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A HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN ANTIQUITY

H. I. MARROU

Translated by George Lamb

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CHAPTER IV

THE "OLD" ATHENIAN EDUCATION

I HAVE borrowed the expression *ἡ ἀρχαία παιδεία* from Aristophanes,[1] and I shall use it as he did to denote the type of education current in Athens in the first half of the fifth century, before the great changes that were made towards the end of the century by the Sophists and Socrates.

Although this earlier type of education was old-fashioned and even archaic in comparison with classical education in its fully developed form, it nevertheless represented a considerable advance in the general evolution from a warrior to a scribe culture. We are still far from the latter in its ultimate form, but already the decisive step has been taken—for in Athens, somewhere in the middle of the sixth century (the actual date is unfortunately not known), education lost its essentially military character.

According to Thucydides,[2] the Athenians were the first to abandon the old practice of going around the streets armed, and, putting aside their armour, to adopt a less violent and more civilized way of life. By so doing, their city, which had always remained somewhat outside the main stream of cultural development and been comparatively unknown, now for the first time came forward in her rôle as a leader of culture—a position which henceforth was to be peculiarly hers.

Originally there do not seem to have been any very noticeable differences in the level of culture and education in the different parts of Greece. In the seventh century we find everywhere the same civic and military ideal as we have seen in Sparta, the same total subjection of the individual to the community. For example, round about the year 650, at Ephesus, in "soft-living Ionia", the poet Callinus, in an endeavour to rouse his people, threatened by the Cimmerian invasion, gave utterance to the same sort of sentiments as had been expressed by Tyrtaeus in the Messenian war, as can be seen from the following passage: "It is a great and glorious thing for a man to defend against the enemy his country and his children, and the wife he espoused as a virgin. Death will come when the Fates decide; meanwhile, let every man, with sword aloft and heart beating high beneath the shield, fall into line when the battle begins. The whole people mourns a warrior who dies bravely; and if he lives, they honour him as a demi-god."[3]

EDUCATION NO LONGER MILITARY

A century or a century and a half later, the atmosphere had completely changed—in Athens, at least. Greek life and culture and education had become predominantly civilian. Of course, the military element had not entirely disappeared: even omitting the glorious Persian campaigns, the incessant wars which the Athenian republic waged against its neighbours never failed to arouse the patriotism of the citizen-soldiers, or at least of those who came from the three wealthier classes—for in theory the *thetes* could not serve as hoplites because they could not afford the expensive equipment. Nevertheless, it seems clear that military training had ceased to play any important part in the education of the young Greek.

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[1] *Nub.*, 961.

[2] I, 6.

[3] Fr. 1, 6–11, 18–19.

In this respect Athenian education, which was to be a model and inspiration to the whole of classical Greece, had quite different aims from those of later Sparta. In Athens children and young men were not regarded primarily as future hoplites and required to join up and keep in step for thirteen years; in fact, military training seems to have played so small a part in this "old education", that the historian, for lack of evidence, may justly doubt whether it ever existed.

Athens was later to develop a remarkable system of compulsory military training known as "ephebia", whereby its young citizens were obliged to do two years' service, between the ages of eighteen and twenty; but there is little evidence about it and it does not seem to have attained its full development until the end of the fourth century. There has been a great deal of discussion about the date of its first appearance; but this can hardly be placed earlier than the Peloponnesian War (431–404). A kind of ephebia may have existed before that time, but then the word could only have meant the coming-of-age ceremonies that marked the adolescent's entry into adult life—not the military training of classical times (1).

Apparently the new democratic tactic of using heavy infantry did not demand any very elaborate technical qualifications on the part of the soldier. Pre-military and para-military exercises were neglected. In Homeric times there had been tournaments like that between Ajax and Diomedes at the funeral games held in honour of Patroclus.[1] From these more or less mock battles the succeeding age had inherited a kind of contest called "armed combat"—ὁπλομαχία.

