



## THREE PERSPECTIVES ON CORE TEXTS AND LIBERAL EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT:** The III European Liberal Arts and Core Texts Education Conference, held at the University of Navarra on October 17-19th, 2019 addressed question such as whether core text education can train the virtues and, in this way, promote intellectual development and personal growth, resulting in students who are engaged with, and care for, the world. This Core Curriculum Document includes three of the papers presented at the conference.

**KEYWORDS:** Core Texts, Liberal Education, Critical Thinking, Philosophy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent debates on higher education are focusing on interdisciplinarity and problem-solving skills, but tend to forget the classic goals of a liberal education, namely, personal growth and the engagement with the fundamental questions of being human. The reading of core texts – i.e. classic texts from philosophical, historical, literary, cultural, or scientific traditions involving ‘the best that has been written’ – eminently allows for a reflection on the great questions of human existence. They allow the student to develop certain intellectual dispositions or character traits whereby the student gains agency in navigating the different knowledge areas within the realm of the university and life outside it.

One could argue that core text education does so because it shapes the student as human being and facilitates the development of certain moral and intellectual dispositions or virtues. For example, reading a core text invites a sense of wonder and the capacity to amaze oneself; it requires charity to make sense of certain assumptions, expectations and a world view in a core text that may initially seem foreign; it presupposes courage to be open-minded and to withhold judgment, and core texts inherently train a kind of intellectual discipline as they tend to be demanding, requiring a significant dose of tenacity, depth, and reflection. Furthermore, core texts can be said to promote self-knowledge when they act as a mirror to one’s own dispositions and deeply held beliefs. As students immerse themselves in a core text they inherently become at home in it and, returning to their own world from what is other they are (trans)formed in their view of the world. As students change, they change the world around them.

The training of these virtues may be reflected not only in the relationship between the reader and the text but also between the readers – students and teachers – in the classroom. Here, core texts discussions train the virtues of charity in allowing one another to speak freely, the courage in opening up about one’s own dearly held beliefs, and the open-mindedness in withholding judgment of the opinions of one’s peers. As such, core texts can create an intellectual community and even friendship, despite real and important differences.

Since all these questions have practical implications for the students’ (and teachers’) lives, they cannot be restricted to the classroom. It should be encouraged to look for answers in experience and life. The kind of community that liberal arts colleges and universities create offers an ideal setting for this. In a community, virtues can be learned and exercised. Properly speaking, virtues cannot be taught, but teachers and other students can act as midwives, both intellectually (through conversations in and outside the classroom) and practically (through their example and interaction).

Can core text education train the virtues and, in this way, promote intellectual development and personal growth, resulting in students who are engaged with, and care for, the world? And, if so, how, and which virtues? Which virtues or vices are discussed in particular core texts? How does core text education promote community?

These were the questions addressed at the III European Liberal Arts and Core Texts Education Conference, held at the University of Navarra on October 17-19th, 2019. Three of the papers presented at the conference are included in this Core Curriculum Document. They deal with authors as distant in time and space as Socrates, Dorothy Sayers or Isocrates, but they have in common the capacity to shed light on the education of the new generations.

## SOCRATES' MORAL INSIGHT AND EXAMPLE IN THE EUTHYPHRO, APOLOGY, CRITO, AND PHAEDO<sup>1</sup>

Robert Anderson<sup>2</sup>

In Plato's four-dialogue sequence of the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, Socrates' words and deeds in the final few weeks of his life give witness to many truths about the moral life. The four dialogues record Socrates' words and deeds pretrial, during trial, in prison, and at his execution, and they show a person who, facing the end of life, lives out his final weeks, days, and hours with strength and moral rectitude. Socrates seems to be offered by Plato as a friendly guide to how one ought to live uprightly.

Socrates' moral guidance can be distilled into various truths and principles. The challenge to carry out the distillation of the moral insights in the four dialogues is a good exercise to assign undergraduates as they hone critical reading and reasoning skills and learn to think deeply about enduring questions such as “what is morality?” and “how should I live my life?” Some of what emerges from the four dialogues is straightforward (and maybe even obvious). Other things are less clear and require greater effort to extract. Here are ten moral insights that emerge. While not exhaustive, these ten capture many of Socrates' most important moral insights.

First, Socrates regards at least many moral matters as both objective and knowable by reason. Morality, or at least important parts of it, is neither relative nor a matter of individual subjectivity, and skepticism is not the appropriate attitude toward moral knowledge. This might be called *the principle of objectivity and intelligibility*. For example, in the *Euthyphro* Socrates and Euthyphro agree that, whatever piety and impiety are, persons or gods do not decide the matter. Instead, piety is what it is, and people and the gods respond to the objective reality of it. To reach agreement on this point is why Socrates asks: “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?”<sup>3</sup> With this question Socrates is attempting to elicit from Euthyphro the response, “the former.” The *Euthyphro* is the search for the objective reality or real quality or form that makes all pious actions pious. So also, however often Socrates might insist that he is ignorant of the nature of piety, readers know better. Socrates clearly makes progress in the understanding of piety and impiety: piety is indeed a part of justice which involves people's relation to superiors such as the

<sup>1</sup> A short version of part of this paper was presented at the III European Liberal Arts and Core Texts Education Conference: Caring for Souls – Can Core Texts Educate Character? University of Navarra, Pamplona, October, 2019, and a short version of a different part of this paper was presented at the Association for Core Texts and Courses Twenty-Fifth Annual Conference, Santa Fe, NM, April 2019. The whole paper is inspired by a wonderful lecture delivered once upon a time by my long-time colleague at Saint Anselm College, James O'Rourke. His lecture was titled: “Acting on Principle: Socrates' Moral Absolutism.”

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<sup>3</sup> *Euthyphro*, 10a.

gods.<sup>4</sup> Again, in the *Crito* whether escape from prison would be right or wrong is not for Socrates or Crito or anybody else to decide. Instead, the moral character of escape is what it is, and people are obligated to discover what it is and then to align their actions with its objective reality. In the *Crito*, accordingly, Socrates examines the question of escape and is convinced that he has figured out the right answer to the question. The detached point of view that marks objectivity is expressed in Socrates final words of the dialogue: "Let it be then, Crito, and let us act in this way, since this is the way the god is leading us."<sup>5</sup>

Second and third, two more principles evident in the *Crito* are closely connected to the idea that moral matters are both objective and accessible to reason. The first is *the principle of expertise*. In many Platonic dialogues, Socrates argues that if a person wants to learn how something is done or what is true, then the person should seek out those who are knowledgeable. The opinions of the ignorant, confused, or stupid are worthless. Collections of such opinions in surveys are equally worthless. Thus, answers to the perennial questions that human beings have should be sought from the knowledgeable, those with expertise, or the wise and from nobody else. Socrates' search for the wise is behind his questions to Crito: "Why should we care so much for what the majority think?"<sup>6</sup> and "Do you think it is a sound statement that one must not value all opinions of men, but some and not others, nor the opinions of all men, but those of some and not of others?"<sup>7</sup> Socrates' life-long search for the wise in Athens led, as Socrates explains in the *Apology*, to a dead end.<sup>8</sup> Second, Socrates measures success in penetrating the truth of a given matter by *the principle of rational persuasion*. The stronger argument should prevail in disputes. The weight Socrates gives to rational argument is captured well in:

We must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not, as not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens only to the argument that on reflection seems best to me. I cannot, now that this fate has come upon me, discard the arguments I used; they seem to me much the same. I value and respect the same principles as before.<sup>9</sup>

Socrates ultimately does not find Crito's arguments for escape persuasive. Rather, Socrates thinks that Crito should find the arguments for non-escape persuasive. So also, the laws of Athens, when imaginatively they speak at the end of the *Crito*, persuade Socrates that escape would be wrong. They expressly say, "be persuaded by us who have brought you up, Socrates" and "do not let Crito persuade you, rather than us."<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, Socrates identifies one's own moral self as the preeminent value in life. At his trial, Socrates upbraids the Athenians, saying "you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul."<sup>11</sup> Once convicted, Socrates asks that his accusers do him this favor:

When my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than they care for

<sup>4</sup> Confer *Euthyphro*, 12d-e.

<sup>5</sup> *Crito*, 54e.

<sup>6</sup> *Crito*, 44c. See also *Crito* 46d-e and 49b-c.

<sup>7</sup> *Crito*, 47a.

<sup>8</sup> See *Apology* 21b-23b.

<sup>9</sup> *Crito*, 46b-c.

<sup>10</sup> *Crito*, 54b-c.

<sup>11</sup> *Apology*, 29e.

virtue, or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody. Reproach them as I reproach you, that they do not care for the right things and think they are worthy when they are not worthy of anything.<sup>12</sup>

Moral goodness is ranked more highly than wealth, reputation, honors,<sup>13</sup> and one's body.<sup>14</sup> Care to be good and wise is said to matter more than household affairs, prestigious offices, and political parties.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly then, the search for moral virtue and reflection on the good life are so important that Socrates' most famous line is attached to them: "the unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>16</sup> So too in the *Crito*, Socrates' focus on the moral self is referred to obliquely with expressions like "that part of ourselves that is improved by just actions and destroyed by unjust actions,"<sup>17</sup> and its value is ranked higher than Socrates' own life and the lives of his children.<sup>18</sup> The kind of care for the self that Socrates is advocating in his most famous line from the *Apology* is further specified in Socrates' questions: "Is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits?"<sup>19</sup> and "Is the truth such as we used to say it was...wrongdoing is in every way harmful and shameful to the wrongdoer?"<sup>20</sup> For Socrates, "the most important thing is not life, but the good life."<sup>21</sup>

Though *the principle of care for the self* can sound like a self-absorbed preoccupation that privileges oneself over others, nothing in Socrates' words or life suggest that he thought of care for the self as a kind of ethical egoism. Rather, Socrates seems to recognize that any reason one could have for privileging oneself would equally apply to other people. Everybody is an *I* with desires, interests, goods, and possibilities for perfection and flourishing, and nobody is an *I* that honestly can say "I matter, but you do not" or "my desires, interests, goods, and possibilities matter more than yours." Conversely, ethical altruism fails for the same reason. Nobody is an *I* that truthfully can say "you matter, but I do not" or "your desires, interests, goods, and possibilities matter more than mine." Socrates's famous image of himself as a gadfly biting the great and noble horse<sup>22</sup> of Athens contradicts the idea that care for the self is self-centered. It is also contradicted by Socrates' life-long commitment to the betterment of Athenians as captured in: "I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, it is contradicted at the end of the *Phaedo* and just before drinking the hemlock when Socrates urges Crito, friends, and family above all else to take "good care of your own selves in whatever you do."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Apology*, 41e.

