sophistry. Isocrates believed the term should refer to the art of eloquence.

Isocrates does not address specifically many of the issues we consider central to philosophy because, according to his definition, those issues are not philosophical. For Isocrates philosophy is not an ivory tower activity for stodgy intellectuals. It is not the sort of abstract reasoning and speculation that later led Descartes to doubt everything except his own existence. Philosophy is the pursuit of practical, useful judgment.

He complains in Antidosis that "what some people call philosophy is not entitled to the name" (p. 335). Isocrates thought that many of the problems of Athens were attributable to the misuse of language. He explains that ". . . some of our people no longer use words in their proper meaning but wrest them from the most honorable associations and apply them to the basest pursuits." (Anti., pp. 341-343). More specifically,

They characterize men who ignore our practical needs and delight in the mental juggling of the ancient sophists as "students of philosophy," but refuse the name to whose (sic) who pursue and practice those studies which will enable us to govern wisely both our own households and the commonwealth — which should be the objects of our toil, of our study, and of our every act (Anti., p. 343).

He explains his own view of philosophy in this way:

For since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight (Anti., p. 335).

True philosophy is pragmatic philosophy.

The way to attain the practical judgment which makes one a true philosopher is by studying the art of rhetoric. Eloquence is the way to wisdom.

In the context of his discussion of philosophy, Isocrates writes:

But I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well, if they become possessed of the desire to be able to persuade their hearers, and, finally, if they set their hearts on seizing their advantage. . (Anti., p. 337).

Having mastered the art of rhetoric, the student will have greatly enhanced his rational skills, communication skills and practical skills and will be a more useful citizen. Such a student and citizen is a true philosopher. Isocrates further hoped that these true philosophers would use their highly developed skills to promote Athenian-based panhellenism.

### The Educational Practice of Isocrates

Isocrates established his Rhetorical School in Athens about 392 and it continued to educate many of the polis' best and brightest until his death in 338. This section analyzes some of the specifics of Isocrates' school, the nature of rhetorical pedagogy, the requirements for good oratory, the limits of education, the teacher's role, the measures of teacher success and the curriculum.

As previously mentioned, Dionysius of Halicarnassus viewed Isocrates' school as the most illustrious in Athens. Isocrates himself acknowledges that he attracted many of the best students, not only from Athens, but from all of the

world. He also admits that his fees were higher than those of most other teachers. What was education like at this famous and expensive school? We have no college bulletin from the Rhetorical School, but we can discover some elements of the school's program.

Isocrates' school was for students who had completed traditional Athenian primary education. Though we refer to this level as secondary education, the Rhetorical School is as much the ancestor of higher education as of secondary education. Students usually entered the school at the age of fourteen years and continued as long as they desired and could afford it. Most stayed three or four years.

Isocrates' school was not just a school over which he administrated; it was a school in which he was the sole teacher. As the only teacher, he could accept only a limited enrollment. In fact, it would appear that Isocrates accepted only a very few students at a time. Plutarch said that Isocrates taught a total of about 100 pupils.<sup>6</sup> Marrou calculates from this that enrollment might normally have been five or six pupils per year.<sup>7</sup> R. S. Johnson made calculations based on Isocrates' income and reached a similar conclusion.<sup>8</sup> This evidence seems to outweigh Freeman's position that Isocrates had 100 pupils at one time.<sup>9</sup> Isocrates does say that he had taught more students than any of his opponents, but this may reflect the longevity of his career rather than the number of students at any given time.

Isocrates' pupil selection was based primarily on his desire to influence Athenian politics. Because he wanted to make a significant difference in Athenian life, he desired students who showed considerable potential for leadership. Since one of the most important qualifications for leadership was high social status, most of his students came from upper class families. These

elite students would have the most opportunity to use the wisdom and eloquence they would gain from Isocrates. Wealth may have also been an important criterion for studying with Isocrates. His school was known to be expensive, though Isocrates claims that he charged only his foreign students. None of his wealth, he wrote in Antidosis, came from Athenian citizens. This claim is suspect. In the same work he writes that the fathers willingly paid him fees for their sons' education. Beck argues that the context requires that we understand these fathers to be Athenian fathers. "It is therefore clear that Isocrates did accept fees from Athenian pupils."<sup>10</sup> If Beck is right, it is an example of blatant inconsistency in Isocrates' writing. In any case we may be sure that most of his students came from wealthy, aristocratic families.

As to the precise method of pedagogy in Isocrates' school little is known. One can, however, draw together some elements of it that are mentioned in his writings. Consider the nature of rhetorical pedagogy. The art of rhetoric, Isocrates writes early in Against the Sophists, is a creative process, not a rigid routine. Many sophists make the mistake of "applying the analogy of an art with hard and fast rules to a creative process" (p. 171). In the study of the use of letters one can formulate fixed rules that are always appropriate and should be memorized. Rhetoric, however, is a creative process that requires the student (and the teacher) to make judgments dependent on the given situation because every situation is different. In grammar one seeks to be uniform; in rhetoric one tries to be innovative.

That is not to say that the art of rhetoric cannot be taught, or that there are no principles of rhetoric that apply on a large scale. In Antidosis Isocrates draws a parallel between rhetoric and gymnastics. Man has two parts, physical and mental, and both need to be developed.

Since this is so, certain of our ancestors, long before our time, seeing that many arts had been devised for other things, while none had been prescribed for the body and for the mind, invented and bequeathed to us two disciplines, physical training for the body, of which gymnastics is a part, and, for the mind, philosophy, which I am going to explain. These are twin arts — parallel and complementary — by which their masters prepare the mind to become more intelligent and the body to become more serviceable, not separating sharply the two kinds of education, but using similar methods of instruction, exercise, and other forms of discipline (p. 289).

Isocrates further explains that as physical trainers teach their students the postures of bodily contests, so "the teachers of philosophy impart all of the forms of discourse in which the mind expresses itself" (p. 289). So, rhetorical education does have certain forms it can follow. In Against the Sophists he writes that oratory involves: 1) learning the elements which make up a discourse, 2) choosing from those elements the ones most appropriate for a given subject, 3) joining those elements together, 4) arranging them properly, and 5) adorning the discourse appropriately with striking thoughts and "flowing and melodious phrase" (p. 173).

For a student to learn to perform these procedures well, he must fulfill certain requirements. In the same context as the above discussion, Isocrates writes that good oratory requires much study, a vigorous and imaginative mind, knowledge of different kinds of discourse, and practice in their use. In Antidosis he compresses these into three requirements for successful oratory: 1) natural aptitude, 2) training and mastery of subject matter, and 3) practice. By natural aptitude is meant intelligence, a strong and pleasing voice, and assurance.

For given a man with a mind which is capable of finding out and learning the truth and of working hard and remembering what he

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\* Remember that by philosophy he means rhetoric, rather than metaphysics, etc.

learns and also with a voice and a clarity of utterance which are able to captivate the audience, not only by what he says, but by the music of his words, and, finally, with an assurance which is not an expression of bravado, but which, tempered by sobriety, so fortifies the spirit that he is no less at ease in addressing all his fellow-citizens than in reflecting to himself. . .(Anti., p. 293).

