

The Rhetoric of Isocrates and Its Cultural Ideal

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Greek literature of the fourth century reflects a widespread struggle to determine the character of true paideia; and within it Isocrates, the chief representative of rhetoric, personifies the classical opposition to Plato and his school. From this point on, the rivalry of philosophy and rhetoric, each claiming to be the better form of culture, runs like a leitmotiv throughout the history of ancient civilization. It is impossible to describe every phase of that rivalry: for one thing, it is rather repetitious, and the leaders of its opposing sides are not always very interesting personalities.¹ All the more important, therefore, is the conflict between Plato and Isocrates—the first battle in the centuries of war between philosophy and rhetoric. Later, that war was sometimes to degenerate into a mere academic squabble, in which neither side possessed any genuine vital force; but at its beginning the combatant parties represented the truly moving forces and needs of the Greek people. The field on which it was waged lay in the very centre of the political scene. That is what gives it the vivid colouring of a truly historical event, and the large sweep which keeps our interest in it permanently alive. In retrospect, we realize that in this conflict are symbolized the essential problems of that whole period of Greek history.

Today as of old, Isocrates has, like Plato, his admirers and exponents; and there is no doubt that since the Renaissance he has exercised a far greater influence on the educational methods of humanism than any other Greek or Roman teacher. Historically, it is perfectly correct to describe him (in the phrase used on the title-page of several modern books) as the father of 'humanistic culture'—inasmuch as the sophists cannot really claim that title, and from our own pedagogic methods and ideals a direct line runs back to him, as it does to Quintilian and Plutarch.² But that point of view, dictated as

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¹ There is a full account of the history of this conflict in H. von Arnim's *Leben und Werke des Dion von Prusa* (Berlin 1898) pp. 4-114.

² See, for instance, a work by Drerup's pupil Burk, *Die Pädagogik des Isokrates als Grundlegung des humanistischen Bildungsideals* (Würzburg 1923), and in particular the two sections called *Das Nachleben der Pädagogik des Isokrates* (p. 199 f.) and *Isokrates und der Humanismus* (p. 211 f.). More recently Drerup himself has brought out four lectures entitled *Der Humanismus in seiner Geschichte, seinen Kulturwerten und seiner Vorbereitung im Unterrichtswesen der Griechen* (Paderborn 1934). British scholars like Burnet and Ernest Barker often call Isocrates the father of humanism.

it is by modern academic humanism, is vastly different from the attitude of this book—for our task here is to examine the whole development of Greek paideia and to study the complexities and antagonisms inherent in its problems and its meaning.³ It is important to notice that what is often regarded by contemporary educators as the essence of humanism is mainly a continuation of the rhetorical strain in classical culture; while the history of humanism is a far broader and richer thing than that, for it contains all the manifold survivals of Greek paideia—including the world-wide influence exercised by Greek philosophy and science.⁴ For this point of view, it is clear that an understanding of the true Greek paideia at once entails a criticism of modern academic humanism.⁵ On the other hand, the position and character of philosophy and science within Greek civilization as a whole cannot be properly estimated until they are seen striving against other types of intellectual activity in order to be accepted as the true form of culture. Ultimately, both the rivals, philosophy and rhetoric, spring from poetry, the oldest Greek paideia; and they cannot be understood without reference to their origin in it.⁶ But as the old rivalry for the primacy of culture gradually narrows to a dispute about the relative values of philosophy and rhetoric, it becomes clear enough that the ancient Hellenic partnership between gymnastic training and 'musical' culture has at last sunk to a much lower level.

To one who has just read Plato's *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* it seems obvious that the educational system of the sophists and rhetors was fundamentally an outworn ideal; and, if we compare it with the lofty claims advanced by philosophy—the claim that henceforth *all* education and *all* culture must be based on nothing but the knowledge of the highest values—it really was obsolete. And yet (as we have seen from our first glance over the

³ Some critics have laid down that a historian of paideia must begin by giving his own definition of it. That is rather as if they expected a historian of philosophy to start either from Plato's definition of philosophy, or from Epicurus', or from Kant's or Hume's—all four being widely different. A history of paideia should describe as accurately as possible all the different meanings of Greek paideia, the various forms which it took, and the various spiritual levels at which it appeared, and should explain both their individual peculiarities and their historical connexions.

⁴ On this see my essay, *Platos Stellung im Aufbau der griechischen Bildung* (Berlin 1928), which first appeared in *Die Antike*, vol. 4 (1928), nos. 1-2.

⁵ From this point of view philosophy, and Greek philosophy in particular, has played a decisive role in the development of modern humanism, which would have had no impetus without it, and would not even have been able to expound its own aims. Actually, the study of the philosophical aspects of classical civilization has become more and more important not only in modern philosophy but in modern philology too, and has deeply influenced the purposes and methods of classical scholarship. But, seen from the same point of view, the history of humanism itself takes on a new appearance. Historians usually speak of two sharply contrasting periods—the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, scholasticism and humanism. But this simple pattern is shown to be an over-simplification as soon as we realize that the rebirth of Greek philosophy in the Middle Ages was really another great epoch in the uninterrupted influence of Greek paideia. That influence never died away entirely, but lived on continuously through mediaeval and modern history. *Non datur saltus in historia humanitatis.*

⁶ It is impossible to appreciate the part played by philosophy within the organic structure of Greek civilization without being fully alive to its close connexion with the internal and external history of Greece.

later centuries of Greek history⁷) the older type of education, the method of the sophists and the rhetoricians, remained unconquerably active and alive beside its rival, and in fact continued to hold a leading place as one of the greatest influences on the spiritual life of Greece. Perhaps the savage scorn with which Plato attacks and persecutes it may be partly explained by the victor's feeling that he is at war with an enemy who is, as long as he remains within his own frontiers, unconquerable. It is difficult for us to understand the violence of his detestation, if we think of his attacks as directed solely against the great sophists of Socrates' generation, considered as embodiments of the type of culture which he loathed: Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus. When he wrote his dialogues, these men were dead, and, in that rapid century, half forgotten. It needed all Plato's art to call the strong personalities of the famous sophists out of the shadows to life once more. When he made his caricatures of them (caricatures which in their way are quite as immortal as his idealized portrait of Socrates), a new generation had grown up; and he was attacking them, his contemporaries, as well as his predecessors. We need not go so far as to see, in the opponents whom he describes, mere masks for notable men of his own age; and yet, in his presentment of the sophists, there are many contemporary traits. And there is one absolutely certain fact: Plato never argues with dead men, with historical fossils.

Nothing shows how strong and vital sophistry and rhetoric were, at the time when he began his struggle against them, more clearly than the personality of Isocrates, who actually entered on his career after *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* were written.⁸ It is particularly interesting that from the very outset he contested the claims of Plato and the Socratic circle, and defended sophistic education against their attacks. This means that he was writing from the firm conviction that such criticisms did not seriously shake his position. He was really a genuine sophist: indeed, it was he who brought the sophistic movement in education to its culminating point. Biographical tradition represents him as the pupil of Protagoras, of Prodicus, and especially of Gorgias; and archaeologists of the Hellenistic age found proof of the third of these connexions in his tombstone, which bore a figure they identified as Gorgias, pointing to a celestial globe.⁹ Another tradition asserted that Isocrates had studied with the great rhetor in Thessaly—doubtless during the last phase of the Peloponnesian war.¹⁰ Plato too, in his *Meno*, mentions that some part of Gorgias' career as a teacher was passed in Thessaly¹¹: an

⁷ See note 1.

⁸ Plato wrote *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* as early as the first decade of the fourth century. Isocrates cannot have founded his school before 390, because in his extant orations we can trace his work as a hired writer of forensic speeches down to that date at least; perhaps it lasted even into the 'eighties.

⁹ The facts of Isocrates' life are thoroughly examined by Blass in the second section of *Die attische Beredsamkeit* (2nd ed., Leipzig 1892); see p. 11 of that book for the traditions about his teachers. On the tombstone, see pseudo-Plutarch, *vit. X orat.* 838d; the author of those biographies took his archaeological and antiquarian data from a work by the Hellenistic epigraphist Diodorus.

¹⁰ It is impossible to set a definite date for Isocrates' stay in Thessaly, but it must have been either just before or just after 410.