<sup>13</sup> *Apology*, 29e.

<sup>14</sup> *Apology*, 30b.

<sup>15</sup> *Apology*, 36b.

<sup>16</sup> *Apology*, 38a.

<sup>17</sup> *Crito*, 47d.

<sup>18</sup> See *Crito*, 54b.

<sup>19</sup> *Crito*, 47e.

<sup>20</sup> *Crito*, 49b.

<sup>21</sup> *Crito*, 48b.

<sup>22</sup> *Apology*, 30e.

<sup>23</sup> *Apology*, 30b.

<sup>24</sup> *Phaedo*, 115c. See also 82d and 107c.

Fifth, because moral goodness is preeminent, *the principle of non-maleficence* is prominent in the dialogues: “one must never do wrong.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, Socrates seems to consider doing harm the essence of wickedness.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, at the beginning of the *Apology* Socrates criticizes his accusers who long before he was brought to trial had been “maliciously and slanderously”<sup>27</sup> persuading Athenians that he was morally corrupt. In the middle of the dialogue, he says “my whole concern is not to do anything unjust or impious.”<sup>28</sup> Just before the Athenian jury votes, Socrates explains that he has not resorted to courtroom theatrics (such as tears, supplication, or the pathetic display of children, friends, and family) because justice is not a favor rendered by the jury but rather a rational judgment according to the law.<sup>29</sup> Finally, at the end of the *Apology* Socrates condemns his accusers who in accusing, convicting, and sentencing him to death attempted to harm him. He says, “they thought they were hurting me, and for this they deserve blame.”<sup>30</sup> In the *Crito*, the specific form that the moral requirement of non-maleficence also takes is as a requirement not to return wrong for wrong and injury for injury.<sup>31</sup>

Because the principle of non-maleficence is so important, its rigor is worth emphasizing as a separate and sixth principle. When Socrates says “one must never do wrong,” he did not mean *almost always* or *with practically few exceptions* or *virtually never*. He means *never*. Period. Whatever the circumstances, motivations, or outcomes, people should never do harm or evil. This might be called *the no proviso principle* or, more informally, *the no matter principle*. No matter who, what, when, where, or why, people should refrain from wrongdoing. Without reservations or qualifications, refusal to do wrong is always the right thing to do. As Socrates puts it, a person “should look to this only in his action: whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is acting like a good or a bad man,”<sup>32</sup> and Socrates makes clear that one should do the right thing of refraining from harm without regard to personal risk, which includes “death and danger.”<sup>33</sup> When the Athenians tried the Athenian generals who after the naval Battle of Arginusae in 406 BCE failed to save their own sailors from drowning, the Athenians unjustly tried them en masse rather than individually. Socrates, who as it happened was serving on the council of the assembly, says of himself: “I thought I should run the risk on the side of law and justice rather than join you, for fear of prison or death, when you were engaged in an unjust course.”<sup>34</sup> So also, Socrates concludes the *Apology* clearly implying that to be condemned to die (as he is) is much better than to be condemned to wickedness and injustice (as the Athenian jury is).<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the importance of the principle of non-maleficence can be amplified in a second way with a seventh, separate principle: *the principle of non-participation*. People should not do evil themselves, nor should they ever participate in the evildoing

<sup>25</sup> *Crito*, 49a-b.

<sup>26</sup> See *Apology*, 25c-e.

<sup>27</sup> *Apology*, 18d.

<sup>28</sup> *Apology*, 32d.

<sup>29</sup> *Apology*, 34c-35d.

<sup>30</sup> *Apology*, 41e.

<sup>31</sup> *Crito*, 49b-d and 54c.

<sup>32</sup> *Apology*, 28c.

<sup>33</sup> *Apology*, 28c-d.

<sup>34</sup> *Apology*, 32b-c.

<sup>35</sup> See *Apology*, 39b and 41e.

of others. Even if the wrong is inevitable, one should still give witness to goodness by non-cooperation in the wrongdoing of others. Socrates tells two stories of his own public refusal to participate in evil. The first was just mentioned. At the trial of the generals after the Battle of Arginusae, Socrates stood against their being tried as a single group. He says, "I was the only member of the presiding committee to oppose your doing something contrary to the laws, and I voted against it."<sup>36</sup> The second public refusal took place two years later in 404 BCE. When the Thirty Tyrants ordered Socrates and others to arrest Leon of Salamis, an innocent man, and to bring him to his execution, Socrates alone refused and went home instead. The others continued to carry out Leon's arrest. Socrates says that the intention of the Thirty Tyrants was "to implicate as many as possible in their guilt" and that "I showed again, not in words but in action, that, if it were not rather vulgar to say so, death is something I couldn't care less about, but that my whole concern is not to do anything unjust or impious. That government, powerful as it was, did not frighten me into any wrongdoing."<sup>37</sup> Socrates' steadfast refusal manifests the agent-centered nature of morality. No matter what Socrates did, the generals and Leon were dead men. The outcomes were foregone conclusions. Injustice was also a foregone conclusion. But what makes all the difference morally is who the one morally corrupted by wrongdoing --whether others are unjust or Socrates is unjust.

Eighth, in the *Apology* and *Crito* the principle of moral integrity or sticking to one's beliefs is especially conspicuous. Socrates is consistent. He speaks to the Athenian jury in the normal way he always spoke, even though the jury expects to be pandered to. Socrates says to the jury that he will, as he always does, speak only the truth and that nothing will be "expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases" but expressed "at random and in the first words that come to mind."<sup>38</sup> So also, he offers no alternative punishment once he is convicted because doing so would contradict his belief in his innocence. Instead, in consistency with his lifelong commitment to the good of Athenians, he counteroffers a reward: "So if I must make a just assessment of what I deserve, I assess it at this: free meals in the Prytaneum."<sup>39</sup> Likewise, once Socrates is in prison, he refuses to escape and flee Athens because both would contradict his lifetime of service to Athens –a city he never left except for military service– and his refusal to offer banishment as his punishment at his trial.<sup>40</sup>

Socrates' consistency is also manifested in his strict adherence to duty. He says, "wherever a man has taken a position that he believes to be best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace."<sup>41</sup> He then mentions two shining instances of his own steadfastness.<sup>42</sup> In the critical battles of Potidaea, Delium, and Amphipolis leading up to and in the Peloponnesian War, Socrates distinguished himself for his military service as an Athenian hoplite. He remained courageous and disciplined, even when the Athenians were routed. Similarly, Socrates interprets the Delphic oracle's pronouncement that nobody was wiser than himself as a divine command to practice

<sup>36</sup> *Apology*, 32b.

<sup>37</sup> *Apology*, 32c-d.

<sup>38</sup> *Apology*, 17c.

<sup>39</sup> *Apology*, 37a.

<sup>40</sup> *Crito*, 52b-c.

<sup>41</sup> *Apology*, 28d. Confer also *Crito*, 51b-52a.

<sup>42</sup> Confer *Apology*, 28d-30b and 21a-23b.

philosophy by examining whether those Athenians reputed to be wise were in fact wise. Accordingly, Socrates spent his life questioning, examining, and testing fellow Athenians and visitors of Athens, even though his obedience to that command entailed poverty, opposition, unpopularity, and persecution.

Despite the many examples of Socrates' unswerving consistency –a consistency which often came at great risk and cost– Socrates can appear inconsistent regarding his duty to follow the laws of Athens. On the one hand, at the end of the *Crito* when Socrates has the laws speak, they speak clearly: “one must obey the commands of one's city and country, or persuade it as to the nature of justice.”<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, in the Leon of Salamis affair, Socrates refused to follow the orders by the Thirty Tyrants to arrest Leon so that he could be executed. So also, Socrates says at his trial that, if his acquittal is on the condition that he quit the practice of philosophy, he will disobey and continue philosophizing.<sup>44</sup> Where is the moral integrity in these inconsistencies? Is Socrates caught contradicting himself?

Socrates has several plausible outs in the matter of Leon of Salamis. He might argue that laws are only laws when created by a proper authority and that the Thirty Tyrants were not a proper authority. Again, he might maintain that an unjust law is no law at all and that what does not exist cannot impose any obligations. Still again, he might distinguish between laws which, if followed, require joining one's will with evil versus those which, if followed, do not require joining one's will with evil. This last out is sometimes referred to as the distinction between formal cooperation and material cooperation. The point of the distinction is to clarify how not all participation in the wrongdoing of others is morally bad. Sometimes a person shares the intention of the wrongdoer, and sometimes a person does not, though the person is involved in the physical act of the wrongdoer. The former is formal cooperation and is always morally impermissible. The latter is material cooperation and is often morally permissible. One can defend Socrates' apparent inconsistency with the help of the distinction between formal and material cooperation thus: just as dutifully sitting in the back of the bus per Jim Crow laws is morally different from enforcing Jim Crow laws that demand some people sit in the back of the bus, so also Socrates' acceptance of his wrongful conviction and execution is morally different from his carrying out an injustice against Leon of Salamis.

Similarly, Socrates has several plausible outs in the matter of a hypothetical acquittal tied to a cease-and-desist order. The most plausible is the one he expressly gives as his reason for his threatened disobedience of the jury's hypothetical verdict. He says, “I will obey the god rather than you.”<sup>45</sup>

Two final moral truths are especially tricky to draw out. The first is a truth about moral conscience. Though moral standards are real and knowable, people at any given point can only do the best that they can do, and thus they must follow their best lights concerning what should and should not be done. This internal guide to right action that should be followed is one's last, best judgment about right and wrong. This can be called *the principle of conscience*. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates calls this internal guide a “divine sign.”<sup>46</sup> In the *Apology*, it is called both a “divine sign” and a “voice,”<sup>47</sup> and in

<sup>43</sup> *Crito*, 51c.

<sup>44</sup> *Apology*, 29c-d.

<sup>45</sup> *Apology*, 29d.

<sup>46</sup> *Euthyphro*, 3b.

<sup>47</sup> *Apology*, 31c-d, 40a, and 41d.

the *Phaedo*, it is referred to as “conscience.”<sup>48</sup> Socrates reports that “whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything.”<sup>49</sup> This voice checks Socrates “even in small matters.”<sup>50</sup> It kept Socrates out of the politics of Athens.<sup>51</sup> On the day of his trial, the voice was silent, neither opposing his words or actions.<sup>52</sup> Though one might suppose that the references to a “divine sign” and a “voice” mean Socrates enjoyed mystical experiences or suffered from psychotic episodes or experienced something else exotic, a simpler and more plausible interpretation is that Socrates is referring to the commands of one's own practical reason that can appear in inner experience as foreign to oneself because they clash with various other inner experiences such as desire and will which are also one's own.