Isocrates considers himself lacking in the latter two of these — voice and assurance. He apparently considered both functions of native ability, and therefore their absence irreparable.

If all of the essential ingredients are present — natural ability, study and practice — one can be assured of oratorical success. Insofar as any one of these elements is lacking, success will be limited. Often one or more of these are lacking, since not all have the natural ability and since learning is not an easy process. Isocrates writes, ". . .all knowledge yields itself up to use only after great effort on our part, and we are by no means all equally capable of working out in practice what we learn" (Anti., p. 299). Diligent study and practice are necessary, but the most important factor in success is natural ability, which is "paramount and comes before all else" (Anti., p. 293). Of teachers of gymnastics and teachers of discourse he writes:

. . .neither class of teachers is in possession of a science by which they can make capable athletes or capable orators out of whomsoever they please. They can contribute in some degree to these results, but these powers are never found in their perfection save in those who excel by virtue both of talent and of training (Anti., p. 291).

Given these requirements for success, and the dominance of native ability among them, there are limits to what education, even rhetorical education, can do. It cannot make great orators of those without natural ability nor those who are unwilling to work hard. On the other hand, it can improve the lot of most anyone. Formal education "cannot fully fashion men who are without natural aptitude into good debaters or writers, although it is capable of

leading leading them on to self-improvement and to a greater degree of intelligence on many subjects" (Sophists, p. 173).

Again, every one of you could name many of your schoolfellows who when they were boys seemed to be the dullest among their companions, but who, growing older, outstripped them farther in intelligence and in speech than they had lagged behind them when they were boys. From this fact you can best judge what training can do; for it is evident that when they were young they had all possessed such mental powers as they were born with but as they grew to be men, these outstripped the others and changed places with them in intelligence, because their companions lived dissolutely and softly, while they gave heed to their own opportunities and to their own welfare (Anti., p. 303).

If students can make such advances on their own, one could expect even greater progress if they had a good teacher.

But when people succeed in making progress through their own diligence alone, how can they fail to improve in a much greater degree both over themselves and over others if they put themselves under a master who is mature, of great experience, and learned not only in what has been handed down to him but in what he has discovered for himself (Anti., p. 303).

Though success is largely dependent on the student, that does not negate the value of a good teacher.

In this process, master and pupil each has his place; no one but the pupil can furnish the necessary capacity; no one but the master, the ability to impart knowledge; while both have a part in the exercises of practical application: for the master must painstakingly direct his pupil, and the latter must rigidly follow the master's instruction (Anti., p. 293).

This quotation should give us some notion of the teacher/student relationship. The teacher is more than mere guide; he is an instructor and director whose instruction must be rigidly followed by the student. As the physical trainer gives lessons, directs exercises, habituates his students to work, and requires them to combine in practice all the things they have learned, so should the teacher of rhetoric.

Watching over them and training them in this manner, both the teachers of gymnastics and the teachers of discourse are able to

advance their pupils to a point where they are better men and where they are stronger in their thinking or in the use of their bodies (Anti., p. 291).

As implied by the above quotations, a good teacher must be mature, must have much experience, must have a good grasp of the knowledge passed on to him, must have discovered new knowledge through his own study, and must have the ability to impart knowledge to others. Further, he must provide an excellent example which students can follow. Emulation is a major feature in Isocrates' educational method. Students spend much of their time copying and memorizing their teacher's (and others') speeches in order to emulate their excellence. He writes in Against the Sophists that

. . .the teacher, for his part, must so expound the principles of the art with the utmost possible exactness as to leave out nothing that can be taught, and, for the rest, he must in himself set such an example of oratory that the students who have taken form under his instruction and are able to pattern after him will, from the outset, show in their speaking a degree of grace and charm which is not found in others (p. 175).

Students learn not only from the example of the master's speeches, but from his way of life as well. Thus, Isocrates' school had a not-so-hidden curriculum built around the way of life, values and judgments of its teacher. Education was not just taking classes, it was socializing with the master, being in his company. This is illustrated by the fact that Isocrates often refers to his students, not as students or pupils, but as his associates. They associate with him. Through formal and informal learning situations, the student slowly developed his rhetorical (and intellectual and social) skills.

How does one evaluate a teacher's success? This dilemma was no less difficult in Isocrates' day than in ours. Modern educational critics like Neil Postman have argued that teacher success should be determined by the rate of student success. If students fail, it is the teacher's fault. Even so, the success



of students is difficult to measure, especially given Isocrates' educational aims. The matter was even more complicated for Isocrates since many of the factors of student success, like native ability, were beyond the teacher's control. When speaking generally, Isocrates lays the responsibility for student success (or failure) first on the student's natural ability, second on his diligence in practice, and third on the teacher. Can teacher quality be determined, then, by student success? Not entirely. As pointed out previously, teachers are not "in possession of a science by which they can make. . . capable orators of whomsoever they please" (Anti., p. 291). In response to the accusation that some of his students have turned out corrupt, he writes:

For example, one might put the following questions on this very subject: Suppose the case of men who, having inherited large fortunes from their ancestors, used their wealth, not to render themselves serviceable to the state, but to outrage their fellow-citizens and to dishonor their sons and their wives; would anyone venture to put the blame upon the authors of their wealth instead of demanding that the offenders themselves be punished (Anti., p. 325)?

The point of the analogy is that a teacher of rhetoric gives his students something good and honorable, eloquence. If they use it to bad ends, that is not his fault. It would be unfair to judge the teacher on the basis of his students' behavior after graduation.

Though such evaluation might be unfair, Isocrates is willing to submit to it anyway to show the impeccable excellence of this school.

For I ask this of you: If any of those who have been associated with me have turned out to be good men in their relations to the state, to their friends, and to their own households — I ask you to give them the praise and not to be grateful to me on their account; but if, on the other hand, any of them have turned out to be bad — the kind of men who lay information, hale people into court, and covet the property of others — then to let the penalty be visited upon me. What proposition could be less invidious or more fair than one that claims no credit for those who are honorable, but offers to submit to punishment for any who have become depraved? And these are no idle words; on the contrary, if anyone can name anyone of that kind to you, I yield the floor for this purpose to my accuser or to anyone else who may desire it. . . (Anti., pp. 239-241).

In this rather dramatic passage Isocrates lays the whole burden of his students' post-graduation behavior upon himself. This implies a power and a responsibility for the teacher far beyond any implied by his views of human nature and learning. At one point he does say that teachers occupy a special position in which they are responsible for the lives, successes and failures of their students. He writes, ". . .yet when anyone occupies a position in the eyes of the public as a counsellor and teacher, he must then justify his followers as well as himself. . ."(Anti., p. 243).

We might suggest two main reasons for his taking such a strong stand in offering to take responsibility for the subsequent failures of his students: 1) He could make this proposition because he had been highly selective of students and he knew from experience that he had wisely or luckily made good choices. 2) He would never have submitted to such scrutiny in a real trial, but in one invented as a literary device it would be both dramatic and safe.