But this had become simply a competition, a matter of pure sport, and in any case it had hardly any connection with education. It is true that Plato devotes the whole of the *Laches* to a discussion of the part it could play in education; and Nicias develops the arguments in its favour,[2] stressing especially its value as a means of military training,[3] but it is easy to see that this is only a personal opinion, unsupported by general practice. Like European fencing from the time of the sixteenth century onwards, hoplomachy had become an art striving after formal perfection, with very little relation to actual fighting: dear old Herodotus in fact confesses somewhere how surprised he was to come across a fencing champion who had actually proved his valour on the field of battle.[4]

It was physical strength and bodily dexterity that gave the soldier whatever real advantage he might possess; and so, as Xenophon's Socrates explains in detail,[1] the only effective training for war came indirectly, through athletics and gymnastics generally. This fact undoubtedly helped to make physical training more popular and democratic; and we shall soon see how important this training was.

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[1] Hom., *Il.*, XXIII, 811–825.

[2] 181e–182d.

[3] 182a.

[4] VI, 92.

Democratization of the Aristocratic Tradition

In spite of this democratization Athenian education kept closely to its aristocratic origins, and in its principles and organization it remained an education for gentlemen: at the height of the democratic era Isocrates[2] could still remember a time when it had been the special privilege of an aristocracy wealthy enough to be able to enjoy its leisure. Indeed, as Plato insisted,[3] it would always tend to remain the privilege of an élite, since few were prepared to suffer the sacrifices it entailed and few could appreciate its advantages.

Even well on in the fifth century education was still mainly for the aristocracy, the great landed proprietors who had wealth and consequently a good deal of leisure, rather than the average Athenian who earned his humble livelihood as a peasant or a craftsman or a small shopkeeper. We can picture this aristocratic existence as the way of life, stripped of its war-like aspects, of the Homeric knight: it was essentially a fashionable sporting world.

One sport always remained the exclusive preserve of aristocratic families: horse-racing (including chariot-racing), which, together with hunting[4] or, as the Greeks called it, "cynegetics" (a word that reveals the part played in it by dogs), was, as it had been since Homer's time, the aristocratic sport *par excellence*, a liking for which was a characteristic of the "smart set". The second property-holding class in Athens was the Ἱππῆς—the knighthood. On the eve of Salamis it was the bit of his horse's bridle that Cimon, the leader of the old aristocratic Right Wing, solemnly went and consecrated to the goddess Athena.[5] The aristocratic families were fond of giving their children names compounded from "Hipp-" or "hippos": you may remember "Phidippides", the name that the self-made man in Aristophanes' *Clouds* coins for his son because his aristocratic wife insists: "She wanted a name with 'Hippo' in it, like Xanthippos or Charippos of Callippidos."[6] The incident is so vivid and significant for our present purpose that it is worth recalling. The mother dreams of a wonderful future for her son: "When you are grown up and drive your chariot to town like [your great-uncle, the illustrious] Megacles, wearing the long tunic of the racing charioteer . . .";[7] but the father bewails the results of the education Phidippides has had, to satisfy his mother's ambition: "He has long hair, rides a horse, drives a two-horse chariot and dreams about horses when he's asleep!"[8] In the fourth century Xenophon, who was a typical representative of the aristocratic class, thought it worth while to write three technical books, *On Hunting*, *On Riding*, and *The Cavalry Officer*.

Riding remained a reserved sport because it was expensive—as Phidippides'

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[1] *Mem.*, III, 12.
[2] *Areop.*, 44–45.
[3] *Prot.*, 326c.
[4] Xen., *Cyn.*, 12.
[5] Plut., *Cim.*, 5.
[6] *Nub.*, 63–64.
[7] *Ibid.*, 69–70.
[8] *Ibid.*, 14–15; 25; 27; 32.

father discovered;[1] athletics, on the other hand, being less costly, became increasingly democratic. In earlier days only the nobility used to go to the gymnasiums: even at the beginning of the fifth century the pan-hellenic champions (whom Pindar praises for their ancestors as much as for their exploits) often came from noble families, because in the beginning they were the only ones who had the means, and also, perhaps, the gifts, for such pursuits. But even at that time the taste for sport was beginning to spread, and by the end of the century everyone in Athens was going to the gymnasium, just as all Romans under the Empire went to the baths. This caused great disgust to the old aristocrats,[2] who felt that with this "democratization" of sport everything of importance in the old culture had been degraded.