Why Socrates says in the *Apology* that his divine sign is limited to prohibitions or negative commands (what *not* to do) and does not extend to positive commands (what to do) is a puzzling question. The puzzle deepens when one notices that the point is contradicted in the *Phaedo* when Socrates says he has turned to composing poetry in his last days so as to satisfy his conscience.<sup>53</sup> Thus, a positive action is commanded by conscience. But perhaps the reason Socrates connects his divine sign more tightly with negative commands is owing to another characteristic of conscience: it involves completely specific judgments in concrete circumstances. Conscience is not general, but rather about the here and now. Some prohibitions (some Do Nots), however, are completely specific because they are exceptionless. They apply always and everywhere. For example, various ways of mistreating other human beings are permanent prohibitions, such as *do not steal*, *never rape*, and *no chattel slavery*. Discerning such exceptionless moral norms (or at least many of them) does not require great wisdom. Since Socrates routinely denies that he is wise, he is perhaps less uncomfortable admitting that he has insight into negative moral norms.

Positive moral commands, in contrast, do require greater wisdom. Who should one marry? What profession should one pursue? How should people honor their parents, especially given the dysfunction in their family? How should one spend the final months, weeks, days, and hours of one's life? These questions are much harder to answer, and so Socrates is much less willing to lay claim to the kind of wisdom required to answer such questions.

The struggle to achieve reliability in conscience's completely specific and *positive* judgments about concrete circumstances is played out dramatically in the *Euthyphro*. At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates is shocked to learn that Euthyphro thinks he is justified in prosecuting his father for murder. Socrates says: “Most men would not know how they could do this and be right. It is not the part of anyone to do this, but of one who is far advanced in wisdom.”<sup>54</sup> Again, after Euthyphro explains the particulars of his case against his father, Socrates questions Euthyphro doubtfully, “Euthyphro, you think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that, when those things happened as you say, you have no fear of having acted impiously in

<sup>48</sup> *Phaedo*, 60e and 61b.

<sup>49</sup> *Apology*, 31d.

<sup>50</sup> *Apology*, 40a.

<sup>51</sup> See *Apology*, 31d.

<sup>52</sup> See *Apology*, 40a-b.

<sup>53</sup> See *Phaedo*, 60e and 61b. Perhaps the point is also contradicted when Socrates insists that the god ordered him to practice philosophy and to improve fellow Athenians (*Apology*, 29d-30b).

<sup>54</sup> *Euthyphro*, 4b.

bringing your father to trial?"<sup>55</sup> At the end of the dialogue after Socrates has shown Euthyphro that he does not know what are piety and impiety and that he does not know whether or not the prosecution of his father is just (though nonetheless Euthyphro maintains his resolve to prosecute his father), readers recognize that Euthyphro's last, best judgment about what is to be done is unreliable and perhaps even erroneous. Similar struggles over other specific positive judgments also are played out dramatically in the *Apology* as questions arise about the reliability of the Athenians' concrete positive judgments that sanction the prosecution, conviction, and sentence of Socrates and in the *Crito* as Socrates considers Crito's proposal of escape.

A second truth tricky to draw out is the moral implications of Socrates' arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* and his mythic stories at end of the *Apology* and in the *Phaedo* about the afterlife. Perhaps they have no moral implications. But that is hard to believe. The poetry composition that Socrates is engaged in at the beginning of the *Phaedo* is, as he says, a matter of conscience, and several times in the course of the *Phaedo* Socrates and his friends indicate that they could spend Socrates' last few hours no better than thinking about whether death is the end. Socrates remains a serious person until his last breath.

If Socrates' arguments and stories do have moral consequences, what might they be? Here is one suggestion. All four of Socrates' arguments for immortality fail at some level. Even if they prove that the human soul survives death, they fail to prove personal immortality—that the same particular person survives death as was alive before death. Likewise, even if they prove personal immortality, they fail to show that a disembodied human soul can function. Finally, even if they prove that it can function, they say nothing about the normal business in the afterlife. The mythic stories, however, that dominate the end of the *Apology* and *Phaedo* do fill in the details on both personal immortality, disembodied functions, and the normal business in the afterlife. Those details give reason to hope for an afterlife and give ultimate meaning to the pursuit of knowledge, goodness, and virtue that Socrates urged and engaged in his entire life but that never fully reached its completion. Without a personal afterlife something like the one Socrates describes, that lifelong pursuit has less clearly a point. In fact, it looks rather absurd. It is a road to nowhere.

Socrates admits that his tale about the afterlife is made-up, but he nonetheless insists that the belief in it is worth the risk. In fact, he says, "a man should repeat this [tale] to himself as if it were an incantation."<sup>56</sup> The point of the tale seems to provide a satisfactory answer to the perennial question: why be moral? What does it matter in the end whether people are good or bad, fools or wise, cruel or kind, virtuous or vicious? Philosophy has no satisfactory answer. Proofs for the immortality of the soul do not entail personal immortality, and proofs for personal immortality do not entail anything about the content of the afterlife. Thus, some of the most important questions philosophy cannot answer. But believing, hoping, and longing that the story of human persons does not end uncompleted with their death but rather continues and reaches its perfection in an afterlife is the better way to live—the way one ought to live. This way of living might be called *the principle of faith, hope, and love*.

Socrates dies calmly and cheerfully with faith in and hope for better things to come, and that way of dying is the best testimony to the belief in the afterlife that Socrates can offer. Thus, besides his many splendid examples of how to live well, Socrates also displays how to die well. With that display, Socrates offers one final piece of evidence

<sup>55</sup> *Euthyphro*, 4e.

<sup>56</sup> *Phaedo*, 114d.

that he was a remarkable individual in whom was found an admirable agreement between thought and action.

Socrates has had his critics, of course. One of the sharpest and shrillest in recent decades is I. F. Stone, who in *The Trial of Socrates*<sup>57</sup> claims that Socrates, among other things, was: insulting, arrogant, ostentatious, pretentious, condescending, boastful, snobbish, mock-modest, prejudiced, contemptuous, derisive, talkative, lacking in candor, dissembling, querulous, crotchety, inconsistent, nonsensical, neglectful, subversive, defamatory, compassionless, insensitive, self-aggrandizing, suicidal, anti-egalitarian, anti-political, anti-democratic, and anti-Athenian. He also adds: a bad husband, a bad father, and a slacker. In short, the Socrates that emerges from Stone's reading of the primary texts differs greatly from the moral and intellectual exemplar described here.

Which Socrates is more accurate? Only a close, intelligent, and charitable reading of the primary texts can settle the question about which description of Socrates is closer to the mark. The reading of the primary texts (at least the Platonic texts) also has to be sophisticated because Plato was a sophisticated author. In various ways, Plato does not communicate his own thought openly and explicitly. The dialogue form veils his meaning. Some things are clearly ironic. Other things are reached by extrapolation. Still other things are not stated but rather displayed or exhibited as the dramatic action of the dialogues unfolds. With Plato, intelligent readers have to ask themselves continually why a given dialogue is written the way it is. They have to pay attention to who speaks, who fails to speak, when a person speaks or remains silent, when a person arrives or departs, what is the connection between the character of the person speaking and the position the person defends, why are various positions presented in the order that they are, and much more.

Despite the many challenges in reading Plato and the need to let a careful reading of the primary texts determine who was Socrates, here are three indications that Stone's description of Socrates is not the more accurate one. First, Stone regards Socrates' pursuit of rationality as in his search for precise and rigorous definitions as "a wild goose chase" that often leads "nonsensical directions" and to "absurd statements."<sup>58</sup> The precise and rigorous definitions that Stone is talking about are verbal formulations that capture the core reality of what is defined and that apply to everything defined and nothing else. Because good definitions apply to what one is trying to define and nothing else, they are exceptionless. Another good term for *exceptionless* definitions is *absolute* definitions, and the latter is what Stone settles on. But Stone cannot even state his complaint about Socrates' absolutism regarding definitions without contradicting himself. Stone says, "The fact that all laws and general propositions have their exceptions does not destroy the value of laws and generalizations as guides to human conduct."<sup>59</sup> Notice, though, if all general propositions have exceptions, then what about Stone's own general proposition just quoted? Does it have exceptions or not? If it does not, then Stone's claim that all general propositions have exceptions is false because his own general proposition is exceptionless. If Stone's claim does have exceptions, then the exception would be certain exceptionless or absolute laws or general propositions, in which case Stone's claim is false yet again. Stone is trapped in a performative contradiction.

<sup>57</sup> See I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (New York: Double Day, 1989).

<sup>58</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 77.

In addition, Stone is simply wrong when he describes Socrates' pursuit of precise and rigorous definitions as a foolish pursuit of the unattainable (“a wild goose chase”) and as “impossible standards of Socratic logic.”<sup>60</sup> Attentive readers of Plato recognize that progress in finding good definitions is regularly made in the course of the dialogues. In the *Euthyphro*, as already mentioned, a rather good definition of *piety* is hit upon: piety is a part of justice, namely, the part that is a kind of service of the gods.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the term *service* is also given content. The service is said to consist in prayer and sacrifice -- in begging and in giving. The term *giving* is given content as well. It is said to consist in honor, reverence, and gratitude.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, a fine example of honoring and gratitude to the gods is displayed in the *Euthyphro* and indeed in the entire life of Socrates: using the gift of rationality to the best of one's ability.

Stone, in the end, is much like Euthyphro. Euthyphro can identify several elements of the definition of *piety*, but he does not recognize his own intellectual successes and soon argues himself into circles. Stone can recognize what Socrates is attempting, but he does not notice the advances Socrates makes and instead reasons himself into contradictions. Attentive readers, in contrast to both Euthyphro and Stone, do recognize the progress in the dialogue and appreciate the definition of *piety* that comes to light.