¹¹ Plato, *Meno* 70b; and cf. Isoc. *Antid.* 155.

interesting proof of the fact that the new culture was penetrating even the frontier lands of Greece. Isocrates' first great book, the *Panegyricus*, which brought him fame almost overnight, closely resembles Gorgias' *Olympicus*; and the fact that he deliberately chose to compete with such a celebrated author in treating the same theme—a call to the Greeks to achieve national unity—is, according to Greek usage, a proof that he considered himself Gorgias' pupil. And the chief evidence for the fact is the dominant position he assigns to rhetoric—that is, to the most concrete, the least purely theoretical, type of sophistic culture. Throughout his life he aimed, like Gorgias, at teaching the art or craft of speaking (*logôn technê*);¹² but he preferred to apply the title 'sophist' only to theorists, whatever their special interests might be. He used it, among others, for Socrates and his pupils, who had done so much to discredit the name. His own ideal he called 'philosophy.' Thus, he completely inverted the meanings given by Plato to the two words. Today, when Plato's definition of 'philosophy' has been universally accepted for centuries, Isocrates' procedure appears to have been a mere whim. But really it was not. In his time, those concepts were still developing, and had not yet finally hardened into their ultimate shapes. It was not Plato, but Isocrates, who followed the general idiom in calling Socrates and his pupils 'sophists' quite as much as Protagoras or Hippias; and in using 'philosophy' to mean intellectual culture in general,¹³ which is the sense it has in Thucydides, for example. He could well have said (as Pericles says in Thucydides¹⁴) that the characteristic mark of the whole Athenian state was its interest in things of the mind, *philosophhein*, and he does actually say something of the kind in the *Panegyricus*. Athens, he writes, invented culture (*philosophia*)—and he is obviously thinking of the whole community rather than of the small group of sharp-witted dialecticians gathered round Plato or Socrates.¹⁵ What he was aiming at was universal culture, contrasted with one definite creed or one particular method of attaining knowledge, as preached by the Platonists. Thus, in the opposing claims made by both sides to ownership of the title 'philosophy,' and in the widely different meanings given to the word by the opponents, there is symbolized the rivalry of

¹²He calls it *ê tôn logôn meletê*, or *paideia*, or *epimeleia*. Blass, on p. 107 of the work cited in note 9, suggests that he avoids calling it a *technê*: probably to avoid being confused with the writers of technical, or rhetorical handbooks. But passages like *Soph.* 9-10 and *Antid.* 178 are enough to show that he held his *philosophia* to be a *technê*.

¹³It is unnecessary to prove this point by enumerating all the relevant passages. In *Antid.* 270 he claims the title *philosophia* for his own work alone, and says that other teachers (e.g. dialecticians, mathematicians, and rhetorical 'technographers') have no right to use it. He is less exclusive in his earlier works, where he speaks freely of the *philosophia* of the professional disputers or eristics (*Hel.* 6) and of teachers of rhetoric like Polycrates (*Bus.* 1); and in *Soph.* 1 he uses it as a general description of all the branches of higher education and culture which are characterized in that work.

¹⁴Thuc. 2.40.1.

¹⁵*Paneg.* 47. The word *katadeizai* describes the act of the founder of a cult. In this place the word *philosophia* does not mean 'philosophy.'

rhetoric and science for leadership in the realm of education and culture.¹⁶

Isocrates, then, was the post-war representative of the sophistic and rhetorical culture which had flourished in the Periclean period. But he was much more. To think of him as nothing more than that is to ignore the best and most characteristic aspects of his personality. The particular way in which he distributes the emphasis, magnifying the importance of rhetoric and of practical politics, and pushing mere sophistry and theory into the background, shows his fine perception of the Athenian attitude to the new culture. It had, during his boyhood and youth, achieved an astonishing success in his native city of Athens; but it had also been violently opposed. Although he was far from being the first Athenian to declare himself its pupil and its champion, it was not really naturalized in Athens until he gave it a truly Athenian dress. In Plato the rhetors and sophists who argue with Socrates are always at a disadvantage, simply because they are foreigners, and do not understand the real problems of Athens and the Athenians. They always seem to be outsiders, as they enter the close, compact Athenian society, bringing with them their knowledge, 'imported ready-made', as it were.¹⁷ Of course they all speak the same international language, in which they can be understood by every educated man. But it never has the Athenian overtones. They lack the casual grace and the social ease without which they cannot achieve full success in the Athenian world. Their wide culture and their fabulous technical skill are admirably welcomed, but in a deeper sense they remain ineffectual—at least for the time. Before it could become effective, the new element had to coalesce with the very special way of life which characterized the incomparable state of Athens; and none but an Athenian could bring about the coalition—an Athenian who, like Isocrates, was fully alive to the nature of his city and of the crisis which then confronted it. It was a full generation after its first appearance in Athens that rhetoric was naturalized there, under the influence of the tremendous events of the war and the post-war years—events which wrought a deep change in the very nature of rhetoric. At the same time it was profoundly affected by the moral reformation initiated by Socrates,¹⁸ and by the great social crises which had shaken the Athenian state throughout Isocrates' youth and early manhood. The new generation, heir to the Periclean

¹⁶Blass (p. 28 of the book quoted in note 9) points out that in Isocrates' time the word 'philosophy' still meant 'culture,' so that there is nothing silly about his claim to 'teach philosophy'; however, he says it is arrogant of Isocrates to pretend to be the only representative of true philosophy—i.e. true culture. Still, Plato and all the other schools and teachers made the same claim: see Plato *ep.* 7. 326a, *Rep.* 490a, etc.

¹⁷Plato, *Prot.* 313 c f.

¹⁸It is difficult to tell how much historical truth there is in that passage of Plato's *Phaedrus* where Socrates is made to prophesy a great future for Isocrates. Perhaps the two had met at some time, and there is no more in it than that. It can hardly mean that Isocrates was Socrates' friend, still less his pupil. And yet his works show many traces of the influence of Socratic ideas. The fullest examination of them is H. Gomperz' *Isokrates und die Sokratik* (*Wiener Studien* 27, 1905, p. 163, and 28, 1906, p. 1). He assumes, correctly, that Isocrates got his knowledge of these ideas from books about Socrates; and this is supported by the fact that he did not begin to talk about them till the years between 390 and 380, when he himself first entered the field of educational theory. Still, I think Gomperz exaggerates the influence of Antisthenes upon Isocrates.

system, found tasks of enormous difficulty confronting it. It was rhetoric, and not philosophy in the Platonic sense, that seemed to Isocrates to be the intellectual form which could best express the political and ethical ideas of his age, and make them part of the intellectual equipment of all contemporary Athenians. With this new conception of its purposes, Isocrates' rhetorical teaching emerged as part of the great post-war educational movement of Athens, into which all the efforts of his day to reform and rejuvenate the Athenian state were inevitably destined to flow.

The factors which brought this about were very various. Despite his mastery of language and of style, Isocrates was not a born orator. And yet, by its very nature, the Athenian democracy still held that no man could be an effective political force unless he were a master of oratory. He says himself that physically he had a weak constitution. His voice was not nearly powerful enough to reach large audiences; and he had an invincible fear of making a public appearance. Crowds terrified him.¹⁹ In speaking without embarrassment of this agoraphobia, Isocrates was not merely offering an excuse for his complete abstention from all political activity; besides that, he felt that his strange condition was a very personal feature of his character, rooted far in its depths. As with Socrates, his refusal to enter politics was not a sign of lack of interest, but the result of a profound intellectual and spiritual conflict—a conflict which both hampered his activity and at the same time enlarged his understanding of the part he must play in the contemporary political crisis. Like the Platonic Socrates, he was convinced that he must initiate the much-needed reformation in some other way than by entering an active career as an orator in the assemblies and the law courts. Thus, he felt that the personal disabilities which made him unfit for normal political life summoned him to a higher vocation. His weakness was his destiny. But whereas Socrates, with his incessant questioning and examining, became an explorer in the sphere of morality, and found himself at last standing before the closed gates of a new world of knowledge, the more practical Isocrates, although for the time being he was deeply impressed by the personality of his great contemporary, and constantly strove to rival the lofty standard he set, felt nevertheless that his special gifts and his natural dislike for the mob predestined him to become within a small circle the teacher of a new type of political action.²⁰

Even the age in which he lived seemed to make this course inevitable. In the calm and concentration of his retirement, he wished to educate statesmen who could give new direction to the efforts of the misguided masses and to the politics of the Greek states, which had long been revolving hopelessly in a closed circle. He set out to inspire every pupil with a passion for the new

¹⁹For the facts of Isocrates' life, see Blass (cited in note 9) p. 8 f.; Jebb, *Attic Orators* (London 1876) 11, p. 1 f.; and Münscher's exhaustive article in Pauly-Wissowa's *Realenzyklopädie der klass. Altertumswiss.* 9.2150 f. On his weak voice and his timidity, see *Phil.* 81, *Panath.* 10.