Athens became a real democracy (I have tried to emphasize the parallel between the way it developed and the development of modern Western Europe): by a gradual process of extension, its people not only won for themselves political privileges and rights and powers, but also gained access to the kind of life and culture and human ideals that in the beginning only the aristocracy had enjoyed. For when athletics passed from the "Knights" to "Demos", so did the whole Homeric ideal of "valour" and emulation and heroic deeds. The change from a military to a civilian way of life had in fact transformed the old ideal of heroism and reduced it to the level of a competitive sport. In this connection the writings of Pindar (521–441) are highly significant. His triumphal odes —ἐπινίκια—were written to celebrate the "valour" of the Greek champions, just as the Homeric epics had celebrated the deeds of the heroes. It was "valour" that was revealed in victory—the manifestation of an almost super-human type of ideal personality: the winner of the Olympic Games seemed worthy of the honour paid to the gods on Olympus when hymns are sung in their praise. This belief in the fundamental value of sporting ability as a sign of "valour" spread with the popularity of sport itself: Tyrtaeus[3] attacked it in the name of the city and Xenophanes[4] in the name of the philosophers' new ideal of spiritual and scientific wisdom; but in vain; and for a whole epoch it remained the ideal of all free men, the supreme ideal of Greek civilization.

First Appearance of the School

With the spread of this ideal, and of the culture which it inspired, the whole system of aristocratic education spread too, and became the standard type of education for every child in Greece. But while its subject-matter and general tendency remained the same, it was obliged, in the course of, and for the purpose of, the new popularization, to develop new institutions. The new education, intended for all free men, was necessarily of a collective character, and this led to the creation and development of the school. This was a decisive step: it is of paramount importance in the whole of the subsequent history.

The aristocratic poets Theognis and Pindar (2) faithfully reflect the scorn and suspicion with which the old nobility reacted to this development. Pindar was already concerned with the celebrated problem discussed by the Socratics, whether *ἀρετή* ("valour", not simply virtue) could be acquired by teaching alone. No doubt, he said, blue blood in itself had never sufficed to make a perfect knight: as the classical "paradigm" of Achilles and Chiron showed,[1] it would be absurd—*ἄγνωμον*—not to try to develop innate gifts by education.[2] But if ancestry was not a sufficient cause, it was at least, in the eyes of these aristocrats, these "good men"—*Ἀγαθοί*, as they proudly called themselves[3]—a necessary condition. In Pindar's view, education only makes sense if it is given to a nobleman, who has to become what he is. "Be the kind of man you know yourself to be."[4] The Wise Man is in the first place a person who knows many things by nature—*φυᾷ*. There is nothing but contempt for the self-educated, the *μαθόντες*, "those who know only because they have had lessons."[5]

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[1] *Nub.*, 11 *seq.*
[2] [Xen.] *Ath.*, 2, 10.
[3] Fr. 12, 1–10.
[4] Fr. 2.

But this contempt, and the vehemence with which it is expressed, are signs that the thing existed, that a growing number of the newly-rich were having their sons trained in arts and accomplishments that had originally been the jealously guarded privilege of the well-born.

In this kind of education, since it involved an increasing number of children, the system of individual tuition by a tutor or lover could no longer work. Some kind of collective instruction was inevitable, and I imagine it was the pressure of this social necessity that gave birth to the school. Private tuition did not disappear immediately; for a long time, as can be seen from Aristotle[6] and Quintilian,[7] educationists went on discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems; but once corporate education had come into existence it soon came to be more generally accepted than the other, and we find Aristophanes recalling the "old education" that nurtured the glorious heroes of Marathon (men, therefore, who had reached adult age by 490),[8] and at the same time describing the city children, at dawn and throughout the day, on their way "to their teachers".[9]

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Who were these teachers? The main feature of aristocratic culture was sport, and so, in the old educational system, physical training occupied the place of honour. The aim of this training was to prepare the child for athletic contests—racing, the discus, the javelin, the long jump, wrestling and boxing. To become adept in the finer points of these complicated sports it was necessary to have lessons from a competent teacher, a P.T. expert or *παιδοτρίβης*, who did his "coaching" on a sports ground, or palestra—*παλαίστρα* (the actual gymnasium was for adults).