Second, Stone finds Socrates to be cold-hearted or compassionless when in the *Euthyphro* Socrates challenges Euthyphro, a bumptious Athenian, who is in the midst of eagerly prosecuting his own father for murder.<sup>63</sup> The story is that, after a servant (drunken and angry) of Euthyphro's family killed one of their slaves, Euthyphro's father responded by binding the servant and throwing him in a ditch. He left the servant there while inquiries were made about what should be done with the killer. While the father waited for replies to his inquiries, the servant died because the father failed to attend to the servant's needs. Nowhere in the dialogue does Socrates ever express pity for the poor servant as Stone thinks Socrates should. Stone also thinks Socrates' sense of justice is distorted because he takes exception to Euthyphro's treatment of his father.<sup>64</sup>

Stone's charge of cold-heartedness and injustice has several problems, however. One, nobody in the dialogue shows any pity at the plight of either the dead servant or the dead slave, not Euthyphro, nor Socrates, nor Euthyphro's father and family. Thus, Stone's sensibilities are his own and supported by nothing in the dialogue. Two, Euthyphro himself says that he is “thought crazy to prosecute” his father.<sup>65</sup> Similarly Euthyphro's father and relatives are outraged at Euthyphro's prosecution. Part of their anger centers on the charge: murder. The father did not kill the servant. The Athenian equivalent of reckless or negligent homicide is the more appropriate charge. Thus, Socrates is not the only person who is dubious of Euthyphro for good reasons. There are good reasons to be dubious. Three, Euthyphro is supremely confident in the justice of his actions. Readers should be more hesitant. Nor should they blame Socrates, if he is hesitant. Euthyphro's prosecution creates a colossal conflict of interests that is obvious to anybody. Does Stone really think the impartiality that justice demands is ensured when family members are both defendants and plaintiffs? Recusal was the appropriate way for Euthyphro to handle his father's case. Four, Euthyphro is also supremely

<sup>60</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Euthyphro*, 12d-e and 13d. See I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 147, for his view that the dialogue makes no progress on the definition of piety.

<sup>62</sup> *Euthyphro*, 14b-15a.

<sup>63</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 146-149.

<sup>64</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 149-152.

<sup>65</sup> *Euthyphro*, 4a.

confident that his actions are pious. But are they? They certainly do not seem to be pious toward or honoring of his father. Nor is the sort of hostility that precedes and results from dragging another person into court something between father and son that is clearly commendable and approved from a God's eye point of view.

Stone's also misjudges in another way the justness of Socrates in the *Euthyphro* because Stone does not understand the demands of justice, specifically retributive justice. Stone thinks Euthyphro had "an obligation as a human being and a citizen to see that justice was done,"<sup>66</sup> and Stone clearly thinks the obligation is absolute or exceptionless (that it, it is obligatory regardless of conditions, circumstances, consequences, ultimate purposes, the identity of the acting person, and so forth), even though he mocks the idea of exceptionless moral obligations elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> But retributive justice, while truly good, is not a good that must always be pursued, and for many sound reasons it might not be pursued. Sometimes punishment leads to more crime, to more injustice, to more danger, or to other undesirable outcomes such as large expenditures of time, money, and effort that one prefers to direct elsewhere. When punishment has these results, not pursuing it is sensible. Similarly, that retributive justice is good does not entail that every person has an equal obligation to pursue it. Retributive justice, like so many goods in this world, is attractive and worth pursuing. But since the same can be said for other goods and the pursuit of some of them is incompatible with the pursuit of others, no specific good is absolutely obligatory. Even less must a specific good always be pursued to a specific degree. Still less must a concrete instantiation of a specific good (like the prosecution of Euthyphro's father) always be pursued.

Third, on the critical question of Socrates' role in his own death, Stone argues that he committed suicide. His argument is unconvincing. In fact, it is quite poor. He says Socrates "chose death over a renewed chance of life. The choice he made was voluntary, and therefore the equivalent of suicide."<sup>68</sup> Here Stone is mistaken. Socrates' choice was not the equivalent of suicide. Socrates chose compliance with the Athenian jury's sentence and non-escape from prison. He accepted his death as a consequence of those choices. Stone's confused logic about choices leads to one absurdity after another. His logic would make parents murderers because they choose to bring children into this world even though they know the children will ultimately die. It would mean that investors welcome and desire their losses when their ventures fail because they choose to invest even though they know that their investments might fail. It would entail that the various ill effects of medical treatment like chemotherapy (hair loss, nausea, vomiting, a compromised immune system, and so forth) are the object of choice because doctors and patients know that those are the consequences of that treatment. It would mean that Stone wanted the embarrassment of having his shoddy reasoning exposed here. After all, he voluntarily wrote what he wrote and then published it in a book.

Where exactly does Stone's logic go wrong? Answer: the source of Stone's confusion lies in the failure to make a simple distinction between the foreseen and the chosen or intended. The two are not equivalent, and the former does not imply the latter. What person P knows may or definitely will result when person P acts is not the same as what person P wills as an end or as the means to whatever end person P wills. Thus, not everything a person knows will (or likely will) be brought about by an action is

<sup>66</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 148.

<sup>67</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 76-77.

<sup>68</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 195.

intended. Many things that are brought about lie beyond the scope of intention. The conceptually precise term for things brought about in this way is *unintended consequences*, but other terms are also serviceable: *side effects* (commonly used in medicine), *collateral damage* (the favored jargon when the bad results are from military operations), and *externalities* (preferred in economics). While unintended consequences are not willed in the precise sense of *chosen* or *intended*, they are willed or voluntary in some way. Specifically, one willingly goes forward with a proposed action that one knows may (or definitely will) bring about the unintended consequences that one has foreseen, as opposed to doing something else that does not have the unintended consequences or as opposed to doing nothing at all. Because unintended consequences are voluntarily brought about, people are responsible for them. They own the unintended consequences. Because the unintended consequences are often bad, the moral goodness of people is at risk. Sometimes bringing about bad unintended consequences indeed makes people morally bad, and sometimes bringing them about does not. But sorting out the exact criteria for when unintended consequences are or are not morally justified is not needed to recognize that Stone fails even to make the critical distinction presupposed by the criteria: not all that is foreseen is intended.

The accurate way of describing Socrates' actions, as a result, is not that he chose death or that he committed suicide. Just because he knew that the choices that he made would lead to his death and he could have made alternative choices that would have preserved his life does not mean his death was intended. Rather, the accurate description is that Socrates chose to follow the sentence of the Athenian court by remaining in prison and drinking hemlock as ordered and that he accepted his death as an unintended consequence of that choice.

In the end, Stone's iconoclastic account of Socrates is suspect. The closer one looks at Stone's claims the more suspect is Stone's account. It is the product of bad reasoning (as shown above), as well as (but not shown here) tendentious interpretations of primary texts, conjecture about counterfactuals of the form "had Socrates done X instead of Y, then Z would have resulted," and debatable assertions about the historical context of Socrates' life. Perhaps even worse, Stone's Socrates is at the end of the day not even an interesting figure with anything valuable to say. Instead, he is a forgettable jerk.

Alternatively, Socrates' words and actions in Plato's four dialogues that chronicle Socrates' final weeks, when examined sympathetically, give witness to many important moral truths: the ten identified here and still others. Because Socrates' moral insight is particularly keen, he is a friendly guide worth listening to. Because Socrates' own life is so exemplary, his life is a model worth imitating. Socrates lived strictly in accord with his moral principles even when doing so meant his death. So extraordinary was this man Socrates that his friends considered him to be "the best, and also the wisest and the most upright"<sup>69</sup> person that they ever knew and even his executioner, who wept at Socrates' death, said he was "the noblest, the gentlest, and the best man"<sup>70</sup> that he ever was required to execute.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Phaedo*, 118a.

<sup>70</sup> *Phaedo*, 116c.

<sup>71</sup> Though the secondary literature on Socrates is enormous, readers interested in that literature have to begin somewhere. A few recommendations for further reading are the works by Nails, Rowe, Ober, Millett, Reeve, Brickhouse, and Smith in the bibliography. The notes and references in these works readily connect readers to the larger universe of Socratic literature.

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# CRITICAL THINKING: ON DOROTHY L. SAYERS APPROACH

Javier Aranguren<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Dorothy L. Sayers pronounced her conference *The Lost Tools of Learning* in 1947. By that time she was quite famous in UK as a detective novels writer. In fact, that year she began being the President of the *Detection Club*, founded by herself and G. K. Chesterton in 1928.

Nevertheless in 1947 Sayers was no interested anymore in writing novels. She was focused in her translation of Dante's *Comedy*, and she was far more interested in writing essays than fiction. After the Second World War her commitment was to understand the *Mind of the Maker* (the act of creation by God and by Man) and the meaning of work and laity. For her these topics were necessary to avoid the possibility of another crisis like the one that had just devastated Europe. Sayers was convinced of how nihilism could be overcome only through meaning or sense, and through education.

## 1. A problem on education

But what is it to *educate*? It is such a common activity, it belongs so much to the daily life, that most of us do not even care about the real meaning of that activity. Every time in History the human being has a problem of perspective. Man tends to think that his moment, his present, even his place, is the good one, and so he puts in dire straits the chance to learn from the past and to improve his future.

Sayers decided to try to learn from the past. She looked at her present and she didn't like what she saw. Although she considered herself an *amateur* in education, one excellent reason for her to "feel entitled to have an opinion about education" was that "if we are not all professional teachers, we have all, at some time or another, been taught. Even if we learnt nothing—perhaps in particular if we learnt nothing—our contribution to the discussion may have a potential value."<sup>2</sup>

Sayers uses in her text two important resources: a witty sense of humor, and an open mind against specialization. The first resource, *humor*, helps to engage the audience. It is like oil in a machinery. The audience gets confident with the speaker and both share a sense of complicity. The second, her openness to give opinions even if it is not her field of specialization is deeply related to her doctrine: she has not learned a specialized field to talk about, just a small dot in the universe of knowledge, but the tools that make her able to talk about the main concerns of humankind. And one of these concerns is, indeed, education.

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<sup>2</sup> We will follow D. Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, reprinted with the kind permission of David Higham Associates, London, UK, for distribution through the Cary Christian School website ([www.carychristianschool.org](http://www.carychristianschool.org)), 2016, p. 4. There is a recent translation into Spanish: Dorothy L. Sayers, *Aprender y trabajar. Introducción, traducción y notas de Javier Aranguren* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2019).

Sayers begins her *The Lost tools of Learning* pointing out two interesting ideas. The first one underlines how “that artificial prolongation of intellectual childhood and adolescence into the years of physical maturity which is so marked in our own day.”<sup>3</sup> In the Medieval Age the students used to join the university (if they did so) at fourteen or fifteen<sup>4</sup>. Now they come at 18 and they are not even ready to work with intellectual tools. “The stock argument in favor of postponing the school-leaving age and prolonging the period of education generally is there is now so much more to learn than there was in the Middle Ages. This is partly true, but not wholly. The modern boy and girl are certainly taught more subjects— but does that always mean that they actually know more?.”<sup>5</sup> She is not optimistic about this possible relationship: subjects and knowledge don’t go always together.

In fact, Sayers insists, it is sad to realize “that today, when the proportion of literacy throughout Western Europe is higher than it has ever been, people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard of and unimagined.”<sup>6</sup> And these lines were not written in a moment of compulsory consumption or when the short messages of Twitter or WhatsApp were the main source of literature for the young (and adult) generation. Do the students today know how to disentangle fact from opinion and the proven from the plausible? Do they have a critical capacity?