²⁰In *Phil.* 81-82 he admits his physical and psychological weakness, but nevertheless claims to be far ahead of others in *phronēsis* and *paideia*.

aims which occupied his own mind. There was within him a political visionary whose thought moved in the same direction as that of the practical statesmen, and was led like them by such aspirations as Power, Glory, Prosperity, Progress. Gradually his experience led him to modify his aims; but from the very beginning he held that they could not be fulfilled by the outworn methods of the Periclean age—competitive diplomacy and exhausting wars between the separate Greek city-states. In that his thought is wholly a product of the weakness of Athens after the Peloponnesian war. Dreamer that he was, in his visions of the future he overleapt that weakness. He believed that Athens could play a leading part in Greek affairs only in peaceful agreement with Sparta and the other Greek states, with entire equality between victors and vanquished; for then the intellectual superiority of Athens to her coarser rivals would assure that she acquired the balance of power.²¹ Only such establishment of equality among the Greek states and their devotion to one great national purpose could arrest the dissolution of Greece, and therewith the total annihilation of the small separate states—which hitherto had striven only to destroy one another, although none of them had ever acquired a real superiority over all the rest, with the supreme power which would impose a lasting peace on the entire nation. To save Greece, a common national purpose must be found. And, after the bitter experiences of the Peloponnesian war, Isocrates considered that the essential duty of true statesmanship was to find it. True, there was an urgent preliminary: the political life of the Greek state had to be purged of its deep corruption, and of the cause of that corruption—the poisonous mutual hatreds of the separate states and parties. It was exactly that selfish hatred of each for his neighbour which, according to Thucydides' tragic description, had during the Peloponnesian war served as a justification for every kind of monstrous crime, and had destroyed the foundations of all established moral codes.²² But Isocrates did not, like the Platonic Socrates, believe that the sorely needed reformation could be achieved by the creation of a new moral world, a state as it were within each man's soul.²³ He held that the *nation*, the idea of Greece, was the point round which the new elements in the spiritual renaissance were to crystallize. Plato had accused rhetoric of being able only to teach men how to convince an audience, without pointing out any ideal to be pursued: and therefore of being only a practical means to provide intellectual instruments by which to achieve immoral ends.²⁴ That weakness in the pretensions of rhetoric was undeniable; and, at a time when the conscience of the best of the Greeks was constantly becoming more sensitive, it was a real danger for the art. In the adoption of the Panhellenic ideal, Isocrates saw the way to solve

²¹That is the role which he assigns to Athens in the *Panegyricus*. Even after the collapse of the second naval confederacy, he continued to maintain the spiritual leadership of Athens—for instance in the *Antidosis* and the *Panathenaiscus*. But he later (as in the *Peace* speech and *Philip*) abandoned the claim that Athens should likewise wield the political hegemony of Greece.

²²Thuc. 3.82.

²³Plato, *Rep.* 591e; see *Paideia* II, 353 f.

²⁴See *Paideia* II, 131 f.

this problem also. The essential was to find a mean, as it were, between the moral indifference which had previously characterized rhetorical education, and the Platonic resolution of all politics into morality, which from a practical point of view was certain to lead away from all politics.²⁵ The new rhetoric had to find an ideal which could be ethically interpreted and which at the same time could be translated into practical political action. This ideal was a new moral code for Greece. It gave rhetoric an inexhaustible theme; in it the ultimate topic of all higher eloquence seemed to have been discovered once and for all. In an age when the old beliefs were losing their binding force and the long-established structure of the city-state was breaking up (the structure in which, till then, the individual had felt his own moral foundations securely embodied), the new dream of national achievement appeared to be a mighty inspiration. It gave life a new meaning.

In that critical time, therefore, Isocrates was, by his own choice of rhetoric as a career, driven to formulate the new ideals which we have described. It is entirely probable that he had been directly impelled towards them by Gorgias, whose *Olympicus* set forth the theme that was to be the centre of Isocrates' life-work. That happens often enough: in his last years a great master formulates an ideal, inspires his pupil with admiration for it, and through it shapes and directs his pupil's entire career. If Isocrates wanted to become a politician without being an orator, if he wished to assert himself as an educator and a rhetorical teacher against the competition of Socratic philosophy and of the earlier type of rhetoric, and to make head against their criticisms, he had found the only possible method of doing so in his concentration on the new ideal. That explains the doggedness with which he followed it to the end. His weaknesses make it easy enough to criticize him; but it is hard to find a man who fulfilled his self-imposed task more completely than Isocrates, and who was better suited to his own conception of his mission. That conception gave rhetoric the realistic content which it had long been accused of lacking.²⁶ Through it the teacher of rhetoric at last achieved the dignity which put him on a level with the philosopher and made him independent of machine politicians—which actually gave him a higher rank than they possessed, inasmuch as he represented a higher interest than that of any separate state. The defects in Isocrates' own nature—not only his physical weakness, but the faults in his intellect and his character—and even the defects of rhetoric itself were, through his programme, almost converted into virtues; or so it seemed. The rhetor, the political pamphleteer and ideologist, has never since found himself in such a favourable situation or commanded such a widespread influence throughout an entire nation; and if his influence lacked something in richness, power, and genius, Isocrates partially compensated for that by an exceptionally long life of determined

²⁵In the speech *Against the sophists*, Isocrates draws a contrast between these two extreme types of contemporary paideia.

²⁶Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 449d, 451a, 453b-e, 455d. Later he repeated the charge in *Phaedrus*.

industry. Of course his determination does not affect the quality of his work; but still it was a vital element in the success of his mission, which, like that of the teacher, depended on his relation to living men.

For centuries past, historians have seen in Isocrates nothing more than a moralist, and have conceived him too exclusively as a writer and publicist, too little as a teacher. They did not fully realize that all his published writings, like those of Plato and Aristotle, were ancillary to the educational programme of his school. But the modern view of his career now does full justice to the political content of his books, and understands all their significance in the history of the fourth century. They were of course intended to produce an effect even outside the circle of his own pupils, and through them he often influenced men who had never heard him teach. But at the same time his political speeches were models of the new type of eloquence which he taught in his school. Later, in the *Antidosis*, he himself exemplified to a wider public the special character of his teaching, in a selection of passages taken from his most celebrated speeches. These speeches were intended to be models not only of content but of form,²⁷ for in his teaching the two elements were inseparable. Whenever we try to re-create from the orations—which are our only evidence—the real character of the culture which he taught, we must always remember that dual purpose. Fortunately for us, he often expressed his views of his art and of his educational ideals; he often seized an opportunity to break off the thread of his argument, and to explain what he was saying, how he was saying it, and why. Indeed, at the beginning of his career he published several programme-works which clearly defined his position with reference to the other educational authorities of his time. We must start with them, if we are to comprehend the full extent of his activity, the true character of his paideia.

He had been a 'speech-writer', which in many respects corresponded to the profession of a barrister today; but we know nothing of the time when he abandoned that vocation for that of a teacher of rhetoric, or the reasons which led him to do so. Like Lysias, Isaeus, and Demosthenes, he had taken it up in order to make money—for his father's property had been largely destroyed by the war.²⁸ At a later time he was reluctant to mention that period of his career, although (as Aristotle humorously pointed out) volumes and volumes of the legal speeches he had written lay in the bookshops.²⁹ Only a few of them survive: his pupils, who had charge of editing his works after his death, had no more interest in preserving them than the master himself.³⁰ We can

²⁷Isocrates' 'speeches' were never delivered as such. Their oratorical form is a pure fiction.