This system of instruction must have been fully developed before the end of the seventh century, for at that time (at the Olympic Games of 632, in the old reckoning)[10] children's competitions made their first appearance in the great

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[1] Pind., *Nem.*, III, 57–58.
[2] *Ol.*, VIII, 59–61.
[3] Theog., I, 28; 792; Pind., *Pyth.*, II, 176.
[4] *Pyth.*, II, 131.
[5] *Ol.*, II, 94–96; *Nem.*, III, 42.
[6] *Eth. Nic.* K., 1180b 7 *seq.*
[7] I, 2.
[8] *Nub.*, 986.
[9] *Ibid.*, 964–965.
[10] Paus., V, 9, 9; cf. Philstr., *Gym.*, 13.

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pan-hellenic games. These competitions gave official recognition to the physical education of the young, and therefore assumed it to be regularly organized throughout the whole of Greece (3).

MUSICAL EDUCATION

In the *Republic*,[1] Plato, describing the education of the "good old days", tells us that it was two-sided, comprising "gymnastics" for the body and "music" for the soul. From the beginning, as we have seen, Greek culture and hence Greek education had included, besides sport, an element that was spiritual, intellectual and artistic all at once. In Plato, music—*μουσική*—signifies the domain of the Muses in the widest sense; but in ancient education generally, music in the narrower sense of the word—i.e. vocal and instrumental music—came first in this category. Aristophanes has the children "marching in crocodile" not only to the gymnastics teachers[2] but also *εἰς κιθαριστοῦ*, to the cither player or music master, "even if the snow is falling as thick as flour".[3]

The historian has to stress this to correct an error in perspective: as they appear in our own classical culture the Greeks were primarily poets, philosophers and mathematicians; and when we pay homage to their artistic genius we mean their architecture and sculpture. We never think of them as musicians. Our scholars and teachers pay less attention to their music than to their ceramics! And yet they looked upon themselves first and foremost as musicians.

Greek culture and education were artistic rather than scientific, and Greek art was musical before it became literary and plastic. It was "the lyre and sprightly dancing and singing" that summed up civilized life for Theognis.[4] *Ἀχόρευτος, ἀπαίδευτος*, as Plato says bluntly:[5] "Anyone who cannot take his place in a choir [i.e. as both singer and dancer] is not truly educated."

EDUCATION THROUGH POETRY

Even in this early period, however, a specifically intellectual, literary element begins to appear. But we are still a long way from "the peoples of the Book", for it is through songs that the teaching of doctrine is transmitted—songs, and poetry. Here, as always, the nature of the education that is given is made clear by the kind of culture to which it paved the way. Greek cultural life centred round the men's "club"—the Cretan *ἀνδρεῖον*, the Athenian *ἑταιρεία*: which meant the *conversazione*—*λέσχη*—the "banquet"—*συμπόσιον*: that is to say, the drinking party which followed the evening meal. This had its own strict rules and formal etiquette: each of the guests in turn received the myrtle branch that meant that it was his turn to sing, and the song "that zig-zags from one to another"—the *σκόλιον*—was the basic literary form around which the other artistic performances—dancing,[6] and musical interludes on the lyre or aulos—centred (4).

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[1] *II.*, 376e.
[2] *Ibid.*, 973 *seq.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 964.
[4] I, 791.
[5] *Leg.*, II, 654ab.
[6] Theog., I, 239–243; 789–792; Pind., *Pyth.*, VI, 43–54.

And so any child who wished to take his place one day at the banquets as an educated person had not only to learn a certain amount of Homer's poetry—which had no doubt quickly become a "classic"—but also to set about acquiring a repertoire of what were essentially lyrical poems.

Athens attached just as much importance as did Sparta to the moral quality of these songs and to their value as moral training: a considerable proportion of the songs were by the Gnomic poets, such as the author of the *Teachings of Chilon*, a few fragments of which have come down to us under the name of Hesiod. It was apparently for a group of Athenians, perhaps the aristocratic circle centring round Callias, that our collection of the elegies of Theognis was compiled, a collection which includes—besides the authentic poetry of the old poet of Megara—poems by other Gnomic poets, as well as the love poems in Book II.