Isocrates proceeds to defend the quality of his teaching by naming some of his successful students. Among these are some of the greatest statesmen of Athens, as well as historians, poets, philosophers and generals.

Among the first to begin studying with me were Eunomus, Lysitheides, and Callippus; and following them were Onetor, Anticles, Philonides, Philomelus and Charantides. All these men were crowned by Athens with caplets of gold, not because they were covetous of other people's possessions, but because they were honorable men and had spent large sums of their private fortunes upon the city (Anti., p. 237).

He also defends at some length Timotheus, a former general and the most controversial of Isocrates' students, as a wise and just man who was unjustly maligned by the Athenian masses. In further support of his teaching, Isocrates uses the attitudes of his students.

In fact, although I have had so many pupils, and they have studied with me in some cases three, and in some cases four years, yet not

one of them will be found to have uttered a word of complaint about his sojourn with me; on the contrary, when at the last the time would come for them to sail away to their parents or their friends at home, so happy did they feel in their life with me, that they would always take their leave with regret and tears (Anti., p. 233).

Student testimonies clearly have an important role in teacher evaluation.

Isocrates further defends his teaching on the basis of his general reputation. If any citizen had ever been wronged by him, surely that citizen would speak up. But no complaints, he claimed, were to be heard. Not only were there no citizens whom he had harmed, his reputation was so good that students sought him out as a teacher. "I, you will find, have never invited any person to follow me. . ."(Anti., p. 233). He does not need to advertise. He is known far and wide as a great teacher, and pupils come unsolicited. Not only that, they come willing to pay high fees to study with him, something they certainly would not do if he was known to have corrupted his students.

Isocrates' views on this matter may be summarized by saying that a teacher may be evaluated on the basis of a combination of factors, including his students' success in adult life, his students' testimonies about him, their parents' testimonies about him, his general reputation as an upright person, and his ability to attract students.

The curriculum by which Isocrates imparted the formal education was broad. He believed that a good orator must be able to speak knowledgeably on most any subject. Thus, his education must be general rather than specialized. Nowhere in his extant writings does Isocrates list and describe the curriculum of his school in catalogue form. From his general comments, however, one can infer what that curriculum might have involved. According to Burk, it included "grammar, style, knowledge of composition and delivery; knowledge of the homeland, history and archeology; law, in its different fields; and not in the least, religion, wisdom of life and philosophy."<sup>11</sup>

In Antidosis Isocrates speaks of the roles of geometry and astronomy as well. Though they are of no practical worth once learned, the process of learning them is of some value. They exercise our minds, give us intellectual strength, and help us to learn more quickly and easily other more important subjects. "I would, therefore, advise young men to spend some time on these disciplines, but not allow their minds to be dried up by these barren subtleties. . . ." (p. 333). Similar is the value of grammar, music, and other subjects normally studied at the primary level.

More important are studies related to Athenian history and politics. In defense of his teaching Isocrates writes:

First of all, tell me what eloquence could be more righteous or more just than one which praises our ancestors in a manner worthy of their excellence and of their achievement? Again, what could be more patriotic or more serviceable to Athens than one which shows that by virtue of our other benefactions and of our exploits in war we have greater claims to the hegemony than the Lacedaemonians? And, finally, what discourse could have a nobler or a greater theme than one which summons the Hellenes to make an expedition against the barbarians and counsels them to be of one mind among themselves (Anti., p. 333).

Athenian history, and particularly the patriotic sort that exalts national heroes, must have been an important part of the studies of Isocrates' students. They also studied something akin to political science in order to understand the workings of the Athenian power structure. If they were to achieve the goal of panhellenism, Isocrates' students needed such expertise.

The thing that tied all of the curriculum together was, of course, rhetoric. The study of rhetoric was the surest path to Isocrates' educational aims. Eloquence was the most certain sign that those aims had been achieved. The role of rhetoric in Isocrates' school was so great that Burk says it was the only subject in the school.<sup>12</sup> These other topics we have mentioned were rather divisions of rhetorical study that were taught as they contributed to the development of oratorical excellence.

Isocrates sometimes referred to the education which his school provided as a liberal education. It provided a broad education, an integrated group of topics which all pupils studied, an emphasis on the humanities, and a commitment to eloquence. Further, and more importantly, Isocrates' education was to be liberating to man, freeing him to think more rationally, speak more clearly and work more effectively. It was not narrowly vocational but was intended to make the student a better man, a better citizen and a better worker at whatever his vocation.

### The Critics of Isocrates

No figure so influential and no school so famous could be without harsh critics. Isocrates had his share. They can be categorized in terms of what in Isocrates' work they found offensive: his success, his politics or his philosophy.

Isocrates believed that many of his critics were motivated, not by genuine complaints about his education, but by envy of his success. In a very difficult period in Athenian history, when many citizens were struggling to survive, Isocrates was accumulating great wealth and fame. Out of sheer envy many, he believed, disparaged his teaching and tried to bring him down. Isocrates responds with amazement at how the city has changed.

For, when I was a boy, wealth was regarded as a thing so secure as well as admirable that almost every one affected to own more property than he actually possessed, because he wanted to enjoy the standing which it gave. Now, on the other hand, a man has to be ready to defend himself against being rich as if it were the worst of crimes, and to keep on the alert if he is to avoid disaster; for it has become far more dangerous to be suspected of being well off than to be detected in crime. . . (Anti., p. 277).

He complains that he had expected to be highly acclaimed upon achieving greater competence and a higher position than other teachers.

But the result has been the very opposite; for if I had turned out to be worthless and had excelled in nothing, no one would have made

trouble for me. . . .But now, instead of the acclaim which I expected, I have been rewarded with trials and perils and envy and calumny (Anti., p. 279).

No doubt, many of Isocrates' critics were motivated by envy and had no greater complaint than that he was successful.

Others were critical of the political ideas promoted in Isocrates' school. Though he lauded the virtues of democracy, as previously mentioned, his thought included a strong aristocratic element. He longed for the days when the democracy was dominated by a handful of distinguished families. His education supported such aristocracy by virtue of the fact that it made no effort to educate the masses, only the elite. His selection of wealthy students with great political potential expressed and promoted Isocrates' aristocratic inclinations.

Taking such a position, Isocrates was subject to criticism from both sides of the issue. He claimed to be democratic, bringing on himself the wrath of oligarchic groups, but was aristocratic enough to arouse the suspicions of the masses. By straddling the fence, Isocrates allowed for support and criticism from both sides.

The central feature of Isocrates' politics was panhellenism, and this too must have produced enemies for him. Though the idea of an Athenian-led panhellenic nation probably appealed to many Athenians, it did not endear him to the rest of Greece. Even many in Athens were skeptical of its possibility, and the idea of unifying the Hellen by declaring war on Persia was, no doubt, a highly controversial one.