²⁸On his work as a logographer, see Dion. Hal. *de Isocr.* 18, and Cicero, *Brutus* 28 (whose source is Aristotle's *synagôgê technôn*). He mentions the destruction of his father's property, in *Antid.* 161.

²⁹Cf. Dion. Hal. *de Isocr.* 18.

³⁰According to Dion. Hal. *de Isocr.* 18, Isocrates' stepson Aphareus said, in his speech against Megacleides, that his stepfather had never written forensic speeches; but that can only mean never since he became the head of a school. His pupil Cephisodoros admitted that there were some such speeches by him in existence, but said only a few were authentic.

trace them no later than 390 or so.³¹ Therefore, the foundation of Isocrates' school roughly coincided with that of Plato's.³² In his introductory speech *Against the sophists*, it is clear that he has Plato's 'prospectuses', *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, before him, and is deliberately trying to set up his own ideal of paideia in contrast to theirs.^{32a} That takes us back to the same period. The incomparable value of that speech for us lies in the vividness with which it re-creates, blow upon blow, the first battle of the generation-long cultural war between the two great schools of education. And it is no less interesting for us to trace in it the immediate impression which Plato made on many of his contemporaries at his first appearance. Accustomed as we are to estimate his importance by the influence of his philosophy on more than twenty centuries of human history, we naturally imagine that he exercised the same powerful influence on the men of his own time. For that view Isocrates is a useful corrective.

He begins by saying that the representatives of paideia have a bad reputation, and he traces it to the excessive hopes which their self-advertisement excites among the public.³³ Thereby he steps forth to oppose the exaggerated estimates of the power of education that were customary in his day. And, as a matter of fact, there must have been something very bizarre in the revolutionary change from Socrates' loudly expressed doubts whether such a thing as education really existed, to the passionate educational conviction of Plato's earlier dialogues. Here as elsewhere, Isocrates represents the happy mean. He himself, of course, wants to be a teacher too; but he 'very well understands' the laymen who would rather do nothing about education at all than believe the enormous promises of professing

³¹The *Trapeziticus* and *Aegineticus* can be dated roughly to 390.

³²There is no confirmation for the statement of pseudo-Plutarch, *vit. X orat.* 837b that Isocrates first had a school in Chios (*scholês de hêgeito ôs tines phasin, peôton epi Chiou*). And *epi Chiou* is an uncommon way to say *en Chiôi*. What we should expect, following *epe*, is the name of the archon in whose time Isocrates began to teach; but if *Chiou* is a corruption of that name, it is difficult to emend. None of the archons in the 'nineties or early 'eighties has a name like *chiou*. If it were <Must>*schidou* that would take us down to 386-385, which is a very late date for the foundation of Isocrates' school.

^{32a}Isocrates himself, in *Antid.* 193, says that the speech *Against the sophists* belongs to the beginning of his teaching career. There is a list of the many works which deal with his relation to Plato, in Münscher's article in Pauly-Wissowa 9.2171. Unfortunately, many of them are obsolete, since the assumption on which they are based is false—the assumption that Plato's chief dialogue on rhetoric, *Phaedrus*, was written in his youth or middle life. Münscher's article, which is otherwise an admirable introduction to the subject, still goes on the same assumption. Modern scholars have revised their views on this point. (About the late date of *Phaedrus*, see p. 330, n. 5 f.) On the other hand, I think it is impossible to follow Wilamowitz (*Platon* 11, 108) and avoid the conclusion that *Against the sophists* attacks Plato just as violently as the other Socratics. It assumes knowledge of Plato's *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and perhaps *Meno* too (see my discussion of the problem on pp. 56 and 66). Münscher's belief, that when Isocrates wrote the speech he still 'felt himself in agreement with Plato' in everything essential, cannot be backed up by anything in the speech, and is actually contradicted by every line of it. The sole basis for that belief is the early dating of *Phaedrus*, in which Plato is clearly more friendly to Isocrates than to rhetors like Lysias. The assumption that it was written before or soon after *Against the sophists* would compel us to make a forced interpretation of that speech as expressing friendship for Plato.

³³Isocr. *Soph.* 1.

philosophers.³⁴ How is it possible, he asks, to put any trust in their yearning for truth, when they themselves arouse so many false hopes? Isocrates names no names, but every word of his polemic is aimed straight at the Socratics, whom here and elsewhere he contemptuously calls 'disputers'.³⁵ In *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* Plato had presented dialectic as an art far superior to the long-winded orations of rhetoricians. His opponent makes short work of dialectic: he couples it with eristic—namely, argument for argument's sake. True philosophy always endeavoured to keep itself free from eristic,³⁶ although the methods of Plato's Socrates often seem to have much in common with it; and in fact there is a good deal of it in the earlier dialogues like *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*.³⁷ No wonder then that Isocrates does not see dialectic in the same favourable light as the Socratics, who thought it was a perfect panacea for all spiritual ills. The infallible knowledge of values (*phronêsis*) which they promise as the result of their teaching must appear to ordinary reasonable people to be something too great for mankind to attain.³⁸ Homer, who knew so well the frontiers that separate men from gods, claims that only the gods have such unerring insight, and he is right. What mortal man has the audacity to promise to give his disciples infallible knowledge (*epistêmê*) of everything they ought to do or leave undone, and to lead them through that knowledge to supreme happiness (*eudaimonia*)?³⁹

In this criticism Isocrates has collected in a small space all the features which make Platonism repulsive to ordinary common sense: the peculiar technique of controversy by question-and-answer, the almost mythical importance which it attributes to *phronêsis* (or knowledge of true values) as a special organ of reason, the apparently exaggerated intellectualism which holds knowledge to be the cure for everything, and the quasi-religious

³⁴Of course the word 'philosopher' is not confined to those representatives of paideia whom we should call philosophers to-day—the Socratic circle. It includes all sorts of professed teachers of culture (see *Soph.* 11 and 18). But it does include philosophers in the strict sense, as we can see from *Soph.* 2, where Isocrates ridicules their claim to teach 'truth'. That is aimed at *all* the Socratics, not merely (as some have held) at Antisthenes' book *Truth*.

³⁵*Soph.* 1: *hoi peri tas eridas diatribontes hoi prospoioutai tèn alêtheian zêtein; Antid.* 261: *hoi en tois eristikois logois dunasteuontas*. In the latter passage the 'disputers' are put in the same class as teachers of geometry and astronomy—both subjects which were taught in Plato's Academy. Münscher's illogical assumption that in the later speech on the Antidosis Isocrates means his readers to think chiefly of Plato when he mentions disputers, but does not in the speech on the sophists, is based on the early dating of *Phaedrus* and the inference that Isocrates and the young Plato were friendly (see note 32a).

³⁶Most probably it was because Plato found his dialectic being confused with eristic, as in Isocrates' attacks on it, that he distinguished Socrates so sharply and clearly from the eristics in *Euthydemus*. In *Rep.* 499a he repeats his complaint that no one knows the true philosopher, and he tries to vindicate him from confusion with mere disputers. There he describes him as a man who finds no pleasure in clever but useless arguments, and seeks 'knowledge for its own sake.'

³⁷At several points *Protagoras* refuses to agree with the logical conclusions reached by Socrates, and he obviously thinks his opponent is trying to trap him. Plato describes this in a perfectly objective way, and thereby shows how easy it was for Socrates' dialectic to be called eristic. In the same way Callicles (*Plato, Gorg.* 482 f.) objects to Socrates' trick of giving different meanings to the same concept in the same argument. On this, see *Paideia* 11, 138.

³⁸*Soph.* 2.

³⁹*Soph.* 2-4.

enthusiasm with which 'blessedness' is foretold to the philosopher. Obviously Isocrates is aiming some of his sharpest shafts at the terminological peculiarities of the new philosophical method: he tracks them down with the subtle instinct of the stylist for everything which seems odd or ludicrous to the average educated man; and by contrasting the Universal Virtue (*pasa aretê*), which is the putative aim of the Socratic knowledge of that which is 'good in itself',⁴⁰ with the trifling fees for which the philosophers sell their wisdom, he really makes the man in the street doubt whether what the young student learns from the philosopher is worth very much more than he pays for it.