But the truly Athenian poet, the man who, like Tyrtaeus in Sparta, embodied the nation's wisdom, was undoubtedly Solon (Archon, 594–593). He certainly had an educational aim in view when he composed his *Elegies*, which appeared in the form of moral injunctions to his fellow citizens.[1] It seems clear that he was looked upon as the national spokesman—consider, for instance, the way he was quoted in the law courts and the Assembly by any orator in need of authority, even by Cleophon[2] and Demosthenes.[3]

Solon's moral outlook, like that of Tyrtaeus, was grounded in the community life of the city, even though his emphasis was different from the latter's. His ideal was *εὐνομία*, the state of equilibrium required by justice. The danger which he sought to avert was no longer external but internal—inner dissension, social injustice, and the party passion that was jeopardizing Athenian unity (5). But it would be a mistake to regard his teaching as exclusively political. There is a real Solonian humanism which stresses the simple joys of existence that make life worth living in spite of everything, in spite even of death: "Happy is the man who loves children and horses, hunting-dogs and strangers . . ."[4] We find him singing the praises of wine and song and friendship—and love: through Solon there was instilled into the heart of every Athenian child the whole of the traditional aristocratic culture.

LITERARY EDUCATION

In all this we are, clearly, still far from any scribe education; nevertheless, writing had gradually been introduced, and it had spread so widely, and had come to be used so much in daily life, that in the end education was unable to ignore it. By the time of the classical era schools where the "three Rs" were taught were well-established institutions: the child no longer had two but three teachers: the pedotribe and the cither player, and also the *γραμματιστής*, "the teacher of letters", who was one day to become by synecdoche simply *διδάσκαλος*—the "teacher".

It would be interesting to try to date the first appearance of this third branch of learning—third in order of origin and, for a long time, third in order of value too. A great deal is made of some supposed legislation by Solon about the moral supervision of schools, but without going into the question of whether these laws were only attributed much later to that great law-giver (they are only known through allusions made to them in the fourth century) we can see that their provisions may quite easily—and perhaps more suitably—have applied to the palestra, rather than to the school of letters—*γραμματοδιδασκαλεῖον*.

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[1] Fr. 4, 30.

[2] Ap. Arist., *Rh.*, I, 1375b 32.

[3] *De Falsa Legatione*, 255

[4] Fr. 12–14.

The existence of the latter can only be conjectured indirectly from the fact that writing was in general use and some such school was needed where it could be taught. It is clear, for example, that since an institution like ostracism, which was introduced by Cleisthenes in 508–507, entailed a written procedure of voting, it required a knowledge of writing from the bulk of the citizens (6). There may still have been many illiterates in the Assembly, of course, like the one who is supposed to have asked Aristides to write his name for him on the piece of pottery that was used as a ballot-paper; and no doubt there were many others whose standard of culture was no higher than that of Aristophanes' butcher—"But my dear fellow, I know nothing about 'music' except how to read and write, and even that only so-so." Nevertheless there can be no doubt that from the time of the Persian Wars onward there existed a system of instruction in reading and writing: thus, in 480, on the eve of Salamis, the Trezenians, in their kindness welcoming the women and children who had escaped from Athens, engaged schoolmasters to teach them to read at their city's expense[1] (7).

THE IDEAL OF *ΚΑΛΟΚΑΓΑΘΙΑ*

Such was the old Athenian education—artistic rather than literary, athletic rather than intellectual: in the account in the *Clouds*, which we have already mentioned more than once, Aristophanes gives only eight verses[2] out of more than sixty[3] to the teaching of music; he says nothing about the teaching of letters. The remaining verses are concerned with physical education, and especially its moral aspects. This is a point to be emphasized: the education was in no sense technical; it was still designed for the leisured life of the aristocracy.

These Athenian aristocrats might be great landed proprietors or men of affairs, but nothing in their education prepared them for such activities. Let us return to that scene at the beginning of the *Laches* in which, as we have seen, Plato presents us with two Athenian noblemen consulting Socrates about their sons' education. We can easily imagine a similar scene today, with two fathers discussing whether their children should do Greek or mathematics when they get into the third form. Similar problems were soon to arise in Greece; but we have not yet reached that stage here: the only question discussed by our two Athenian fathers is whether the youngsters shall learn fencing or not.[4]

The guiding ideal of this old education was still an ethical one. It can be expressed in one word—*καλοκἀγαθία*—"being a man both beautiful and good."

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[1] Plut., *Them.*, 10.

[2] *Nub.*, 964–971.

[3] *Ibid.*, 961–1023.

[4] *Lach.*, 179d.; 181c.