The greatest criticism of Isocrates came from opponents of his philosophy. It should by now be clear to the reader that there were sharp

differences between Isocrates and many of his contemporaries as to the nature of reality, knowledge, values, human nature and philosophy itself. These philosophical differences implied significant differences in education as well. Isocrates' definition of philosophy and his solutions to the crises in Athenian life were diametrically opposed to those of Plato and his followers. Plato defined philosophy as a speculative, other-worldly discipline concerned with metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and human nature. He believed a stable society could be built only upon absolute virtues and that education must discover and teach those virtues. Isocrates defined philosophy as the pursuit of practical this-worldly wisdom through the art of discourse. He believed society could be stabilized through political unity and a common military enemy. He believed that education should promote these. The philosophical and educational differences between Isocrates and his critics were pronounced, and they produced vigorous criticism on both sides.

### The Influence of Isocrates

Isocrates died in 338 B.C.; his influence did not. Isocrates' thought has continued as a significant educational force in western civilization from his day to ours. A detailed study of that influence would take years to complete and volumes to write. This section attempts nothing more than to sketch an outline of that influence to show that it was significant.

Naturally, Isocrates' greatest and earliest influence was in his native land. He shaped it most by educating its leaders but also by helping define education. A major channel of his influence was ironically, Plato's student, Aristotle. Aristotle accepted whole-heartedly the educational views of neither Plato nor Isocrates but was substantially influenced by both. From Isocrates he borrowed the art of rhetoric, from Plato the definition of philosophy.

Aristotle adopted Isocrates' educational emphasis on rhetoric and much of his method of teaching it but redefined its precise role in education. For Isocrates rhetoric had been the dominant feature of a liberal education, the thing that unified the whole curriculum. For Aristotle rhetoric was an important subject within a liberal education but was not the essence of a liberal education. Aristotle believed eloquence to be important but not the ultimate goal of all education.

Aristotle rejected Isocrates' idea that philosophy and rhetoric are roughly synonymous terms. Rather, in this case he adopted (and adapted) Plato's definition of philosophy as a speculative, intellectual discipline. In fact, it was Aristotle who gave us the term metaphysics. Thus, in Aristotle we find Plato's definition of philosophy combined with Isocrates' commitment to and method of rhetoric. This may explain the direction Isocrates' influence took.

In the latter days of Greece and in much of subsequent history, Isocrates' rhetorical method of education became quite popular, while his pragmatic definition of philosophy fell on hard times. In the period of the Roman republic rhetoric flourished. Cicero agreed with Isocrates' conception of philosophy and rhetoric, and later Quintilian borrowed his method. The term rhetorical school became synonymous with secondary education in Rome. The Hellenistic Christians at Alexandria also valued and perpetuated Isocratic rhetoric, but they did not accept his pragmatic philosophy. With the rise of Christianity, and particularly platonic, Augustinian Christianity, Isocrates' pragmatism in philosophy and education waned.

Rhetoric was passed on throughout the Middle Ages as a part of the trivium in the seven liberal arts and saw a great revival in the Renaissance. With the revival of the study of Cicero and the discovery of Quintilian's



Institutes of Oratory, Isocratic rhetoric flourished again. Though few recognized that these ideas originated with Isocrates, they were, nevertheless, manifestations of his influence. Some did recognize his importance, and scholars like Aldus Manutius and Hieronymus Wolf published editions of his works. Burk views much of Renaissance humanism as a later expression of Isocrates' rhetorical education and even finds elements of that influence in Pestalozzi. Further, he sees in the modern conception of the liberal arts elements attributable to the ancient rhetorician.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1: xxix.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 1: 163.

<sup>6</sup>R. S. Johnson, "A Note on the Number of Isocrates' pupils," American Journal of Philology 78 (July 1957): 297.

<sup>7</sup>H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, trans. George Lamb (New York: Steed and Ward, 1956), p. 377.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson, pp. 299-300.

<sup>9</sup>Kenneth J. Freeman, Schools of Hellas, Classics in Education, no. 38 (New York: Teachers College Press, c1969), p. 191.

<sup>10</sup>Frederick A. B. Beck, Greek Education, 450-350 B.C. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), p. 260.

<sup>11</sup>William M. Boast, "The Pedagogical and Rhetorical Concepts of Isocrates as a Classical Communication Methodology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1960), Appendix, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

## CHAPTER IV

### ISOCRATES AND MODERN PRAGMATISM

#### Introduction

The rhetorical training of Isocrates' school played a major role in shaping secondary and higher education in the West, though his philosophy was long overshadowed by Platonic and Christian idealism. In the twentieth century John Dewey introduced education to a new pragmatic philosophy which bears a more-than-casual resemblance to the educational philosophy of Isocrates. The purpose of this chapter is to compare modern educational pragmatism with the educational thought of Isocrates in order to determine their major similarities and differences. First is a survey of some major features of modern pragmatism, following traditional philosophical categories. Then follows a brief discussion of some of its major educational tenets. Last is a list of observations about the major similarities and differences between the educational thought of Isocrates and the twentieth century pragmatists.

#### The Philosophy of Educational Pragmatism

This section describes briefly the dominant views of modern educational pragmatists toward metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and human nature, and the aims of education. Most of the views expressed here come from the thought of John Dewey, Boyd Bode, and John Childs. Though there are other important educational thinkers who can be called pragmatic, these seem to be some of the leading spokesmen for the movement.

What position do pragmatic educational philosophers take with regard to metaphysics? It may be said that pragmatists generally do not write about metaphysics. They, like Isocrates, are not interested in the other-worldly speculations traditionally associated with metaphysics. They are not transcendently minded. They are interested only in the natural world and matters related to it. Of course, to reject metaphysical speculation as a waste of time is to take, indirectly, a metaphysical position. Sidney Hook has recognized this and expresses his views in a book entitled The Metaphysics of Pragmatism.<sup>1</sup> Pragmatism assumes that the physical world, the world of human experience, constitutes all of reality. The pragmatist

. . . asserts unqualifiedly that experience is all that we have or can ever hope to have. It is "the ultimate universe of discourse." In more homely language, "it is anything that anybody can talk about." As such it is the first word and the last word. Experience "sets our problems," and it "tests our solutions." Hence if human experience cannot give us an adequate account<sub>2</sub> of realities, then man has no possibility of gaining such an account.

For the pragmatist, reality consists of the natural world. What is this natural world's dominant feature? It is change. Like Heraclitus, pragmatists believe that reality is in perpetual flux. Nothing in the universe is fixed, absolute. Pragmatists explain the transition in our civilization from traditional absolutism to relativism with the statement, "Everything that was nailed down is coming loose." The transitory nature of all things is closely tied to evolution in the thought of most modern pragmatists. Life evolves, man evolves, even the heavens are following an evolutionary path.

Since everything changes, nothing is secure. Everything, including existence itself, is precarious. Pragmatism holds that "we live in an unfinished, changing world, in which novelty and variety are naturalized—in a contingent world of plural possibilities."<sup>3</sup> The precarious, changing nature of reality implies for all of creation infinite possibilities and dangers.