He adds that the philosophers themselves cannot believe very strongly in the perfect virtue which they say they wish to release in the souls of their pupils, because the regulations of their school betray a far-reaching distrust of its members. They demand that the fees be paid into an Athenian bank in advance, before the pupil can be admitted.⁴¹ They are justified, no doubt, in looking out for their own interests; but how can their attitude be reconciled with their claim to educate men to attain justice and self-mastery? This argument seems to us to be pitched rather too low; but it is not without wit. In *Gorgias* Plato had argued with just the same malice against the rhetors, who complain about the misuse their pupils make of the art of oratory, without seeing that they are accusing themselves—for if it were true that rhetoric improved its students, it would be impossible for those who had really learnt it to misuse it as they do.⁴² Actually, the amoral character of rhetoric was the principal charge against it. In several different contexts, Isocrates supports the view represented by Gorgias in Plato's dialogue: the view that the teacher imparts to his pupil the art of rhetoric in order that he may use it rightly, and is not to blame if the pupil misuses it.⁴³ That is, he does not accept Plato's criticism, and maintains that Gorgias is wholly in the right. But he goes beyond that, and attacks the philosophers for distrusting their own pupils. That makes it probable that when he was writing the speech *Against the sophists* as an inaugural address, he knew Plato's *Gorgias* and deliberately set out to answer it.⁴⁴

⁴⁰Plato contrasts 'universal virtue' and 'special virtues' like justice, courage, self-control, etc. Sometimes he calls the former 'virtue in itself' (*autê hê aretê*)—a kind of expression new and strange to his contemporaries. In c. 20 also, Isocrates emphasizes the ethical element in the paideia of the 'disputers'; they assert that virtue can be taught (21), which Isocrates and all the sophists violently deny. See Plato's *Protagoras*.

⁴¹*Soph.* 5.

⁴²Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 456e-457c, 460d-461a.

⁴³In *Antid.* 215 f., Isocrates tries to defend teachers of rhetoric against the charge that their pupils learn evil from them. See also *Nic.* 2 f.

⁴⁴This is the most probable view of the dates at which the two works were written. *Gorgias* is now generally believed, on convincing grounds, to have been written between 395 and 390 B.C.; but Isocrates had scarcely opened his school at that time, since we can trace his work as a logographer down to 390. Therefore the speech *Against the sophists*, which gives his programme, was written in the 'eighties. Some scholars have attempted to fix the chronological relationship between *Against the sophists* and Plato's *Gorgias* by what appear to be allusions in Plato's dialogue to Isocrates' speech. But even if Plato speaks of a *psychê stochastikê* (*Gorg.* 463a) and Isocrates of a *psychê doxastikê* (*Soph.* 17), that does not prove that Plato is imitating Isocrates. Also, *doxastikê* is a Platonic phrase. Plato despises mere *doxa*, while here as elsewhere Isocrates insists that man's nature does not allow

Plato's dialogue must have seemed particularly offensive to him as a pupil of Gorgias, and he must have felt himself arraigned in the person of his master: for as we have shown, it was not only Gorgias himself but rhetoric in all its branches that Plato had impugned. All the typical doctrines of the 'eristics' which Isocrates ridicules in his inaugural speech *Against the sophists* had already been clearly enunciated in *Gorgias*, where they were analyzed with special reference to their significance for the new Platonic system of paideia.⁴⁵ (*Paideia* II, 126 f.) Plato and the Socratics are among the foremost of the opponents whom Isocrates attacks, and since he attacks them with special violence and completeness, it is clear that he fully understands the danger that threatens his ideal from their teaching. His invective is entirely realistic. He never makes it a theoretical refutation of his opponents' position, for he knows that if he did he would lose his case. The terrain he chooses is that of ordinary common sense. He appeals to the instincts of the man in the street—who, without comprehending the philosophers' technical secrets, sees that those who would lead their followers to wisdom and happiness have nothing themselves and get nothing from their students.⁴⁶ Their poverty did not harmonize with the traditional Greek concept of *eudaimonia*, perfect happiness, and other sophists—Antiphon, for instance—had already derided Socrates for exalting it.^{46a} The man in the street sees that those who expose the contradictions in people's speeches do not notice the contradictions in their own acts; and that, although they profess to teach their pupils how to make the right decision on every problem of the future, they cannot say anything at all or give any correct advice about the present.⁴⁷ And when he further observes that the mob, whose conduct is based on nothing more than Opinion (*doxa*), find it easier to agree with one another and to hit the right course of action than those who pretend to be in full possession of Knowledge (*epistêmê*), he is bound to end by despising the study of philosophy—concluding it to be empty chatter, mere hair-splitting, and certainly not 'the care of the soul' (*psychêis epimeleia*).⁴⁸

This last point above all makes it certain that Isocrates is aiming his attacks at Plato and at the rest of the Socratics—Antisthenes in particular. He has deliberately—and in a way justifiably—mixed up their features into a

him to engage in more than *doxa* and *doxazein*. The very fact that he is replying to Plato shows that he depends on Plato's formulation of the problem. But the main argument is that given in the text (page 56 f.): the information about Plato's fundamental concepts and their logical interrelation (e.g. *pasa aretê* :: *eudaimonia*, *epistêmê* :: *doxa*, *aretê* :: *epistêmê*) which is contained in *Against the sophists* is so full that it could have been derived from no other early Platonic work but *Gorgias*, the only work of Plato's youth in which he gives a fairly systematic exposition of his thought.

⁴⁶It would anyhow be difficult to name any of Plato's early works which more convincingly and completely expounds all those characteristic features of his philosophy which are referred to by Isocrates, and makes their underlying connexions so clear.

^{46a}*Soph.* 6.

⁴⁷Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.1 f.

⁴⁸*Soph.* 7.

^{48a}*Soph.* 8.

composite portrait of 'the pupil of Socrates' which they all claimed to be.^{48a} Nevertheless he knows very well that the pupils of Socrates are bitterly hostile to one another, and he converts their strife into another argument against professional philosophers—the favourite argument of common sense in every age. It was Antisthenes in particular who imitated his master's poverty and independence; while the abstract and theoretical aspects of Isocrates' portrait are principally drawn from Plato, and the description of philosophy as hair-splitting is obviously pointed at Plato's elaboration of dialectic into the art of logic.^{48b} That was, as Isocrates rightly saw, a step into the sphere of theory and pure form. So he measures this new art of discovering contradictions—the art which attempts to conquer Opinion by Knowledge⁴⁹—against the old Socratic aim of 'caring for the soul,'⁵⁰ and throws doubt on its ability to achieve that aim. Thereby he concludes his criticism precisely at the point where (as history shows) the real problem lies. And so, in the argument which we here witness between Plato and Isocrates, there is unfolded part of the long series of conflicts through which the ideal of culture has been developed—a dialectic process which still retains a deep and permanent value, independently of the small personal details of the dispute.

The second group of opponents attacked by Isocrates are described by him as teachers of politics.⁵¹ They do not, like the philosophers, search for the truth. They simply practise their techné—their craft, in the old sense of the word,⁵² whereby it implied no trace of moral responsibility. In *Gorgias*, Plato had asserted that true rhetoric ought, like the craft of the doctor, to entail such moral responsibility.⁵³ Isocrates could not deny Plato's claim; and the moral factor is especially prominent in his treatment of the third group of his opponents, the teachers of forensic oratory. But he did not assert its validity simply in order to exalt Plato. His criticism of those who teach the craft of making political speeches introduces us to a type of education which was the absolute opposite of philosophy—the art of extempore speechmaking. As typical of the specialist in this subject we must think of Isocrates' own

^{48a}Perhaps the charge of asking pupils for contemptibly small fees is more appropriate to Antisthenes than to Plato, who probably took no fees at all. But we know far too little of these matters to judge with certainty. Even in the Academy, pupils probably had to pay a small sum—for instance, their share of the symposium. This was not meant to be the salary of their teacher, but Isocrates may have chosen to describe it as if it were, and to imply that Plato was underbidding his competitors. He attacks Plato and Antisthenes again in *Helen* 1: see note 85. On the fees of the Socratics, see Diog. Laert. 2.62, 65, 80, and 6.14.