"Good"—ἀγαθός—signifies the moral aspect, which was essential, as we have seen, with the social and worldly implications which it had had from the very beginning. "Beautiful"—καλός—refers to physical beauty, with the inevitable "aura" of eroticism that had come to accompany it. And here I must try to explode the modern myth that Greek civilization achieved a harmonious synthesis between "racial beauty, the highest artistic perfection, and the most elevated flights of speculative thought" (8).

This ideal of a fully-developed mind in a superb body may not be entirely imaginary: it was at least in Plato's mind when he was creating his unforgettable young men—the handsome Charmides puzzling over the problem of moral perfection, Lysis and Menexenus gracefully discussing friendship. . . . But it must nevertheless be realized that if this ideal was ever achieved, it could only have been for a fleeting moment of unstable equilibrium between two opposite tendencies which could only grow at each other's expense. A time was to come when Greek education would be—like ours—essentially intellectual, under the influence of men like Socrates, who was ugly, and Epicurus, whose health was poor.

In the early period we are discussing at the moment, there is no doubt that the καλὸς κἀγαθός was primarily a sporting type. There may be a moral side to this education, but it is only realized in and through sport (as is clear from Aristophanes, who never separates the two), and its aim was to develop the body at least as much as the character. Much later, Plotinus used to say:[1] "Be always at work carving your own statue", and he meant this in a moral sense; but taken literally it could have been the motto of the old education. Remember how Plato introduces Charmides at the beginning of the dialogue that bears his name: "Everybody was looking at him as though he was a statue."[2] "What a handsome face he has! [εὐπρόσωπος]," cries Socrates. "But if he was naked he'd seem to you to have no face [ἀπρόσωπος]: he is so beautiful in every way [πάγκαλος]!"[3] "To have no face": this seems a strange way of putting it to us, accustomed as we are to looking on the face as the reflection of the soul; but it is symbolized by those expressionless athletes (the Discobolos for instance) whose features remain unmoved despite their most violent efforts.

This ideal, strange though it may seem to us, is nevertheless perfectly legitimate; that is to say, in itself it is quite consistent. There is nothing absurd in believing that physical beauty, the worship of the body, can be for some people a real reason for living, a way of expressing, indeed of fulfilling, their personality—after all, it has long been accepted as legitimate enough as far as women are concerned. In fact these young Greeks were honoured and courted and pampered and admired very much like our women of today (or yesterday). Their whole life was bathed, like any woman's, in the glow of their youthful successes, the lustre of their beauty (Alcibiades is a case in point).

Thus the ideal in itself is perfectly valid—but how brutal and uncomplicated, compared with the marvellous picture presented by Nietzsche and Burckhardt for example, and so many other neo-pagans of their school! No doubt these young men were strong and handsome, but in the pursuit of this single end they used up all their energies and all their will-power. It would be simple-minded (or sharp practice) to point to Plato's young men and forget the circumstances in which they appear. Socrates may go to the gymnasium to collect his disciples, but he goes there to drag them away from it and to submit them to the hard discipline of mathematics and dialectics.

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[1] *Enn.*, I, 6, 9. [2] *Chrm.*, 153c. [3] *Ibid.*, 154d.

Between the two types of training, the physical and the intellectual, there was not, as some would have us believe, any kind of mysterious secret attraction or pre-established harmony, but on the contrary the most radical hostility. Take, for instance, Aristophanes: what exactly is his pupil promised by the "Old Education" whose praises he sings? A strict morality, true, but also: "You will be as bright and fresh as a flower, spending your time in the gymnasium . . . you will go down to the Academy, and there, under the sacred olive trees, crowned with light reeds, you will run a race with a friend of your own age, to the scent of the yew tree and the white poplar that loses its leaves, enjoying all the delights of spring when the plane tree whispers to the elm. If you do what I tell you, and apply your whole mind to it, you will always have a powerful chest, a good complexion, broad shoulders, a short tongue, massive buttocks and a little rod. . . . But if you follow present-day practices"—and here Aristophanes explicitly attacks Socrates' teaching—"you will have a pale complexion, narrow shoulders, a pigeon-chest, a long tongue, bony buttocks and a big rod. . . ."[1]

If anyone is shocked by my choosing Aristophanes' coarse caricature rather than Plato's ideal figures, I reply that experience provides us with ample evidence of the truth of the picture presented by Aristophanes. For, after all, a man has only one nervous system, one fund of energy at his disposal, and that a small one; and we have learned, in Péguy's words, "that spiritual work is paid for by its own peculiar kind of inexpiable fatigue".