The stablest thing we can think of is not free from conditions set to it by other things. That even the solid earth mountains, the emblems of constancy, appear and disappear like the clouds, is an old theme of moralists and poets. . . . A thing may endure secula seculorum and yet not be everlasting; it will crumble before the gnawing tooth of time, as it exceeds a certain measure.<sup>4</sup>

The stable world that Plato hoped to build around absolute virtues is impossible, because nothing is stable, including those virtues.

If this is the nature of reality, what can we know? First, pragmatism denies that we can know anything beyond the naturalistic universe. If there is a transcendent world of forms, we cannot know it. Therefore it is pointless to argue about it. This agnosticism is the basis for pragmatism's lack of interest in metaphysics. Ultimate reality, if there is such, is unknowable. Man does not possess the ability to transcend the world of phenomena. Thus, metaphysical speculation may be occasionally amusing, but it is without any other value.

What can man know? He can know phenomena. He can know things that can be empirically tested.\* Pragmatism, at least the sort advocated by Dewey and Charles Sanders Pierce, places great emphasis on scientific method. Man knows not through intuition, reason, or revelation, but rather through a scientific process that combines observation and logic. Dewey says the development of knowledge involves: 1) continuous experience, 2) a problem that stimulates thought, 3) the collection of information and the making of observations, 4) the consideration of possible solutions, and 5) the testing of ideas by application.<sup>5</sup> When one experiences this process he is truly thinking and is attaining knowledge in the only way man can. Thus, all knowledge is of an empirical nature.

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\* Pragmatic epistemology is rooted in the thought of Immanuel Kant, who distinguished between the noumenon, the thing-in-itself, and the phenomenon, one's experience of it. Pragmatism believes that man can know the phenomenon, but not the noumenon.

What constitutes truth? The term truth refers to statements about phenomena, not statements about ultimate reality. Thus, pragmatists generally avoid writing the term with a capital "T" as some absolutists do. A statement may be described as true which accurately predicts phenomena. Its accuracy is tested by experience. A true statement is not necessarily one that corresponds to external reality, but one that has "anticipatory accuracy."<sup>6</sup>

The belief that truth is based on anticipatory accuracy has led to the idea that for pragmatism, "Truth is what works." This popular statement drastically oversimplifies pragmatic epistemology, but it does reflect one major point accurately. Truth is not that which precisely corresponds to reality (we never know if we have precise correspondence) but that which accurately predicts phenomena and is thereby verified by the phenomena. This can be illustrated by the pragmatic attitude toward non-Euclidean geometry. Pragmatists are not bothered by the fact that Euclidean and non-Euclidean systems are fundamentally contradictory. They are satisfied with the knowledge that both work. Which is right? Which accurately describes the way things are? To the pragmatist that is not an important question, because correspondence is not the criterion for truth. The criterion is anticipatory accuracy, the ability to predict phenomena. Both systems meet this criterion. The point is that for the pragmatist knowledge is not something we discover, it is something we construct. If the knowledge we construct is workable, then it is true. If it is not workable, then it is not true. Truth then, does not consist of divine decrees, or even universal laws, but rather verified human hypotheses.

Is knowledge ever certain, final? Clearly not. Since reality changes, so does knowledge. And, since knowledge is a creation of human experience, as that experience changes, so does knowledge. From the perspective of

pragmatism, all knowledge is tentative and subject to later revision or rejection. This is exemplified by Einstein's overthrow of the Newtonian universe and the advent of non-Euclidean geometry. We can know nothing for sure — not even fundamental physical and geometric laws.

Having considered pragmatic metaphysics and epistemology, pragmatic axiology holds no surprises. Values are not universal, based on some ultimate and unchanging reality. They are not founded on divine attributes or decrees. They are functions of society, tradition, and individual personality. Pragmatic axiology is, in other words, relativistic. On what basis are we then to make decisions? Dewey finds his firmest axiological footing on evolutionary ground. The two values implied by physical reality are survival and growth. The evolutionary nature of life implies that it is good to survive. "It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being."<sup>7</sup> Thus, when faced with values decisions, the question becomes "How will this enhance my ability to survive?" Not just immediate survival is meant, but long term survival and quality of life as well. Dewey further concludes that the most important quality for human survival is growth. To enhance our chances of evolutionary survival we must always be growing — not growing toward any specific end, but growing for growth's sake. For Dewey, all other values questions must be considered in light of these.

In view of these evolutionary values, we can see that values decisions are not entirely arbitrary — nor are traditional values pointless. Though traditional mores are without metaphysical justification, they may perform certain survival and growth functions. Therefore, they are not to be discarded casually. They are not trivial, but neither are they sacred and above revision. Values should be continually evaluated and changed as seems appropriate for growth and survival.

Next is the question of human nature. Are human beings fundamentally rational or spiritual and thereby qualitatively distinct from animals? Do they even have a fixed nature? (This latter question should provide an answer to the former.) Does humanity have a fixed human nature? This was answered earlier when it was said that nothing in the universe is fixed. Since they believe everything changes, pragmatists reject the idea of Aristotle and modern perennialists like Robert Hutchins that human nature is everywhere the same and is fundamentally rational. Human beings have no distinct rational or spiritual nature that qualitatively distinguishes them from the rest of the natural order.

To the pragmatist, humans are evolving biological creatures—nothing more, nothing less. They are distinguished from other animals only in that they are more complex, having achieved a higher stage of evolution. Man does have distinctives, but they are differences in degree, not in kind. The most profound manifestations of this higher degree of complexity are in man's ability to think and to communicate. He has a very highly developed brain that allows him rational skill unknown to other animals. One of his more notable skills is the unique ability to make choices by projecting the likely consequences of each of his options. By doing this, man enhances his adaptability and ability to survive in the evolutionary world.

Man is also a social being, as is demonstrated by his ability to communicate and his preoccupation with communication. His articulation distinguishes him from all other animals. John Dewey writes:

Take speech as behavioristically as you will, including the elimination of all private mental states, and it remains true that it is markedly distinguished from the signaling acts of animals. Meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects. But the behavior of which it is a quality is a distinctive behavior; cooperative, in that



response to another's act involves contemporaneous response to a thing as entering into the other's behavior, and this upon both sides.<sup>8</sup>

This distinctive of human nature allows man a unique power, for by it he can learn not only from his own experience, but from the experience of others. "Normal communication with others. . . links up the net results of the experience of the group and even the race with the immediate experience of an individual."<sup>9</sup>

Much has been written about the aims of education from the perspective of pragmatism. Though one might by its name expect those aims to be narrowly utilitarian, that is not the case. The aims of education must be practical, but practical for long-term benefit. John Dewey has discussed in some detail the matter of educational ends. One of his main points is that education does not have one fixed End toward which it works. It aims toward a diversity of more immediate ends, which, when linked together, form a chain of growth. That chain of growth is the closest thing to a universal aim education has. This is implied by pragmatic assumptions about reality and human nature. Education should help students grow. Toward what goal? None. They are to grow so they can grow some more so they can grow some more. This non-directional growth is important because it makes man more adaptable and therefore enhances his ability to survive.