^{48b}The charge that dialectic is hair-splitting recurs in *Anid.* 262, where it is admittedly an attack on Plato. Why should it not be an attack on Plato here too?

⁴⁹This description of the art of discovering contradictions, 'elenctic', is aimed at Socrates and Plato. See the parallel in *Helen* 4, where the Socratic technical term *elegchein* is particularly derided.

⁵⁰See *Paideia* 11, 39, which explains how the purpose of all Socrates' educational activity can be described as 'caring for the soul' (*psychês epimeleia*).

⁵¹*Soph.* 9: *hoi tous politikous logous hypischnoumenoi*.

⁵²Isocrates' phrasing clearly shows that he is putting the word *techné* (as used by these teachers of rhetoric) inside quotation-marks, so to speak. The same thing applies to the passages where he parodies the terminology of the Socratics.

⁵³See *Paideia* 11, 131, and *passim*.

fellow-student in the school of Gorgias, Alcidamas⁵⁴—who like him published several model speeches, but whose forte was improvisation (*autoschebiazein*). One of his speeches, which has been preserved, is significantly aimed against rhetors like Isocrates, who can write well enough but are incapable of seizing the critical moment to say the words demanded by the immediate situation.⁵⁵ There can be no doubt that the constant practice of this technique was invaluable training for the student who intended to be an active public speaker, even although the actual teaching often degenerated into mere routine instruction, and grossly neglected the higher claims of art. This class of his opponents Isocrates charges with lack of taste: they have, he affirms, no aesthetic sense.⁵⁶ In practice, their type of rhetoric turns out to be nothing more than a collection of formal devices which the pupil gets off by heart and can bring into play at any moment. It enlarges neither his intellect nor his experience, but merely teaches him the patterns of speechmaking as abstract forms to be learnt by rote, as the elementary teacher teaches little children the alphabet.⁵⁷ This method is a fine example of the contemporary trend towards mechanizing both education and life itself as far as possible. Isocrates seizes the opportunity to distinguish his own artistry from this empty commercialized technique, and to clear himself from the charge which he might well have incurred through his distaste for the subtleties of philosophical education—the charge of being narrow-mindedly practical. What he is looking for is the middle way between highflown theory and vulgar penny-chasing technical adroitness; and he finds it in artistically disciplined Form.⁵⁸ In this he introduces a third principle. Here again we find that he explains himself and his ideal by contrast with another point of view. But by thus waging war on two fronts, he shows that his conflict with philosophical education, important as it is, expresses only half of his own ideal. He is just as far removed in the other direction from rhetoric in the accepted sense. For, in the sphere of rhetoric as well as in that of philosophy, Isocrates' *paideia* was something perfectly new.

More than any other sphere of life, the art of oratory resists the effort of systematic reason to reduce all individual facts to a number of established *schemata*, basic forms. In the realm of logic Plato calls these basic forms the Ideas. As we have seen, he took this three-dimensional mode of describing them from contemporary medical science, and applied it to the analysis of Being. In rhetoric we can see the same process in operation at the same time, though we cannot definitely say that it was directly influenced by Plato's use of the term *idea*. Medicine and rhetoric were by their very nature the spheres in which this conception of basic forms or Ideas could be developed—for

⁵⁴See J. Vahlen, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1, p. 117 f.; and before him, C. Reinhardt, *De Isocratis aemulis* (Bonn 1873).

⁵⁵This speech is best explained as Alcidamas' reply to the attack on him made by Isocrates in the speech *Against the sophists*.

⁵⁶*Soph.* 9.

⁵⁷*Soph.* 10.

⁵⁸*Soph.* 12 f.

medicine reduces a number of apparently different physiological events to a few fundamental types; and rhetoric likewise simplifies what seem to be separate and distinct political or legal situations. The essence of both skills is to analyze the individual case into its general aspects, so as to make it easier to treat in practice. The comparison of these general patterns to the letters of the alphabet (*stoicheia*)—which we find in Isocrates here, and later in Plato—was obvious enough. The act of reading is just the same as that of political or forensic or medical diagnosis: a large number of variously assembled shapes are reduced to a limited number of basic 'elements', and thus the meaning of each of the apparently manifold shapes is recognized.⁵⁹ In science too, the 'elements' which make up physical nature were first called by that name in the same period, and the same analogy, drawn from language and the letters of the alphabet, lies behind it.⁶⁰ Isocrates of course does not by any means reject the doctrine of a rhetorical system of Ideas. In fact, his writings show that he largely adopted that doctrine, and that he took as the foundation of his own teaching the mastery of the basic forms of oratory. But oratory which knew no more than these forms would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. The letters of the alphabet, immovable and unchangeable, are the most complete contrast to the fluid and manifold situations of human life, whose full and rich complexity can be brought under no rigid rule.⁶¹ Perfect eloquence must be the individual expression of a single critical moment, a *kairos*, and its highest law is that it should be wholly appropriate. Only by observing these two rules can it succeed in being new and original.⁶²

In a word, oratory is imaginative literary creation. Though it dare not dispense with technical skill, it must not stop short at that.⁶³ Just as the sophists had believed themselves to be the true successors of the poets, whose special art they had transferred into prose, so Isocrates too feels that he is continuing the poets' work, and taking over the function which until a short time before him they had fulfilled in the life of his nation. His comparison between rhetoric and poetry is far more than a passing epigram. Throughout his speeches the influence of this point of view can be traced. The panegyric on a great man is adapted from the hymn, while the hortative speech follows the model of the protreptic elegy and the didactic epic. And, in these types, Isocrates copies even the order of his ideas from the well-established traditional order which was a rule in each of the corresponding poetic genera. More than that: the position and prestige of the orator are determined by this parallel with the poet. The new vocation must support itself on an old and firmly-established one, and take its standards therefrom. The less Isocrates hopes or wishes to succeed as a practical statesman, the more he needs the

⁵⁹Plato compares his 'ideas' to letters of the alphabet in *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *The Statesman*, and *The Laws*.

⁶⁰This was first done in Plato's *Timaeus* 48b, 56b, 57c: see H. Diels' *Elementum*.

⁶¹*Soph.* 12.

⁶²Cf. *Soph.* 13, on the *kairos* and *to prepon*.

⁶³*Soph.* 12.

prestige of poetry to set off his spiritual aims; and even in the educational spirit by which his rhetoric is inspired, he is deliberately emulating what the Greeks conceived to be the educational function of the poets of old. Later, indeed, he compares his work with that of the sculptor (as Pindar had done) and proudly puts himself on a level with Phidias;⁶⁴ but that is more to illustrate the fact that there are still some who, despite the loftiness of his art, consider the rhetor's profession to be something second-rate. The classical Greeks had always tended to depreciate the sculptor's trade a little, as resembling the work of a common artisan—and that although the word *sculptor* could be applied to every worker in stone, from the ordinary mason to the creator of the Parthenon. But later, as the prestige of the plastic arts and their great masters gradually rose in the post-classical centuries, the comparison of oratory to sculpture and painting seems to become commoner. However, the dynastic succession of rhetoric to poetry remained the true image of the spiritual process in which rhetoric arose as a new cultural force: all late Greek poetry is simply the offspring of rhetoric.⁶⁵

Naturally, Isocrates' view of the educational value of rhetoric is defined by this conception of its true character. Being an act of creation, oratory in its highest ranges cannot possibly be taught like a school subject. And yet he holds that it can be employed to educate young men: because of his own peculiar view of the relation between the three factors which, according to the pedagogic theories of the sophists, are the foundation of all education. They are: (1) talent, (2) study, and (3) practice. The current enthusiasm for education and culture had helped to create and disseminate exaggerated views of their powers;⁶⁶ but that enthusiasm had been succeeded by a certain disillusionment—due partly to Socrates' far-reaching criticisms of the limitations and pretensions of education,⁶⁷ and partly to the discovery that many a young man whom the sophists had educated was no better than those who had never enjoyed such advantages.⁶⁸ Isocrates explains the exact value of education with great care. He asserts that natural talent is the principal factor, and admits that great gifts, untrained, often achieve more than mere training without ability—if indeed it is possible to speak of training when there is nothing there to train. The element second in importance is experience, practice.⁶⁹ It would appear that until then professional rhetors had theoretically recognized the trinity—talent, study, practice—but had in their own courses pushed study and training into the foreground. Isocrates modestly relegates training (*paideusis*) to the third rank. It can, he says, achieve much if it is helped by talent and experience. It makes speakers more clearly conscious of their art, stimulates their inventive faculty, and saves

⁶⁴In *Antid.* 2 Isocrates compares himself to the sculptor Phidias and the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius—the greatest artists in Greece. So does Plato in *The Republic*: see *Paideia* II, 258 f.