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[1] *Nub.*, 1002–1019.

CHAPTER V

THE PEDAGOGICAL REVOLUTION OF THE EARLY SOPHISTS

THUS Athenians born in the decade 490–480—men like Pericles and Sophocles and Phidias, who, in politics and literature and the arts, brought classical culture to such a high level of maturity—had only had an elementary education, which as far as actual instruction is concerned was not much higher than the level of our present-day primary schools (1). This is a striking example of the inevitable time-lag between culture and education, a time-lag which is often increased by routine—the field of education being a preserve of the conservative outlook. Nevertheless, any really thriving civilization eventually becomes conscious of this gap and determines to bridge it. We know in fact that each new advance made by the Greek genius was soon followed by a corresponding endeavour to create an educational system that would disseminate it.

THE FIRST SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE

There is a great deal of evidence of this from the sixth century onwards. It was a time rich in great new enterprises. For example, there were the first schools of medicine, which appeared in Croton[1] and Cyrene[2] towards the end of the century, before the opening of the classical schools of Cnidus and Cos (2).

THE FIRST SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY

But it is in the realm of philosophy that the effort to create a new type of education appears most clearly. The first physicists of the school of Miletus were pure scholars with no leisure for teaching. They were absolutely absorbed in their own creative efforts, and these isolated them from their contemporaries and made them appear odd. Their behaviour occasioned surprise and sometimes out-and-out disgust, but this was usually tinged with irony, and in kindly Ionia did not exclude a secret good-will—one remembers the case of Thales who fell into a well while he was studying the stars.[3]

But already Anaximander, and following him Anaximenes,[4] were giving written accounts of their teaching. In the next generation Xenophanes of Colophon no longer wrote, as they did, in prose—the law-maker's medium—but in verse, thus setting himself up in direct rivalry to the poet-educators, Homer and the Gnomics. This was his avowed intention: he used to address the cultivated audiences at the aristocratic banquets,[5] condemning Homer's immorality[1] and the traditional ideal of athletics,[2] and boldly—and indeed proudly—setting up his own new ideal of Wisdom in opposition.

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[1] Hdt., III, 129 *seq.*

[2] *Ibid.*, III, 131.

[3] D.L., I, 34.

[4] *Ibid.*, II, 2; 3.

[5] Fr. 1 (Diels).

Pythagorism eventually realized this educational aim in an institution adapted to the purpose—the school of philosophy. This, as we see it at Metapontus or Croton, was no longer a simple "hetairia" of the ancient type, with the master and his pupils all on the same level; it was a real school, taking charge of the whole man and forcing him to adopt a particular way of life. It was an organized institution, with its own buildings and laws and regular meetings—a kind of religious brotherhood devoted to the cult of the Muses and, after the death of its founder, to the cult of the apotheosized Pythagoras. And it set the type: modelled on it later were Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum and the school of Epicurus, and it was always to remain the standard pattern of the Greek school of philosophy (3).

The New Political Ideal

Nevertheless, it was not these specialized circles that produced the great revolution in teaching which was to put Greek education on the road to maturity; this occurred in the latter half of the fifth century and was the work of a group of innovators who have come to be known as the Sophists.

The problem that faced the Sophists, and which they succeeded in solving, was the fairly common one of how to produce capable statesmen. In their time this had become a matter of the utmost urgency. After the collapse of tyranny in the sixth century most of the Greek cities, and democratic Athens in particular, developed an intensely active political life; and exercise of power, the management of affairs, became the essential concern, the noblest, the most highly-prized activity in the eyes of every Greek, the ultimate aim of his ambition. He was still anxious to excel, to be superior and effective; but it was no longer in sport and polite society that his "valour"—his ἀρετή—sought to assert itself: from now on it expressed itself in political action. The Sophists put their talent as teachers at the service of this new ideal of the political ἀρετή:[3] the training of statesmen, the formation of the personality of the city's future leader—such was their programme.