If we go to the political debate, at least in many democracies, we could face a similar pessimistic impression. “Have you ever, in listening to a debate among adult and presumably responsible people, been fretted by the extraordinary inability of the average debater to speak to the question, or to meet and refute the arguments of speakers on the other side?”, asks Sayers.<sup>7</sup> And we have, for sure. The same thing usually happens in work meetings, in the newspapers, in the biases and tribalism that we find and back up everyday in the social networks. Can the students today be easily manipulated by the Media, the Social Networks, the common places or the political correctness and the public indoctrination campaigns?

## 2. A proposal for a solution

Dorothy L. Sayers proposes a solution to this concerns. For her “the great defect of our education today [is] that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils ‘subjects’, we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning.”<sup>8</sup> To use other words, Sayers defends that Education should be more concentrated in teaching *habits* that in, for example, memorizing the name of the capitals cities in East Africa. At the end of the day, that can be acquired without any teacher, but the *habits*, cannot. The habits are closely related to craftsmanship. To learn them every student needs a *master*, a *personal trainer*, that will show to the pupil how to learn by herself. The capital cities can be memorized by heart at any moment, but the tools of learning need accompaniment and expertise. An example: the *core curriculum system* does not consist just in reading text. The

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Javier Aranguren, *La universidad, sus alumnos y sus profesores* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2019), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Idem.

<sup>7</sup> Idem.

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 10.

conversation, the debate, is the most important moment of learning. Hutchins, Adler or the Aspen Institute work always with this idea.<sup>9</sup>

In the Medieval Syllabus this idea was also present. In the *Trivium* Grammar and Dialectic were no ‘subjects’ but “methods of dealing with subjects. Grammar, indeed, is a “subject” in the sense that it does mean definitely learning a language—at that period it meant learning Latin. But language itself is simply the medium in which thought is expressed. *The whole of the Trivium was, in fact, intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before he began to apply them to “subjects” at all.*”<sup>10</sup> The main goal of this stage of education was “not merely to write an essay on paper, but to speak audibly and intelligibly from a platform, and to use his wits quickly when heckled.”<sup>11</sup>

It means that the student was playing a game. Doesn’t happen the same with sports today? The children learn how to play soccer by playing, and meanwhile they learn also the rules, how to cheat to the referee, how to improve their technique, or how to play as a team. The players don’t sit down in a classroom to get theory first: they learn by living, it is a practical experience.

How does a person learn how to play a game, or an instrument? Playing it before knowing how to play it. Any person that has had a neighbor trying to learn how to play the violin knows what we are saying. “We learn the things that we don’t know by doing them”<sup>12</sup>: building houses, playing a guitar..., or learning to learn.

If “modern education concentrates on teaching subjects, leaving the method of thinking, arguing, and expressing one’s conclusions”, “*mediaeval education concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning*, using whatever subject came handy as a piece of material on which to doodle until the use of the tool became second nature.”<sup>13</sup> Aristotle considered that *culture* was like a *second nature*, the moral development of the human being, the ‘learning how to live’ of the human being. The greek idea of *paideia*, as well as the Medieval idea of *formation*, has more to do with uprising a character than with learning a ‘subject’. It has more to do with learning how to learn or with cultivating a critical thinking attitude that at the end should become natural to the student.

Nowadays “we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words (...). We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda with a smattering of ‘subjects’.”<sup>14</sup> Sayers is suggesting that the students don’t need to get to sources of information (they are indeed at hand), but just how to deal with them. We can remember a metaphor proposed by Sayers’ friend, C. S. Lewis in his book *Miracles*: a young girl in a Pharmacy is at risk of

<sup>9</sup> Robert. M. Hutchins, “The Aims of Education”, in *Education for Freedom*, (Louisiana: Louisiana UP, 1947), 19–38.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethic*, III, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 13. On this topic: Javier Aranguren, “El renacimiento del pensamiento crítico en las primeras universidades”, en *La universidad, sus alumnos y sus profesores*, 13–39.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 16.

taking medicines just because they are ‘very attractive red pills’<sup>15</sup>. If the girl has the access to all the medicines but not the skills to deal with them, she is in a clear danger, “unarmed and unequipped”.

### 3. Sayers’ program and stages

As Sayers is offering the tools of learning, her proposal has to be started at the beginning of the educational process. The Author makes a distinction among three different stages: “the Poll-Parrot, the Pert, and the Poetic—the latter coinciding, approximately, with the onset of puberty.”<sup>16</sup> She classifies these three moments, closely related to the different stages of the human psychological development. “The Poll-Parrot stage is the one in which learning by heart is easy and, on the whole, pleasurable.”<sup>17</sup> It is the age to exorcize more memory than reason. The age of rhymes and rhythm.

After that should come the Pert age. A time to quarrel, contradict, answer back, liking to catch people out (specially the elders), as a signal of the arriving of someone who was not there before: a Person, a novelty.

“The Poetic age is popularly known as the ‘difficult’ age. It is self-centered; it yearns to express itself; it rather specializes in being misunderstood; it is restless and tries to achieve independence; and, with good luck and good guidance, it should show the beginnings of creativeness; a reaching out towards a synthesis of what it already knows, and a deliberate eagerness to know and do some one thing in preference to all others.”<sup>18</sup>

Stage	Age	Trivium
Poll Parrot	9 to 11	Grammar
Pert	12 to 14	Dialectic
Poetic	15 to 16	Rethoric
University	16 to ...	Quadrivium (College)

Relationship among stages, age and Trivium

Each learning age fits with a different moment of maturity.

*Poll-Parrot* for children; *Pert* for the maturity of childhood. *Poetic* for the teens. It would be a big error to deal with the students using tools that they are not yet ready to use or from which they have already gone beyond. At the same time, each age and each layer in the learning process is related with one of the three fields of the Trivium: *Grammar* for *Poll-Parrot* children (including latin and other languages, so that they can structure the mind of the learner). They will learn about other topics (History, Geography, Science, Maths, even Theology) always in a *Poll-Parrot* way: through anecdotes and events, maps, studying the classification of the spices or the

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study*, (London: Collins, 2012), ch. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>18</sup> *Idem.*, 19.

multiplication table and “the students should become acquainted with the story of God and Man in outline—i.e., the Old and New testaments presented as parts of a single narrative of Creation, Rebellion, and Redemption—and also with the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. At this early stage, it does not matter nearly so much that these things should be fully understood as that they should be known and remembered.”<sup>19</sup> All these things are perfect for this level. Of course, they would be a joke if at the other two levels they continued studying with this layout.

Something analogous would apply for the Pert and the Poetic stages. Sayer’s proposal reviews learning materials always using a sloping learning process so that the students start reading little by little deeper texts having always in mind that what the students really need to do is to exercise their rational and critical capacities. It doesn’t matter the topic as much as the use of “the spontaneous development of the ratiocinative faculty and the natural and proper thirst of the awakening reason for the definition of terms and exactness of statements. All events are food for such an appetite. An umpire’s decision; the degree to which one may transgress the spirit of a regulation without being trapped by the letter: on such questions as these children are born casuists, and their natural propensity only needs to be developed and trained—and especially, brought into an intelligible relationship with the events in the grown-up world.”<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Sayers’ diagnostic is not optimistic. She expresses the opinion that the Western World has been making a living from its capital, “but one cannot live on capital forever»<sup>21</sup>. The roots have been neglected. «We have lost the tools of learning—the axe and the wedge, the hammer and the saw, the chisel and the plane—that were so adaptable to all tasks. Instead of them, we have merely a set of complicated jigs, each of which will do but one task and no more, and in using which eye and hand receive no training, so that no man ever sees the work as a whole or ‘looks to the end of the work’.”<sup>22</sup>

Sayers demands the return of reflexion, of philosophy, of the skills provided by the critical thinking attitude. This has all to do with the formation of a character. Instead of that our students are lost piling tasks and working hard... but having nowhere to go. The educational structure has been built upon sand. The students work hard, but they do not achieve the only true end of education: to teach men how to learn for themselves, to provide tools for them so that they can become free and think out of the cave, out of the box, by themselves.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *idem*, 20–24.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem.*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem.*

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# PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE IN ISOCRATES' SCHOOL

## A reading of the antidosis speech<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Since the past few decades there has been a renewed interest in the approach to ancient philosophy which understands it firstly and foremost as a way of life, and from this interest there have been throughout thought methods to the study of ancient philosophy, like the one developed prominently by Pierre Hadot. This interest towards ancient philosophy as a way of life is seen both in the academia and also in the public. While within the academia, as it is natural to its milieu, the approach remains a detached one, in the general public the demand for such an approach is also a demand in connection to value education, among other things. In other words, in academia one tends to go into this subject as a mere historiographical phenomenon being guided by research questions such as: In what extent is the philosophical production in antiquity related to a certain practice of spiritual exercises typical of the philosophical school out of which this or that philosophical work emerged? The general public, on the other hand, tends to regard this field looking rather for a source in the earliest roots of western civilization for value education, and generally also for wisdom suitable for today's world. This kind of public interest towards antiquity in general and towards ancient philosophy in particular impose a big task to academics, namely the task of addressing the question of how to bring ancient philosophy closer to the public to contribute to the value and character education. It is often the case that the endeavor of interpretation and detached argumentation of academics in this field becomes so detailed and abstract, that the gap between the academic work and the public interest become so large, that the latter can almost not profit from the first at all. I believe that the gap might be shortened, among other endeavors, with the aid of didactics in general, and subject didactics (ger. *Fachdidaktik*), in particular. Didactics has often, among its duties, the task of purveying overviews. The idea of a way of life can be put in the foreground in the introduction to the history philosophy, which is a main subdiscipline of its didactics (that is, the didactics of general philosophy). This can and should be made especially in the case of antiquity.

I would like in this paper to contribute to the broad picture of ancient philosophy as a way of life and as spiritual exercises, as presented and defended particularly by Pierre Hadot, by trying to present how does philosophy and a philosophical school looked like in the texts of one contemporary of Plato, called by some his big contender: Isocrates. In order to do that I will also dedicate some words to Hadot's approach.

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We will focus on just one of Isocrates speeches, the *Antidosis* speech, which stands out among his other works as a particularly important document for our purposes. The *Antidosis* speech of Isocrates is particularly important as a testimony of the understanding of philosophy as a way of life in vogue in classical Athens. One can at this point complain that the works of Isocrates are not unanimously considered among the core texts of Western tradition, and are far from being so considered when compared to those of Plato. Be that as it may, the plainness in which the text and its arguments unfold show us a pristine picture of how philosophy was conceived by some as way of life and of educating the character in the Athens in times of Plato, that it represent an invaluable testimony and in some regards a testimony without comparison so far I can tell. Didactically then, a first reading of the speech may provide the students with an insight of the lived practice of philosophy, in order to, after the lecture of the *Antidosis* speech, to venture the reading of a classical work of Plato like the *Menon*, or the *Gorgias* with this scope fresh in mind.