⁶⁵Plato too, in *Gorg.* 502c, implies that poetry is a kind of rhetoric.

⁶⁶*Soph.* 1.

⁶⁷See *Paideia* 11, 59 f.

⁶⁸*Soph.* 1 and 8.

⁶⁹*Soph.* 14.

them much vague and unsuccessful searching. Even a less gifted pupil can be improved and intellectually developed by training, although he can never be made into a distinguished orator or writer.⁷⁰

Rhetorical training, says Isocrates, can teach insight into the 'ideas' or basic patterns out of which every speech is built. He appears to mean that this phase of it, hitherto the only one which had been cultivated, was capable of far profounder development; and we would gladly hear more of his new doctrine of ideas, to be able to compare it with that of the older rhetors. But the real difficulty of the subject does not lie in that aspect of it—all the less so because it is taught so thoroughly. It lies in the right choice, commixture, and placing of the 'ideas' on each subject, in the selection of the correct moment, in the good taste and appropriateness with which the speech is decorated with enthymemes, and in the rhythmic and musical disposition of the words.⁷¹ To do all that correctly needs a powerful and sensitive mind. This, the highest stage of training, assumes in the pupil full knowledge of the 'ideas' of speech and skill in their employment; from the teacher it requires the ability to expound everything which can be rationally taught, and beyond that—i.e. in everything which cannot be taught—it demands that he should make himself a model for his pupils: so that those who can form themselves by imitating him may at once achieve a richer and more graceful style than any others.⁷²

Plato, in *The Republic*, later declared that the highest culture could be attained only if certain qualities which are rarely found together were to coincide. Similarly, Isocrates asserts that it is impossible for the teacher to succeed unless all the factors which we have mentioned are brought into play at once.⁷³ Here the general Greek idea, that education is the process by which the whole man is shaped, is enunciated independently of Plato, and variously expounded in such imagery as 'model' or 'pattern' (*paradeigma*), 'stamp' (*ektupoun*), 'imitate' (*mimeisthai*).⁷⁴ The real problem is how this process of 'shaping' can be converted from a beautiful image into a practical reality—that is, what is to be the *method* of forming the human character, and ultimately what is the *nature* of the human intellect. Plato seeks to form the soul through knowledge of the Ideas as absolute norms of the Good, the Just, the Beautiful, etc., and thus eventually to develop it into an intelligible cosmos which contains all being within itself. No such universe of knowledge exists for Isocrates. For him, rhetorical training is worked out simply by Opinion, not by Knowledge. But he frequently claims that the intellect possesses an aesthetic and practical faculty which, without claiming absolute

⁷⁰*Soph.* 15.

⁷¹*Soph.* 16.

⁷²*Soph.* 17.

⁷³*Soph.* 18. Plato also speaks of the 'coincidence' of power and intellect in *Rep.* 473d, and *Laws* 712a. But also, without using the word, he sets up an ideal of many-sided talent (*Rep.* 485b f.)—the *philosophos physis*, which is a coincidence of qualities that can exist together but seldom do. This way of formulating ideals is characteristic of the literature of *paideia*.

⁷⁴*Soph.* 18.

knowledge, can still choose the right means and the right end.⁷⁵ His whole conception of culture is based on that aesthetic power. Plato's dialectic guides the young student step by step towards the Ideas; but that still leaves it to him to employ them in his life and conduct, and the way in which he employs them cannot be rationally explained. In the same way Isocrates can describe only the elements and the separate stages of the educational act. The formative process itself remains a mystery. Nature can neither be wholly banished from it, nor be put wholly in control of it. Therefore, everything in education depends on the proper cooperation of nature and art. If we once decide that Isocrates' incompleteness (as Plato would call it) and his reliance on mere Opinion (which Plato called the vital force of all rhetoric) were imposed on him by his subject, then we must conclude that his resolute self-limitation, and his deliberate renunciation of everything 'higher', everything which he felt to be obscure and doubtful, were a sort of constitutional weakness converted by him into a strength. This, in the sphere of culture, is the same thing that assured Isocrates' own personal success: he has made a virtue of necessity. He recognizes the empirical character of rhetoric; and, whether or not it is right to call it a true *techné* or art—Plato in *Gorgias* had claimed that it was not—Isocrates holds fast to its empiricism. Therein he clings to the principle of *imitation* established by his predecessors—the principle which in the future was to play such an enormous part in rhetoric and (as literature came more and more under the influence of rhetoric) in every branch of literature. Here we know more of his method of teaching than we do of his attitude to the rhetorical doctrine of ideas; for all his great speeches were meant to be models in which his pupils could study the precepts of his art.

He spends little time on the third group of educators, the writers of forensic speeches. Obviously he considers them his weakest opponents—although Plato attacked them a good many years later in *Phaedrus*, and therefore thought them fairly important even then. It is clear that Isocrates believes their rivalry far less dangerous than that of the new philosophical culture, in which he recognizes the real threat to his own ideals. The forensic speechmakers were out to make money, and their product was meant for practical use. We know their technique from the sample speeches published by Antiphon, Lysias, Isaeus, Demosthenes, and even Isocrates himself at the outset of his career. This type of literature is one of the most remarkable plants in the garden of Greek literature—and a native Attic vegetable at that. The Athenian mania for litigation, so delightfully satirized by the comedians, is the obverse of the firm legality of the Athenian state: of that foundation in Law of which its citizens were so proud. It produced a universal interest in *agones*—lawsuits and prosecutions. The model speeches written by the logographers served both as advertisements for their authors, as patterns for

⁷⁵*Cf. Soph.* 17, on the *psychê doxastikê*.

their pupils to copy, and as interesting reading-matter for the public.⁷⁶ Here too Isocrates manifests the more sensitive taste of the younger generation. Ironically he recommends that the logographers should leave it to the enemies of rhetoric (already numerous enough) to display this, its least attractive side, instead of proudly dragging it out into the glare of publicity; and he adds that anything that can be learnt in rhetoric is just as valuable in other spheres as in legal disputes. We need not question the sincerity of this attitude. It explains quite clearly why Isocrates abandoned the profession. He felt that the speechwriter was morally far below the philosopher.⁷⁷ Clearly he is thinking not only of the men who write speeches for use in law courts, but of all kinds of rhetors, since he includes them all under the name of 'teachers of political oratory.'⁷⁸ Doubtless the subjects investigated in philosophical education are not worth the trouble, and the arguers who 'wallow' in debates would get into serious danger if they applied their conclusions to real facts (here Isocrates is quoting Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, and taking his side too), but at least the fact that the rhetors talk about a better subject, politics, must not keep us from recognizing that in practice they generally misuse it and become interfering and ambitious busybodies. Thus Isocrates follows Plato in his criticism of the political orators, though he does not accept his positive conclusions. He does not believe that virtue can be taught, any more than the aesthetic sense. Plato refuses to grant the name of *techné* to any kind of education which does not teach virtue; and Isocrates frankly thinks it impossible to create such education. Nevertheless, he is inclined to concede that education of a political tendency might have some ethical influence if it were practised in the manner he recommends, not in the amoral way represented by earlier rhetoricians.⁷⁹

The striking thing about Isocrates' conception of Plato's *paideia*, as set forth in his speech *Against the sophists*, is that he entirely overlooks the political content of his opponent's theories. From Plato's early dialogues he must have got the same impression as they made, until a short time ago, on most modern readers—that their author's sole concern was moral reformation, an ideal which is somehow strangely connected with dialectic reasoning. The superiority of rhetoric, as Isocrates conceives it, is that it is entirely political culture. All that it has to do to attain spiritual leadership in the state is to find a new approach to life and its problems. The older type of rhetoric missed many important opportunities because it was content to serve day-to-day

⁷⁶Isocrates thinks that, if these model speeches are meant to be specimens of the teaching technique used by their writers, they come under the definition of *paideia* just as much as his own political rhetoric and its products. After all, that kind of literature represents a formal educational principle which is valuable and interesting in itself. However, since its content has comparatively little importance, it has not been exhaustively treated here. In this, I have accepted the estimate of Plato and Isocrates. General and legal historians will of course take a different view.