What areas of human life should be growing? Every area. Pragmatic education is education of the whole man. Pragmatism has defined educational growth so broadly as to make it synonymous with human development. Education is in fact, according to Dewey, life itself.<sup>10</sup> Traditional educators in our civilization saw education as a specialized institution concerned primarily with the development of the intellect and the transmission of truth. This was believed necessary to prepare the student for life after graduation. The

pragmatists believe that education is not preparation for life, it is life itself. Thus, education should be concerned with all of life, not just one specialized area.

The pragmatic emphasis on development of the whole person does not mean intellectual education is unimportant. Pragmatic educators agree that the mind is man's greatest attribute, and they strongly advocate that students' ability to think be developed. Rationality is one of the areas where man has grown the most and in which future growth will be most profitable. The importance of reason, however, does not justify the neglect of other aspects of human personality in schools.

The ability to think is also important for politically utilitarian reasons. American educational pragmatists tend to be strong supporters of a democratic way of life. This is reflected in the titles of two of the most important works on pragmatism in education: John Dewey's magnum opus Democracy and Education and Boyd Bode's brief work Democracy as a Way of Life. Most educational pragmatists believe that in the world as it is today, democracy is the sort of government most conducive to human growth and survival. Therefore, pragmatic education has an implied goal of promoting democracy and preparing students for successful participation in that democracy. Education then should develop the students' rational and communicative skills in order that they may participate more effectively in and contribute to the success of the democratic society.

Some pragmatists, who are often referred to as social reconstructionists, make the political aims of education primary. They believe that the world is in an age of crisis and that society must be completely restructured to meet that crisis. Because of man's increased potential for

destruction with the advent of nuclear arms and because of growing international tensions, the reconstructionists believe the only solution will ultimately be a worldwide democracy.

. . . American civilization cannot survive, much less reorganize itself, unless its own transformations are geared throughout to those of other countries. On our technologically interdependent planet, isolation is now completely impractical even were it morally defensible.<sup>11</sup>

This reconstruction of society requires more than political and institutional changes, it requires changes in the way people think. Therefore, education must lead the way to the ideal society. Education's primary goal, according to this particular wing of educational pragmatism, is the promotion of true democracy (that is, a society in which the people control all institutions) in America and ultimately worldwide.

To expose the conflict between demands of national sovereignty and the need for responsible world sovereignty, and hence to commit ourselves unequivocally to world government and world citizenship, is not only one of our highest educational obligations — it is foremost among all such obligations.<sup>12</sup>

### The Education of Pragmatism

This section considers briefly some of the educational manifestations of twentieth century American pragmatism, including educational method, the curriculum, and student and teacher roles.

Educational method, like everything else in the pragmatists' universe, is flexible and changing rather than rigid. One cannot use either the systematic organization of academic disciplines or a psychological learning theory as a fixed model for teaching method. One of the reasons for the popularity of pragmatic education at the turn of the century was its rejection of the lock-step method associated with American Herbartianism. Even a psychological explanation of learning, like Herbart's five steps of apperceptive learning, must not be turned into a universal teaching method.

Method is, according to Dewey, an art that may follow certain principles of learning theory but must always be adapted to the given situation. Education is an interactive relationship among people, and different relationships require different methods. Three distinct elements that shape method are the teacher, the subject matter and the students.

A teacher's method should be an extension of his personality. In planning and directing the learning process, the teacher must take seriously his own special strengths and weaknesses. What might be an effective method for one teacher might be highly artificial and awkward for another. A teacher must be aware of his unique educational skills in order to develop effective method.

One cannot talk about method without talking about subject matter. In fact, Dewey sees subject matter and method as one and rejects any sort of dualism between them. "Method means that arrangement of subject matter which makes it most effective in use. Never is method something outside of the material."<sup>13</sup> Or, to put it another way, "Method. . . is but an effective way of employing some material for some end."<sup>14</sup> Dewey recognizes that in thought it may be useful to make a distinction, but he insists that in existence no such separation exists. Needless to say, if subject matter and method are one in experience, in our planning we must allow subject matter to shape our method. That is to say that a teacher must know not only his own communication skills, he must also know the subject matter with which he and students will be interacting. It is also the case that a teacher cannot adopt a method as "his method" to be used interchangeably with whatever subject matter he happens to be teaching. That would be a denial of the unity of subject matter and method.

For good method a teacher must also know his students. He must understand how students learn generally, as well as the interests, strengths and

weaknesses of his particular students. Some students learn well through verbal communication, others through hands-on experience. The teacher must know the peculiar learning skills and attitudes toward learning of various students in order to develop a method appropriate for that particular group.

In summary it may be said that for Dewey and most other pragmatic educators, method cannot be prescribed. It is a creative process which combines a given teacher's teaching skill, the particular characteristics of given subject matter, and the special interests and learning skills of a given group of students. When a teacher knows all three well and combines them intelligently and creatively, then he has good method.

The curriculum, like everything else in pragmatic education, is highly flexible. Like method, it is dependent on the situation at hand. The pragmatic attitude toward curriculum is here described by contrasting it with the realist view of Robert Maynard Hutchins. Hutchins once wrote:

Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence, education should be everywhere the same.<sup>15</sup>

The philosophical absolutism of Hutchins lends permanence to the curriculum. Education everywhere should have certain fixed elements in the curriculum. The relativism of pragmatic thought denies this permanence and insists that the curriculum must be entirely flexible in order to meet the needs of a given situation.

For the pragmatist, the curriculum is a tool to promote growth, which develops out of the immediate needs and interests of the students. For learning to be effective, it must grow out of the experience of the students and must embrace their interests and goals.

The subject matter of the learner is not, therefore, it cannot be, identical with the formulated, the crystallized, and systematized

subject matter of the adult; the material as found in the books and in the works of art, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Educators must not think of learning in terms of traditional courses and subject matter, but rather in terms of students' interaction with their environment and with the teacher. Courses may enhance that learning process, but they must not be seen as central to it. According to Dewey, "the teacher should be occupied not with subject matter in itself, but in its interaction with the pupils' present needs and capacities."<sup>17</sup> For pragmatists the most notable feature of education should not be its courses but rather its educative social relationships among students and teachers. Related to this is the notion of the educational value of play which was borrowed from Froebel's romanticism and united with pragmatism by Dewey.

Though pragmatic educational thought may not value courses, it does value subject matter. In Democracy and Education Dewey discusses in some detail the educational value of geography, history, natural science, social studies and vocational studies. Many of these traditional topics should be a part of education but not in their traditional forms.

Finally, the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship should be considered. Traditional education defined those roles quite clearly. The teacher is the classroom authority. He makes the decisions, makes assignments and forces students to work. The students were viewed as ignorant (often evil) ones, who had to remain silent, sit still and do what they were told. The teacher was the instructor who dominated the educational process. Pragmatic education radically alters that teacher-student relationship. The teacher is not one who instructs, but one who guides. He is a mature resource person not a taskmaster. He does not prescribe the activities of the students, he helps them do and learn the things in which they are interested.