The paper will go first into a general introduction of the work in question. For that I will present an overview of the non-philosophical content of the speech (1.). The discussion of the philosophical aspects of the speech, that is, the discussion of the most important subjects of the work for my purposes here will be left to the third section (3.). Before that I will introduce some key concepts of Pierre Hadot's approach (2.). Finally, I will discuss some further ideas regarding the conception of philosophy outlaid in Isocrates' *Antidosis* (4.), in relation with rhetoric. For that I will briefly discuss the ideas of Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* about the essential trait of the public sphere in Classical Greece as compared to nowadays.

## 1. *Antidosis*-speech as a political and self-defense plea.

The *Antidosis* speech stands out among Isocrates' work for providing a portrait in first person of his life and deeds. While most of his other writings are either directly political speeches (v. g. *On Peace*, *Panegiricus*), which tackle mainly inner and outer political problems of Athens, or letters to his pupils and friends (v. g. *Letter to Nicocles*, *Letter to Demonicos*), which consist mostly of advices for the improvement of their virtue, the *Antidosis* is a fictional defense speech in which Isocrates gives an account of his whole life. It was written as he was 82 years old, as he himself tells us in the introduction<sup>3</sup>. The defense speech occurs within a fictional court trial in which Isocrates is accused of corrupting the youth, i. e. his pupils. Isocrates himself states the fictional character of the speech in the introduction, where he invokes as the motivation to write it a real court trial in which he was counter-demanded (a kind of trial called *Antidosis*) to pay a liturgy. Liturgies were a special tax imposed to rich Athenian citizens after a trial which was about showing that the demanded was wealthy enough to afford the tax. The tax consisted in the cost of one of the Greek warships, the trireme. The demanded could get discharged of the tax by means of demanding another citizen to pay the tax instead of him. This second trial was called *Antidosis*, and in it the accuser (i. e. the person who was previously tried to pay the liturgy) claimed the new demanded was wealthier than himself and that the latter should be charged with the liturgy instead of the first. In real life, Isocrates had been tried in the past by another wealthy citizen called Megaclides in one of those *Antidosis* trials, he lost the trial and had to pay the tax (cf. Guzmán Hermida, Vol. II, 75). His fictional *Antidosis* speech is accordingly not part

<sup>3</sup> If this date is correct, Isocrates wrote the *Antidosis* speech around 354-353 BC.

of his defense in that real *Antidosis*-prosecution. The fictional *Antidosis* speech we have was probably conceived as a personal discharge to restore the unfair reputation Isocrates got after the real trial of been an excessively rich citizen or of having not contributed to the city accordingly to his wealth. He himself states later in the text, that he always contributed to the city more than the strict amount the laws demanded from him to do (cf. 145-146). At any rate, after the real trial he should have gotten the impression not only that he was considered to be unfairly rich, but also the impression that he, his life and his work were deeply misunderstood, and that could be why he decided to write this fictional defense speech in which to give account of his life and deeds. Some of the passages of the text give us a great remembrance of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. In his defense, Isocrates provides a brief overview of his life.

The accusation of which the fictional speech is a defense was the typical accusation charged against the sophists, as I already said above: to corrupt the youth, charge famously pressed also against Socrates. In the speech Isocrates defends himself of the accusation by exposing his vision of philosophy, education and rhetoric. In it he also exposes his views about the political situation of Athens.<sup>4</sup> All these four subjects are addressed by Isocrates as closely connected and interwoven.

Isocrates first refers to the accusation and to the arguments supporting it. The accuser Lysimachus argues that Isocrates has another trait typical to the Sophists beside corrupting the youth, namely the ability to make the strongest argument to appear as the weakest and the weakest to appear to be the strongest. This strategy, claims Isocrates, is thought to let Isocrates appears guilty in both of the following scenarios: if he speaks well, which would hint that he is a sophist, and also if he speaks poorly, in which case his case (namely, to be innocent) will appear less true than Lysimachus' case, namely, that Isocrates is guilty (15-17).

He then goes on to complaint that it is often the case in trials, that after the accusers had exposed their case against the accused and drawing such a depiction of the accused in order that he gets disliked by the judges and the jury, the jury is than ill-disposed towards the accused and will not consider the defense's arguments with the same benevolence they heard the accusers arguments moments before. Another vice goes hand in hand with this, namely, the tendency of accusers to present calumnies in their accusations. If on average the trials show a tendency of prejudging guilt of the accused for the reason just exposed, which Isocrates claims is a fact in Athens more than other cities, that very fact makes the presenting of a calumnious accusation to be more probable to succeed than if the two parties were heard equally. The culture of calumnies has gone so far, continues Isocrates, that to have always strived for an honest life is no guarantee to be completely safe from accusations in Athens (17-28).

The indictment is read and the charge of corrupting the youth (i. e. his pupils) is stated: the corruption of the pupils is according to the indictment brought about by means of "teaching to speak and gain their own advantage in the courts contrary to justice" (30). Isocrates distinguishes the present accusation from the calumnies of which he was victim in the past and demands from the judges and the jury to attend exclusively on the present accusation, and to pay no attention to the calumnies of the past, and to judge him "to be the kind of man which the accusation and the defense in this trial will show me to be; for if you decide the case on this basis, you will have the

<sup>4</sup> He states that he always cared about the issues of the city, just like he did with respect to the issues of whole Greece (*panhellenism*). Like in other speeches, he stresses here his views about why Athens should be the leading city of Greece, how it rightly got to this leading role and how it should maintain its predominance over the other competing cities, especially Sparta.

credit of judging honourably and in accordance with the lay, while I, for my part, shall obtain my complete deserts" (32). Then he goes on to argue that, had he done any harm in the past, the victims of his mischievous acts would have come forward in this trial to speak against him. The fact that no such man shows up in the present trial is an indication that Isocrates never wronged anyone in the past (*cf.* 33-36). A central point of his defense is the claim that Isocrates is rather alien to the speeches pertaining to private court trials. This is important, because according to the accusation, the pupils of Isocrates used the rhetorical skills conveyed to them by him to unjustly profit from winning in such court trials by means of arguing fallaciously. But Isocrates states that he never concerned with private trial speeches, but almost exclusively with speeches of public or political affairs.<sup>5</sup> A further argument by means of which he sets himself apart from the writers of private trial speeches is pointing out to the fact that the writers of speeches for litigation are very numerous and that none of them "has ever been thought worthy to have pupils, while I, as my accuser states, have had more than all the rest together who are occupied with philosophy" (41). He then goes on to depict the kind of speeches he has specialized in, namely the political speeches. This kind of speeches is not only much nobler than the litigation speech, but also more pleasant to hear and "more akin to the works composed in rhythm and music than to the speeches which are made in court" (46-47). Besides, the writer of political speeches is inspired by philosophy, whereas the court speech writer is capable of writing merely thanks to the capacity of intrigue. Besides, the latter are only tolerated to speak during the trial, whereas the firsts are "held in high esteem in every society and at all times" (48-49). He then goes on to refer to his own occupation with politics, and in concrete with the writing of political speeches about the role of Greece in the world and about fostering and defending the hegemony of Athens in the Greek world. He let a clerk read passages of political speeches his published in the past, namely: the *Panegyricus* (§ 51-99), *On the Pease* (§ 25-56, § 132-145), and the discourse *To Nicocles* (§ 14-39). This last speech is addressed to Nicocles as he was the king of the Salaminians. Isocrates claims that in that speech he did not address the king as an adulator seeking the king's favor. On the contrary, "since in addressing a king I have spoken for his subjects, surely I would urge upon men who live under a democracy to pay court to the people". (70-71). To further exalt the dignity of this occupation of him (i. e. the writing of political speeches) he goes on to compare it with another worthy occupation, namely the creation of just laws. Hereby he claims that the creation of public speeches is even nobler than the creation of just laws, because "while any number of men both among the Hellenes and among the barbarians have been able to lay down laws, there are not many who can discourse upon questions of public welfare in a spirit worthy both of Athens and of Hellas" (80-81). Besides, he continues, given that the amount of political discourses and of laws are innumerable, whereas the legislator can easily copy laws already invented without having the need of feeling shame for having done this, the speaker should procure not to copy discourses of other while composing his own discourses, because the ones who do the such are "regarded as shameless babblers" (83). He later complains about the inadequacy of his accusers of using arguments that are equally employed against the innocent as against the guilty: just going on talking with long speeches about the mischievousness of sophistry does not contribute to the argument that the accused is indeed guilty of sophistry (88-92). Isocrates continues his defense and names a few renown students of his in order to further substantiate his plea that he

<sup>5</sup> He did actually work briefly as a Logograph writing private court trials before he founded his rhetorical or rather philosophical school.

did not corrupt his pupils, but rather that he contributed to the education not few of Athens's most prominent leaders, like Eunomus, Lysitheides, Callippus; Onetor, Anticles, Philonides, Philomelus and Charmantides (92-100). Isocrates then goes on to refer extensively about a friend of his and also a former pupil, the general Timotheus. He and his friendship with Isocrates were mentioned by the accuser Lysimachos in his speech of accusation, according to which both Isocrates and Timotheus appear shown as being bad citizens. Isocrates recovers the reputation of Timotheus claiming that he was the general who gained for the hegemony of Athens the submission of the most quantity of cities with the least resources. He praises Timotheus' strategic intelligence and his mercy and kindness in treating the subdued neighbor poleis, so that thanks to him, Athens did not appear threatening to them and therefore these fellow cities remained faithful to Athens's leadership. Likewise, he explained the bad reputation of Timotheus by invoking his lack of strategy and of talent in what we would now call *networking* or public relationship, that is, is neglect of flattering the other leading Athenian politicians he dealt with (101-139).

After that Isocrates goes back to his own defense. He reproduces a warning of an unnamed friend of him who told him once, that even though he procured his whole life to live honestly in order to have peace and avoid trouble with his fellow citizen, that precisely this peaceful and just way of life had irritate some of his fellow citizen, namely those who did not live honest lives themselves. This kind of peoples, so continues the warning of Isocrates' friend, are more annoyed with the innocent than with the criminals, because the life of the innocent and of the honest man constitutes a parameter, in comparison to which their vices get highlighted (140-154). Isocrates moves on to argue against the charge that he was unfairly rich. In order to counter this charge, he compares his own wealth with the wealth of the richest of the sophists, Gorgias, following hereby the idea, that people of similar or of the same profession should compare with one another and not with the average in general. In this vein, continues Isocrates, if they class Isocrates' wealth with Gorgias', this would not be a complete mislead estimation and it would show that Isocrates expended more on his public duties than on his private life (155-158).