⁷⁷*Soph.* 19-20.

⁷⁸*Soph.* 20.

⁷⁹*Soph.* 21.

politics as an instrument, instead of rising above it. From this we can see that Isocrates believed he could inspire the political life of his nation with a higher moral creed. Unfortunately only a fragment of the speech on the sophists now survives, without the principal section, which doubtless explained his new ideal. Isocrates must have changed his attitude to Plato's cultural plans as soon as he understood the political aspect of his philosophy. Actually, he had already been warned by Plato's *Gorgias* that Socrates was the only real statesman of his age, because he alone tried to make his fellow-citizens better.⁸⁰ That might well be interpreted as pure paradox—especially by Isocrates, who held that the moving impulse of all contemporary writers was to struggle for originality at all costs, hunting out hitherto unheard-of paradoxes on every subject, and who feared (with justice) that he could not rival Plato and the other philosophers in that exercise. But later, in his *Philip*, he reviews Plato's life-work not long after his death, and treats him as a very great political theorist, whose theories could unfortunately never be put into practice.⁸¹ When did he first change his view of Plato's character and philosophy?

We can find the answer in his *Helen*. *Helen* is a model encomium, addressed to a mythical personage, and paradoxically praising her although she was generally reviled. The exact date of its composition is unknown, but it was obviously written soon after the speech *Against the sophists*—namely, while Isocrates' school was yet new. A lower limit for its date is fixed by the singular form which Isocrates, towards the end, gives to the praise of his heroine: it was she, he says, who first brought about national unity among the Greeks, in the war against Troy that resulted from her abduction.⁸² Thus he makes Helen a mythical symbol of the political aspirations which he expressed more fully soon after that, in the *Panegyricus* (380)—of the great struggle to unite the Greek states in a national crusade against the barbarians. In this first decade Isocrates is still moving in the paths beaten out by Gorgias. The relation between his *Panegyricus* and Gorgias' *Olympicus* is the same as that between his *Helen* and Gorgias' *Defence of Helen*. The little speech is (as he says⁸³) a first-fruits offering suitable for a man of *paideia*. It is interesting because of its renewed polemics against the Socratic school and its cultural ideal.⁸⁴ Here again, as in the speech on the sophists, he blends the features of Plato and Antisthenes in a composite portrait. His attack is aimed, not at one particular person, but at the entire tendency of the new movement.

⁸⁰See *Paideia* II, 150.

⁸¹*Phil.* 12.

⁸²*Hel.* 67.

⁸³*Hel.* 66.

⁸⁴This attack on the 'disputers' occupies the whole of the introduction to *Helen*, and has nothing to do with the rest of the speech. It will be enough for our purpose, therefore, to discuss the introduction alone. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.14.1414b26) says that the prooemium need have no connexion with the main part of an epideictic speech, and cites Isocrates' *Helen* as an example. He compares the introduction to an encomium with the loosely attached prelude (*proaulion*) to a flute-solo.

Isocrates says he cannot interpret their utterances as anything more than attempts at paradoxical wit, when some of them (Antisthenes) teach that it is impossible to make a false statement, or to make two contradictory assertions about the same thing, while others (Plato) try to prove that courage, wisdom and justice are one and the same, and that none of these qualities is implanted in us by nature, but that they are all attained by one and the same knowledge (*epistêmê*).⁸⁵ Here Isocrates really does distinguish the Socratics from those who are mere arguers, who teach nobody, but only try to make difficulties for others. He objects that all of them try to refute others (*elegchein*), although they themselves have long since been refuted,⁸⁶ and that their paradoxes are thrown into the shade by those of their predecessors the sophists: for instance, by Gorgias' statement that no existing thing exists, or Zeno's, that the same thing is both possible and impossible, or Melissus', that the apparently infinite multitude of things is really one.⁸⁷

With this pettifoggery, Isocrates contrasts the simple effort to find out what is true: which he conceives to be the effort to get experience of reality and to educate oneself for political action. Philosophers are always chasing the phantom of pure knowledge, but no one can use their results. Is it not better to spend one's time on the things which people really need, even if we cannot achieve exact knowledge, but only approximate opinions about them? He reduces his own attitude towards Plato's ideal of scientific accuracy and thoroughness to the formula that the smallest advance in our knowledge of really important things is better than the greatest intellectual mastery of unimportant trifles which are irrelevant to our life.⁸⁸ As a good psychologist, he evidently understands how much young men love dialectical disputation—for at their age, they have no interest in serious private or public problems, and the more futile a game, the more they enjoy it.⁸⁹ But those who profess to teach them deserve reproach for allowing them to be charmed by it. They incur thereby the same guilt of which they accuse forensic orators—they corrupt the youth.⁹⁰ They do not shrink from preaching the absurd doctrine that the life of beggars and exiles, deprived of all political rights and duties, is happier than that of others—namely, of the full citizens who remain peacefully in their native land. (This is clearly an allusion to the ethical individualism and cosmopolitanism of the radical wing in the Socratic school—Antisthenes, Aristippus, and their followers.⁹¹ He finds the other philosophers to be even more ridiculous: those who think that their moral paradoxes really contribute something to the spiritual upbuilding of the state.

⁸⁵Hel. 1. It is easy enough to identify Isocrates' two unnamed opponents. On Antisthenes see Arist. *Met.* Δ 29.1024b33, with the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias on it, and Plato, *Soph.* 251b.

⁸⁶Hel. 4.

⁸⁷Hel. 2-3.

⁸⁸Hel. 5.

⁸⁹Hel. 6.

⁹⁰Hel. 7.

⁹¹Hel. 8.

This can only be a hit at Plato, who held that Socrates' moral evangel was true political science.⁹² If we are right in this identification, it was as early as the 'eighties, soon after he wrote his speech *Against the sophists*, that Isocrates changed his views of Plato's cultural ideal, and recognized that it too had political implications. Only he felt that its concentration on individual morality and on dialectical quibbles—which seemed to him the distinguishing tendency of Plato's educational system—was absolutely irreconcilable with the universally useful purpose which it professed to serve.

Thus, as Isocrates and Plato appear to approach nearer and nearer to each other in the practical aim of their cultural theories, Isocrates' disapproval for Plato's abstract 'roundabout way'⁹³ becomes more and more pronounced. He knows only the direct route. There is in his system none of the inward tension that exists in the mind of Plato between the urgent will to action and the long philosophical preparation for action. True, he stands far enough away from the politics of his day and the activity of contemporary statesmen to understand Plato's objection to them. But, as a man who keeps to the middle way, he cannot appreciate the bold ethical claims of the Socratic system, which creates a gulf between the state and the individual. He does not look to Utopia for the improvement of political life. He embodies the rooted hatred of the propertied and cultured bourgeoisie both for the mad eccentricities of mob-rule and for the tyranny of individuals, and he has a strong admiration for respectability. But he has none of Plato's uncompromising passion for reformation, no thought of introducing such a terrific intensity into everyday life. Therefore, he does not realize the enormous educational power which lies in Plato's thought: he judges its value exclusively by its immediate utility for the particular political question which interests him. This is the internal condition of Greece, and the future relations of the Greek states to one another, after the great war. The Peloponnesian war had clearly demonstrated that the existing regime could not be permanent, and that the whole Greek world had to be rebuilt. When he wrote *Helen*, Isocrates was already at work on his great manifesto, the *Panegyricus*. Its purpose was to show the world that his school was able to state, in a new language, new ideals—not only for the moral life of the individual, but for the entire nation of the Hellenes.

⁹²Hel. 9.

⁹³See *Paideia* II, 280 and III, 193.