One of the major distinctives of pragmatic education is the fact that it is child-centered education rather than teacher-centered or content-centered. The school exists, not for the subjects or the teachers, but for the students. It exists to help them grow and if they are to grow, educators must take seriously the goals and interests of the students. As traditional education was informed by a Calvinistic view of man, so pragmatic education has been informed by Rousseau's romantic view of man. Calvinism implied strict control of students in a teacher-centered environment. Romanticism implied freedom and natural development for students in a child-centered environment.

#### A Comparison of Isocrates and Modern Pragmatists

Having studied the educational thought of Isocrates in some detail, and having surveyed some major features of modern pragmatic educational thought, the following section makes some observations as to the most important similarities and differences.

1. The metaphysical positions of Isocrates and modern pragmatic educational thinkers are almost identical. Both reject metaphysical speculation as useless and without value. Both assume that the natural world, the world of human experience, is all there is. Education should be concerned with human experience and the natural world, not with abstract speculations as to the nature of ultimate reality.

2. Isocrates and his modern counterparts also generally agree on the nature of knowledge and knowing. They take the agnostic position that if there is ultimate, transcendent reality, man cannot know it. He is equipped to know only this world. Isocrates says that man cannot have knowledge of eternal principles that will guide him in future decision-making. Whether or not he believed man could predict future natural phenomena is not clear. Modern

pragmatists agree that man cannot know fixed moral principles but believe he can predict natural phenomena. That is, they believe that man can formulate laws that will help him anticipate natural events. Even these "natural laws" are tentative because they are human constructs, not divine decrees.

3. Axiologically, Isocrates and modern pragmatists also have much in common. Their agnostic epistemology implies an axiology of relativism. If there are absolute virtues, man cannot discover what they are, so they are irrelevant. Values are viewed as products of human tradition and opinion, not moral absolutes. Those traditions and opinions are valid insofar as they enhance the quality of human life and development. When one is faced with a moral decision, he cannot rely on axioms he once memorized. He cannot, in fact, know what is right. He must make a judgment based on informed opinion. The validity of that judgment can be based only on its subsequent consequences, not on its conformity to some moral code. The axiology of modern pragmatism is based on the evolutionary values of survival, adaptability and growth. Naturally, Isocrates' axiology does not follow that line.

4. Significant similarities and differences are evident between the conceptions of human nature in the thought of Isocrates and modern pragmatists. Neither view man in the traditional sense of essentially rational or spiritual. Dewey views man as a highly complex animal, different from other animals in degree but not quality. Though Isocrates is not so explicit, his view seems very similar. Both do explicitly describe man as rational, communicative and active. The educability of man is an issue where the ancient pragmatist and his modern counterparts differ. Isocrates believed that great inequalities among men existed because of differences in native ability, and he saw education as strictly limited by that native ability in students.



Education is, therefore, more valuable to some than others. Isocrates may have believed in education of the masses, but his view of human nature did not encourage it. He tended toward an aristocratic attitude, which was reflected in the selectivity of his school. Modern pragmatic education, on the other hand, links achievement with education (rather than native ability) and emphasizes education of the masses. Today, educators view human personality as much more maleable than did Isocrates.

5. The similarities in their conceptions of human nature play a crucial role in defining educational aims. Education is, in the case of both parties, a process of developing rationality, rather than transmitting content. It aims to enhance the student's ability to think critically and to make wise judgments. It further is built upon man's unique ability to communicate and is designed to develop his communication skills. Education aims to develop man's rationality and ability to communicate, not so he can contemplate and debate about ultimate reality, but so he can function effectively in his particular environment. The social contexts of the educational thought of the Athenian and American pragmatists differ, but their general educational aims are the same. Even the political aim of Isocrates, panhellenism, has a counterpart in the international political ideal of modern social reconstructionists.

6. The ancient and modern forms of pragmatism have significant similarities and differences in method. Both seem to view method as a fundamentally creative process which cannot be mass produced and applied universally. They seem to recognize differences in teachers' personalities, students' personalities and subject matter that must be taken into consideration in planning learning activities. In the application of method, Isocrates and modern pragmatists differ significantly. The modern educators tend to

emphasize flexibility, creativity and activity in the learning process. Isocrates, on the other hand, though recognizing the value of these things, places a greater emphasis on memorization and imitation. It may be argued that the memorization and imitation of the Rhetorical School were manifestations of the three factors of method later named by Dewey. Given Isocrates' particular abilities, his students' interests and abilities, and the nature of his subject matter, memorization and imitation may be seen as consistent elements within a pragmatic method.

7. At first glance the curricula of the two parties being compared seem to be at odds with one another. Isocrates' curriculum was prescribed by the teacher, was apparently fairly rigid, and was the same for all students. Modern pragmatic educators believe the curriculum should be flexible, should grow out of the interests of the students, and should vary among the students. These differences are not as great as they first seem. For example, students at the Rhetorical School did have input into the kind of curriculum they studied by virtue of their choice of Isocrates' school. They were not compelled by law to go to any school, much less the Rhetorical School of Isocrates. By making that choice students exercised some control over the curriculum they would study. A more important similarity is the close connection between means and ends within the curriculum. The curriculum for neither Isocrates nor modern pragmatists is an end in itself. The curriculum is a series of tools that must be used as appropriate to achieve certain ends and laid aside if they do not contribute to that achievement. They also agree that the curriculum should not be narrowly specialized but should be broad and intellectually liberating.

8. Student and teacher roles in the Rhetorical School seem to have been quite different from modern pragmatically based schools. The Rhetorical

school was built around its teacher, his skills, interests and values. He acted as friend and guide but also as authority, instructor, critic and taskmaster. Isocrates' school seems to have been much more teacher- centered than modern pragmatists would like. They see schools as child-centered, emphasizing natural development and freedom. The teacher acts as a guide to help students identify their interests and pursue them educationally.

These represent some major similarities and differences between the educational philosophies and practices of Isocrates and modern pragmatic educational philosophers. The two approaches to education are quite similar philosophically but in practice have some substantial differences. These practical differences are in fact consistent with a pragmatic philosophy, which emphasizes change and adaptability to given situations. The philosophy of Isocrates and his modern counterparts are basically the same, but the environment is different and therefore requires a different response.

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<sup>2</sup>John L. Childs, Education and the Philosophy of Experimentalism (New York: Century Co., c1931), pp. 50-51.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>John Dewey, Experience and Nature (Chicago: Open Court, 1926), pp. 70-71.

<sup>5</sup>John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 163.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest E. Bayles, Pragmatism in Education (New York: Harper and Row, c1966), pp. 43-44.

<sup>7</sup>Dewey, Democracy, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Dewey, Experience, p. 179.

<sup>9</sup>Dewey, Democracy, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>11</sup>Theodore Brameld, Patterns of Educational Philosophy (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, c1971), p. 449.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>13</sup>Dewey, Democracy, p. 165.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup>Robert M. Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1936), p. 66.

<sup>16</sup>Dewey, Democracy, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 183.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary

Isocrates was, like all men, a man of his time. He was born into Athens with a glorious history but a doubtful future. The days of Marathon and Salamis were past. The great Athenian empire and the Golden Age of Pericles had crumbled. It was an era of nostalgia as men afraid of the future looked to the past.