As announced in the introduction we break here the commentary of the speech to expose next some traits of Pierre Hadot's approach to ancient philosophy as a way of life, which are of central importance for my purposes here. After that I go back to comment the second part of the *Antidosis* speech (158-323), which contains the most important passages for my reading of it.

## **2. Some notes on Pierre Hadot's approach to the study ancient philosophy**

Pierre Hadot is counted among the most significant historians of philosophy to recover the vision of ancient philosophy as a way of life in the past century. His approach has broadly two branches: on the one hand he defends a mayor thesis about the essence of ancient philosophy, that is, a broad answer to the question “what is ancient philosophy?”, and on the other hand he developed an exegetical approach to interpret ancient philosophical texts. Both aspects are intimately interwoven in his oeuvre. For economy of language we are going to call the first aspect of Hadot's work the thematic-panoramic one and the second aspect the methodological one (*cf.* Fernandez 2012).

## 2.1 The thematic–panoramic aspect of Hadot's approach

Hadot's mayor thesis in the thematic aspect of his oeuvre is that ancient philosophy throughout its history at least since Socrates is first and foremost a way of life. He claims furthermore that the aim of configuring the own life in a certain way and to live life guided by a certain ideal was a general and central trait shared by all philosophical schools and was moreover a trait present and central at the outburst of almost all philosophical production in antiquity. According to this one would be called a philosopher in antiquity if, and almost only if, he or she professed to conduct a certain way of life, namely the way of life specific to one of the known philosophical schools. In antiquity you could be perfectly considered a philosopher, with the full worthiness and dignity of such a title, regardless of the question whether you wrote philosophical texts or not. The developing of new philosophical theories, problems, ideas, or thoughts in the form of written texts was, unlike today's broad understanding of the term “philosopher”, no *sine qua non* condition to be regarded as a philosopher. One fine example of this difference between antiquity and today's conception of philosophy, which Pierre Hadot presents, is the roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who, even though he did write philosophy, he did this only for himself (the meditations he wrote were unknown on his lifetime), and was considered philosopher mostly because of the way of life he professed to conduct. It wasn't back then a sufficient condition, on the other hand, to write about philosophy to be considered a philosopher. In that regard we have the opposite example (opposite to the case of Marcus Aurelius) of Aulus Gellius, a roman writer, contemporary of the philosopher-emperor, who was indeed interested in philosophy and wrote about philosophy but who wasn't considered to be a philosopher, simply because he never professed to live a philosophical life (*cf.* Hadot 1992, 17). In addition, the choosing of one of the schools offered was according to Pierre Hadot an essential trait of the ones called philosophers: you wouldn't count as a philosopher if you did not pick a school for your own philosophical life conduct.

According to this broad and shifted (shifted in relation to the predominant current understanding today in respect to ancient philosophy) understanding of ancient philosophy, the central element of all philosophical activity was the pursuit of a virtuous life, and all philosophical production was in its core a certain variety of a spiritual exercises conceived to serve the purpose of the virtuous life, or at least had as it intended purpose to serve to a certain spiritual practice.

## 2.2 The methodological aspect of Pierre Hadot's approach

With this idea we arrive to the second aspect of Hadot's work: the methodological one. With this image of ancient philosophy as a way of life and as the practice of spiritual exercises in the back of the head, Hadot proposes, one must always try to examine ancient philosophical texts, that is, one must regard the text under the light of the ancient representation of a certain life and pursue of it guided by the ideal proposed by the philosophical school, to which both the author and his addressee of the text belonged. There are three prescriptions for the interpreter of ancient philosophy, which condense the approach of Pierre Hadot, each concerning one of the following issues: first, the intention of the author, second, the genre of the work studied, and third, its context (I thank Arnold I. Davidson for this schematical rendering of Hadot's method. *cf.* Arnold I. Davidson 1-47, in Hadot 1995a)

These aspects are to be understood as three prescriptions for the scholar confronting any philosophical text in antiquity. Thus, one must ask oneself, first, what is the

formative *intention* of the author of the text, that is, in which way is he intending with these ideas and sentences to contribute to the spiritual improvement and formation of his disciples (or of himself in some cases). Secondly, the scholar should ask himself, what was the *literary genre* to which the text pertained. According to Hadot the manifold of the genres was brought about by the vast plurality of contexts of oral teaching and practice of philosophy as well as the variety of the contexts of oral communication between master and disciple.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, the third aspect, the *context*, is partly about the general conception of philosophy at the time (that's why this part of the method is especially close to the thematic-panoramic aspect of Hadot's oeuvre referred above), and specifically about the philosophical life out of which the oeuvre in question emerges. (Let us note marginally, that another aspect of the context, but one which is not important for our purposes here, is the phenomenon of *contresens*, which we can translate, following Arnold Davidson, as *transposition*, and which consisted in the mutations of meanings due to the transfer of concepts doctrines sentences and so forth from one tradition, from one context, from one school or from one epoch to another.) A further aspect of the *context* is constituted by the studies of the *topoi*, the study of the formulae, images and metaphors, which are forced upon the author, who sees himself compelled to use them, but who usually tends to give this imposed pattern a meaning and a function which serves his purposes, functions and meanings which were absent in their original formulations. As also a part of the studies of the *topoi* Hadot considers the study, and this is for central importance for his purposes, of the topics of meditation and self-control stretched in the practice of lived philosophy, like the topic of conceiving philosophical life as a preparation to death, famously taken up by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (67d). Finally, the context includes also the rather sociological question of how was philosophy and philosophical life perceived by non-philosophers, which could include the study of the vision of philosophy from non-philosophical authors, like comedians speaking about philosophers (*cf.* Arnold I. Davidson 1-47, in Hadot 1995a).

### 3. The *Antidosis* speech and Isocrates' conception of philosophy

While looking at Isocrates's text closer I will focus mostly on the thematic-panoramic aspect of Hadot's approach, that is, the lived practice and the inner conception of philosophy. Hereby I claim that the *Antidosis* speech is not suitable to be interpreted under scope of Hadot's method. Nonetheless, I will argue that the speech in question represents a fine testimony to foster the thematic-panoramic aspect of Pierre Hadot's approach. In the section [4.] I will expose, among other things, my own thesis with regard to Isocrates conception of philosophy and rhetoric, namely that he conceived

<sup>6</sup> This aspect of Hadot's proposal regarding the literary genres is of especial concern for the critic Hadot stresses to the widespread approach which overlooks the question regarding the literary genres. Hadot says that the interpreters of ancient prose (especially philosophy) often carry out their work under the (most of the times erroneous) assumption, that the oeuvres studied are *treatises* of philosophy, that is, works destined to the public mainly proposing theories or problems of a certain kind, thought of as contribution to the shared and public enterprise of moving forward philosophical theory. This approach is problematic because it presupposes some methodological decisions, whose deliberation is in the most cases not even tackled beforehand as it should properly be. That means, that these decisions are taken the most of the times without being considered as such, as decisions, but being considered just as the natural and only way of carrying out the philosophical interpretation of works of ancient philosophy. This is firstly problematic since the literary genre called "philosophical treatise" didn't come to be the predominant genre in philosophy until the modern era. In the Antiquity it wasn't predominant at all. (*cf.* for instance Hadot 1995a, 269).

both rhetoric and philosophy as aspects of the same art, which consists in the proper taking care of central issues of life by means of the speech: while rhetoric focuses on the public issues by means of the public speech, philosophy focuses on the private or rather inner issues by means of the inner speech.

### 3.1 Rendering of the second part of the content of the *Antidosis* speech (resuming where we left in section [1.] )

Briefly after comparing his own wealth with Gorgias' (see above at the end of section [1.]), Isocrates goes into the subject of education, where he explains the central place it has for the *polis*. Just as the education is shaped, he claims, so will later become the *polis*. The elders are gradually but constantly handing down the dealings of the *polis* to the youth. And in order to do that, they have to bring them up so the youth becomes able to deal with such issues and to replace the older generation in this task. In order for education to fulfil that role in the handing over of the responsibilities of the *polis* to the youth, learning oratory was central. The issues of the *polis* were tackled first and foremost through the practice of public speeches (174).

About philosophy, Isocrates describes it while making a comparison with the body and presenting thereby a twofold vision of man: man is according to that a being with two natures: the body and the soul. Whereas the body is to be trained by the discipline called gymnastic, the discipline which is in charge of the training of the soul is philosophy (180-185). Both gymnastic and philosophy are similar and complementary: both have similar teaching (*didaskalíais*) and training (*gymnasíais*) methods and other kinds of instructions (*epimeleíais*) are also similar in them both (“*tais didaskaliais kai tais gymnasiais kai tais allais epimeleiais*” (ταῖς διδασκαλίαις καὶ ταῖς γυμνασίαις καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐπιμελείαις) [183]. Think here of Socrates's famous formula of the care of the soul, *epimeleía tes psyches* (ἐπιμελεία τῆς ψυχῆς), Platon, Apology 30b. *Epimeleía* can be translated both as instruction (as we do here in Isocrates' passage) or as 'care' (as is usually done in the Socrates quote just referred to.)

The philosopher is furthermore compared with a sport teacher in the *Antidosis* speech (183). Just like it happens in gymnastics, the theories (*ai dóxai, ai dóξαι*) in philosophy are nothing more than the instructions or explanations which are given to the disciple at the beginning of his training, and whose purpose consists mainly of assisting the exercise and the use (184). The sport teacher and the philosopher contribute, respectively, to the bodily constitution and to the intellectual capacity of the disciple. But no teacher and no master of philosophy can grant to make a full-fledged athlete or a full-fledged speaker of his pupil. There is neither a science nor a method which could grant this with complete certainty (185).

The necessary conditions for the rhetoric education, continues Isocrates, are the following: innate aptitude, experience and formal training. Aptitude is the most important of them three (187-191). This point could be problematic if we take rhetoric as being a synonym with philosophy (what Isocrates sometimes tends to do): If only the especially talented one are able to receive a philosophical education, that would mean that philosophy (i.e. the training and education of the soul) would not be meant for everyone, but only for a reduced elite of exceptionally talented young men and women. Nonetheless, in a latter passage (209-214), Isocrates develop an argument for the idea that even the those who lack innate aptitude can gain from the education of the soul just like even the ones who are bodily weak can gain strength thanks to gymnastics. In this passage Isocrates refute those who criticize philosophy when they claim that the intellect cannot be made better through training. He stresses the paradox of both

thinking, on the one hand, that gymnastic can improve even the innately worst disposed (which is easily agreed upon by virtually everyone), but thinking at the same time, on the other hand, that the souls are not susceptible to be turned substantially better through education and proper care.