Those who remembered the pre-war past realized that more than Athens' power was gone. Its stability was lost as well. Life in Athens after the Peloponnesian War was tragically unstable, dangerously confused. The democracy had sometimes degenerated to nothing more than volatile mob rule. Traditional values had lost their hold on the people; impiety flourished. Isocrates complained that people had even ceased to use words with their proper meaning. Education had moved further and further from its family base as sophists plied their trade for money, and secondary schools of all sorts were established.

As Athenian thinkers sought educational solutions to the polis' social problems, one particular issue came to the fore—the issue of paideia. Plato and others in the Socratic tradition believed the rise of relativism and the loss of traditional values were the roots of all of Athens' problems. The way to stabilize society was to rebuild it on unchanging realities. Education must

teach those realities and develop the reason of men so they can conform to those realities.

Isocrates and others in the tradition of the sophists believed the problems of the city to be primarily political ones. What Athens needed was capable and efficient statesmen, not philosophers pursuing some unseen reality. Education must teach students to think clearly, to speak persuasively, and to produce political action (particularly the panhellenic ideal).

Isocrates' philosophy of education owed no small debt to the sophists who preceeded him and particularly Protagorus and Gorgias. Like them he rejected metaphysics as useless and adopted an agnostic epistemology and a relativistic axiology. He believed the highest attributes of human nature and the aims of education to be rationality, persuasiveness and productive activity. His belief in the natural inequality of men gave him a tendency toward elitism.

Isocrates' school was a secondary school of rhetoric, which attracted young aristocrats from many of Athens' wealthiest families. The school claimed to be both liberal and vocational by maintaining a broadly based curriculum built around one central element, rhetoric. It further maintained a close connection between means and ends in the curriculum. The Rhetorical School tended to be teacher-centered, and it placed much of the burden for success on the student.

Isocrates was quite influential in his own day as well as in the centuries that followed. Neither he nor Plato, however, were able to restore Athens to its place as the leader of western civilization. The political aim which Isocrates promoted, panhellenism, was achieved, but not as he had hoped. The Greeks did unite and conquer Persia, but under coercion from Philip of

Macedon and his son Alexander. Hellenistic Alexandria soon became the cultural center of the West, and Athens never regained that title.

Isocrates' influence on subsequent educational history was slanted toward one side of his educational thought. His educational ideal had combined a pragmatic philosophy with rhetorical education. Western pedagogy later used his rhetorical education extensively but rejected the pragmatic philosophy. This may be due to the influence of Aristotle who adopted (and adapted) Plato's definition of philosophy and united it with Isocrates' rhetorical curriculum. Thus, Isocrates' rhetorical pedagogy flourished while his philosophy waned.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, after a very long sleep, pragmatism was revived in education. Charles Sanders Pierce and William James gave it new life, and John Dewey re-introduced it to the pedagogical community. This new pragmatism is philosophically almost identical to that of Isocrates, but in education it has some substantial differences. The reason for these differences is a marriage of ideas that occurred in the mind and writings of John Dewey. Where Isocrates had combined a pragmatic educational philosophy with rhetorical education, Dewey abandoned that rhetorical tradition and wed his new pragmatism with the romantic tradition of Rousseau. The result was the progressive school, which was pragmatically based and child-centered.

The author does not claim that Dewey or other modern pragmatists were directly influenced by Isocrates' educational philosophy. The author does believe that Isocrates' education thought and influence are sorely under-rated in the educational community today. Most educators who have studied ancient Greek education come away with a distorted picture which over-estimates the roles of Plato and Aristotle in Greek education and ignores Isocrates. The

implication of that view is that no one else was making a significant contribution to Athenian education or challenging the ideas of the Socratics. That was not the case. The Rhetorical School of Isocrates challenged the educational ideals of the philosophers and probably established a greater following among his contemporaries. Furthermore, Isocrates' pragmatic philosophy clearly makes him the prophet of twentieth century education, not his more famous Socratic opponents.

### Critical Concluding Comments

This study has raised the issue of pragmatism versus idealism and realism in education. In antiquity it was manifested in the debates between the rhetorician Isocrates and the philosophers Plato and Aristotle. More recently a similar debate has ensued between John Dewey and Robert Maynard Hutchins. The question that remains is "Which side is correct?" The author has attempted to describe Isocrates' views objectively, now he will offer his own critique. The critique is centered around the fundamental issue of *paideia* over which Isocrates and his contemporaries debated. The main feature of that debate was the philosophical question of absolutism versus relativism. Which is a more defensible basis for education and society?

Though there is much that is attractive and secure about absolutism, it faces one great dilemma. That is the dilemma of discovering the absolutes and demonstrating them conclusively. The greatest argument the relativist has is modern western man's inability to reach uniform and definite conclusions about values. If there are absolutes, why can people not agree upon them?

In futility many have abandoned the search for Truth and are, by default, relativists. This leaves them with a very fundamental educational problem, "Why educate?" Relativists have long argued that teachers should not



impose their values upon students, but education by its very nature implies that one generation has something of value to transmit to another—if not content, then the ability to think, to communicate and to act effectively. But why is it deemed better, from a relativistic perspective, to have these abilities than to not have them? When teachers promote these abilities and manipulate the educational environment to enhance them, are they not imposing their values upon students? If relativism is taken seriously, all values, even those values of survival and growth espoused by modern pragmatists, are relative. Who is to say that it is better to survive than die, or better to grow than not to grow?

Relativism, when applied to education consistently, leaves education entirely adrift, without direction or purpose. Thus, the question, "Why educate?" Education is by its nature a value-laden enterprise. It is a process of transmitting values. If values are removed by the declaration that all is relative, the whole process becomes meaningless. Education becomes nothing but sophistry in the worst sense of the term. Earlier in this study it is written that John Dewey finds his firmest axiological footing on evolutionary ground. That ground, it would seem, is but sand.

It seems to this author that philosophical absolutism with its problems is a much sounder choice than relativism as a basis for society and education. First, it gives meaning to education as the mature transmit their knowledge and rational skills to the young. Second, it provides a basis for a stable society because there is a legitimate basis for authority. Third, philosophical absolutists need not be narrow, arrogant and domineering as many relativists assume. One of the most thoroughly absolutistic of all educators, Socrates, was known for developing an inquiry method of learning and expressing great intellectual generosity toward his students and opponents.

That which distinguishes philosophical absolutism in education is not its teaching method or content. Rather, it is the aim. Philosophical absolutism seeks nothing less in education than Truth. It humbly recognizes that man's knowledge and experience of that Truth is yet limited but challenges him to press on. The pressing on, the pursuit of Truth, is what gives education meaning.

The study of Isocrates' educational thought is valuable because such a study broadens one's understanding of the world and because Isocrates has some valuable contributions to make to rhetorical and liberal education. Though his thought has a valuable contribution, it also has a fundamental flaw. That flaw is his relativistic philosophy. Isocrates builds his educational house on shifting sands that cannot support it. If we are to build a better society, we must lay a firmer foundation. That foundation begins with a belief in and the pursuit of the good.

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