In the passage from 253 to 257 Isocrates develops a vision of man as a speaking being (*homo loquens* conception of man). According to him, that which distinguishes humans from other animals, is the faculty to convince (persuade) one another and to share to one another our wishes. This trait made us able to found *poleis*, to give ourselves laws, to create arts and crafts, and generally speaking “our ability to speak (*memechaneména lógos*, *μεμηχανημένα λόγος*) has helped us at almost all our creations and enterprises” (254).

In 271 Isocrates presents the thesis that there is no science about what is to be said or about what is to be done. Isocrates, thus, considers “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”. Thus, a philosopher will be nothing more than that man who pursues a certain virtue or excellence, the virtue of having the insight of what is to be done.

There is furthermore no science which can warrant to turn an evil man into a good one. But the oratory, the art of speaking, can make the pupil to a morally better man by inculcating in him the striving for honor. He who has a good reputation, alone because of this trait, convinces his audience more than the one who doesn't. That sole reason would turn the life of a man who seriously goes after a career as a speaker into a righteous man, because if you want to be respected and honored, you should behave accordingly (note that we are here dealing with a prudential [i. e. not moral] foundation of the pursuit of virtues, or even a nonmoral foundation of morality, cf. 273-280). He then criticizes those who claim those to be philosophizing who love the strange theories of the ancient sophists but disregard to apply the verb (i. e. the verb “to philosophize”) to those who take good care of the practical issues, both private and public. Note by the way that this criticism of Isocrates of the understanding of philosophy by some of his contemporaries can also be seen as a criticism *avant la lettre* against our general and most widespread reception of Isocrates, according to which he is not a philosopher but *merely* a rhetorician. This arguably unfair reception of Isocrates can be explained as a reception embedded in the *conventional* view on ancient philosophy as mere theory which Pierre Hadot lucidly criticized, about which we talked about above (see note 4).

#### **4. Commentary of the referred passages in [3.] under the scope of Hadot's approach.**

The speech of Isocrates is clearly not much susceptible to be studied under Hadot's prescriptions. The three prescriptions of Pierre Hadot are thought of as a tool case for those works which are to be considered first and foremost as the *written* register of a certain philosophical spiritual practice, mostly an *oral* one. Works like Plato's *Socrates' Apology* or Isocrates' *Antidosis* are biographical writings, and as such, they above all give an account of the life and deeds of the philosopher in question, they refer indirectly (as every biographical account would do) to the philosophical life of the philosopher, and don't consist themselves in the *written* register of philosophical exercise in action (leaving aside the argumentation found in the text itself, which can after all be considered as de written register of the argumentation which was part of the

philosophical life of the philosopher in question). Thus, Hadot's metaphor of the philosophical text of the antiquity as being like a CD (*cf.* Arnold I. Davidson 19, in Hadot 1995a), that is, a recording which connects experiences, one lived in the past and one to be lived in the future, would not apply, or would do so only vaguely or indirectly, to works of the vein of Isocrates' *Antidosis* or of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. In that sense, even though little susceptible of being studied under the scope of the three methodological prescriptions of Pierre Hadot, as we said, the speech *Antidosis* contributes as a testimony finely to foster the thematical-panoramic aspect of Pierre Hadot's approach, that is the image of ancient lived philosophy. It wouldn't be much fruitful to fully apply Hadot's method (i.e. to apply it to the letter) to the interpretation of this work. The reason is that the plain and literal application of his method presupposes (assumes) that the work studied is to be considered first and foremost as a spiritual exercise. Of course, no text is ever in itself a spiritual exercise, but it is rather a set of symbols pertaining to a symbol system (a language), which properly decoded purveys ideas, concepts, representations (images), notions and stories. With that being said, let us remember that according to Hadot that which is at stake at most philosophical activity in antiquity (and philosophical writings of antiquity are for Hadot almost always the written register of oral communication) is the practice of spiritual exercises, that is, a certain training in order to pursue an inner transformation and perfectionating inspired by an ideal notion of the wise man. The appliance of the method fails in this concrete example because the text in question is noticeably not in itself an example of a lived philosophical practice recorded in text (as some of Plato's dialogues do can be regarded as de written recording of the spiritual practice of the spoken dialogue). It is rather an account of the work of Isocrates done by himself which is motivated by his impression of being misunderstood and misjudged by his fellow citizens of Athens. Furthermore, it is as we said most likely a fictional defense speech of a trial which never took place (at most is loosely inspired, as we mention above, by a real trierarchy trial which took place in 357 BC, in which Isocrates, as he lost the trial had to pay the extraordinary tax (liturgy) consisted in the cost of a trireme). As such a fictional apology the *Antidosis* is nevertheless a fine testimony for the understanding of philosophy in the classical era, the Greece of Athens of the fifth and fourth century B.C. Another contribution to Hadot's approach in the example of Isocrates was made by Ilsetraut Hadot, the wife of Pierre Hadot, who, on her German PhD Thesis about Seneca and the Greek and Roman tradition of soul guidance (1967, of which a new French edition has recently appeared under the name of *Direction spirituelle und pratique de la philosophie*) examined the elements of this tradition among others in Isocrates. She compared the ideas about the parenetic speech in both Seneca and Isocrates. She quotes two letters of Isocrates, the letters to Nicocles and to Demonicos, in which Isocrates claims that, whereas virtue is the biggest and most durable possession, so is a good adviser the most valuable of all assets, for he leads one to the virtue (Isocrates I, 5 and II, 5, quoted at Hadot, I., *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* 13).

I now will propose a central thesis regarding the interpretation of the text *Antidosis* itself. This suggestion is of main relevance with regard to the predominant conception of philosophy in the Athens of the classical period. We saw that, according to Isocrates, the way in which public issues of the *polis* were tackled was by means of public speeches. That is why the education in oratory was a key factor in order for the gradual handing over of the issues of the *polis* from the elders to the young to succeed. The issues of the *polis* were handled then by the rhetoricians in the forensic or public

speeches.<sup>7</sup> We also saw, that in concordance to Isocrates' twofold conception of man as made out of both a body and a soul, whereby the two of which were to be trained, the first by gymnastic the second by philosophy and oratory. Furthermore, we saw that the training of the soul through philosophy was primarily and almost exclusively the education of the art of speaking. Accordingly the suggestion presented here by me would entail to ascribe to Isocrates the equating of rhetoric (ἡ ῥητορική τέχνη) and philosophy. According to this the two would be synonyms, and each of the two terms would at most connote different nuances of the same art. These nuances would then consist in the ambits, in which the art is applied: rhetoric would be thus the art of taking good care of *the public issues*, while philosophy would be the art of taking good care of *the private* (or shall we say *inner*?) *issues* also by means of the education of the art of the speech (in this second case not forensic, that is public, speech, but private, and even inner speech).

This distinction which we are tended to do while reading the *Antidosis* speech between the private (or inner) sphere and the public or *polis*-related sphere, remind us of a distinction drawn by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition*. While enquiring about the public sphere in the classical Greek world and making a contrast with the modern world, Arendt said that the Greek (especially in Athens) of the classical period distinguished between the spheres of the *koinós* and the sphere of the *oikós*. The later corresponded to the issues of the household, in which, especially those kind of tasks regarding life sustain, like the providing of food for the house. From there it derived the modern term for economy, the science of the better arranging the providing of life sustain, word which knowingly comes from the Greek word *oikonomía*, which originally meant the science of administering the household. Arendt emphasizes in her book that this science was back then restricted to the private sphere: the problem of the material sustain of life was according to this in ancient Greece mainly a problem pertaining to the private sphere. The sphere of the *koinós* on the contrary was the sphere of the public, whose issues, unlike nowadays, did not have to do mainly (if at all) with economy, but rather with some kind of human deeds, which Arendt render as *action*, which goes beyond the other two kinds of human activity distinguished by her in *The human condition: labor* (i. e. the providing for life sustain) and *work* (i. e. the production of the artifacts with which we live). Both of these kinds of *lower* activities pertain according to Arendt to the private sphere of the *oikós*. *Action* of the contrary, claims Arendt, did not have to do with any kind of work whatsoever. And this third kind of activity was mainly carried out in the classical democratic Athens by means of partaking in the public life of the citizens. The citizens who constituted the group of free rulers of the *polis* had to be free to do so, and in that sphere, it was the fully unfolding of their freedom that it was at stake. The disputing Athenians in the Agora were peers, nonetheless they were not much fulfilling an impersonal duty of administrating the *polis*, they were rather contesting and dialoguing about *what* the *polis*, which entailed that, in those discussions, the question about who and what they as individuals and as people were, was at stake. That is why the endeavor of the politicians to outstand by means of their unique traits were so crucial among the Athenians, for they were not only competing about the best way to administer a political entity, whose essence was

<sup>7</sup> We can attest a similar practice later in the late Roman Republic, as Cicero, as instructed by his father, and being still under-age was introduced in the jurist profession by means of frequenting the house of Quintus Mucius Scaevola Augur to attend to the issuing of legal opinion of the old Jurist as he was still under-age. (cf. Fuhrmann 23.)

already set and fixed, but rather, by their act of public speaking, they were defining the essence of that *community* itself (cf. Arendt, 37-96).

Now, just to draw a first comparison between our reading of the *Antidosis*, and the *koinós/oikós* distinction proposed by Arendt, it seems quite plausible to equate the public issues referred by Isocrates with the *koinós* talked about by Arendt. That is, it seems on the one hand plausible to identify the master of rhetoric with the master of the political art. But, on the other hand, the identification of *philosophy* (as my reading of Isocrates proposes, defined as the taking care of private issues by means of the art of speech) and the *oikonomía* (the providing of the house) does not seem suitable at all. Nevertheless, Arendt's thematization of the Greek *koinós* can be helpful here if we take from it the idea that the highest element of the one's own life was at stake and been displayed while debating the public issues by means of speeches and conversation on the fore. If we accept this hypothesis, we might also think Isocrates is somehow proposing that rhetoric should be considered as a role model for philosophy: he would be proposing philosophy to be the responsible of taking care of issues which are at least just as important as those of the *polis*, namely, the issues of the soul, and by the same means, by which the issues of the *polis* were tackled: the cultivating and developing of the art regarding our ability to speak, which includes the ability to also speak inwardly with ourselves.

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