It would be a mistake, however, to connect this undertaking too closely with the progress of democracy, and imagine that the Sophists' system was meant as a substitute, designed to meet the needs of a new class of democratic politicians, for the old hereditary aristocratic type of education. In the first place, Greek democracy went on recruiting its leaders from amongst the oldest aristocratic families for a very long time—think, for example, of the part played by the Alcmeonidae in Athens. Secondly, it is impossible to discern in the Sophists of the fifth century any definite political bias like that of the *Rhetores Latini* in Rome at the time of Marius: they had a wealthy clientèle, which generally included some of the newly-rich seeking "polish", like Aristophanes' Strepsiades; but the old aristocracy, far from resenting them, were eager to sit at their feet, as we can see from Plato's *Dialogues*.

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[1] Fr. 11 *seq.* [2] Fr. 2. [3] Pl., *Prot.*, 316b; 319a.

The Sophists offered their services to anyone wishing to acquire the accomplishments needed for success in the political arena. Once again I refer the reader to the *Laches*: Lysimachus, the son of Aristides, and Melesias, the son of Thucydides, want their own sons to have the kind of education that will prepare them for political leadership,[1] and naturally, when the Sophists come and offer something more useful than fencing, they are quick to accept it.

Thus the revolution in education that has come to be known as Sophistry seems to have had a technical rather than a political origin: on the basis of a mature culture, these enterprising educators developed a new technique, a form of teaching that was wider in its scope, more ambitious and more effective than any previous system.

THE SOPHISTS AS EDUCATORS

The Sophists were active during the second half of the fifth century. There seems to be something rather artificial in the attempt that is sometimes made to parcel them out over two generations. In point of fact, their careers overlapped; Plato was able without any sense of anachronism to introduce the most famous of them to Socrates and Alcibiades at the house of the wealthy Callias in a famous scene in the *Protagoras*.[2] There was not much difference in age between the earlier and the later Sophists. The oldest, Protagoras of Abdera, must have been born in about the year 485, and Gorgias of Leontini, and the Athenian Antiphon (4) (of the deme of Rhamnus), who were almost as old, in about 480. The youngest, Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis, were born some ten years later and appear in Socrates' day—and Socrates, as we know, lived from 470–69 to 399 (5). Diverse in origin and itinerant from the necessities of their profession, they all, nevertheless, spent some time in Athens; and with them Athens became the crucible in which Greek culture was refined.

Every historian of philosophy or the exact sciences feels bound to devote a chapter to the Sophists. It is a chapter that is extremely difficult to write and rarely satisfactory (6).

It is not sufficient to say that we know very little about them. As our original sources we have only a few fragments and meagre doxographical notices—very slender evidence to set against the deceptive power of Plato's satirical portraits and parodies. Plato's treatment of the Sophists was always highly ambiguous and it has never been easy to grasp where invention and caricature and calumny begin and where they end. There is the further possibility that his representation of the conflict between Socrates and the Sophists was really a camouflaged form of his own struggle against his contemporaries, people like Antisthenes in particular.

The truth is the Sophists do not properly belong to either philosophy or science. They set in motion a number of ideas, some of them their own, some derived from others—Protagoras got his from Heraclitus, for example, and Gorgias his from the Eleatics or Empedocles—but strictly speaking they were not thinkers or seekers after truth, they were teachers. "The education of men"—παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους—such, according to Plato,[1] was Protagoras' own definition of his art.

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[1] Pl., *Lach.*, 179cd.

[2] 314e–315e.

And indeed that was the only thing they had in common: their ideas were too heterogeneous, too vague and fleeting for them to belong to any school, in the philosophical sense. The only thing they had in common was their profession; and they deserve our respect as the great forerunners, as the first teachers of advanced education, appearing at a time when Greece had known nothing but sports-trainers, foremen, and, in the academic field, humble schoolmasters. In spite of the sarcasm thrown at them by the Socratics with their conservative prejudices,[2] I shall continue to respect them because, primarily, they were professional men for whom teaching was an occupation whose commercial success bore witness to its intrinsic value and its social utility.[3]

THE TEACHER'S PROFESSION

It is therefore a matter of some interest to study in detail the way in which they carried on their profession. They did not open any schools—in the institutional sense of that word. Their method, not unlike that of early times, might be described as collective tutoring. They gathered round them the youths entrusted to their care and undertook their entire training. This is generally reckoned to have taken three or four years, and it was agreed to by contract: the sum demanded by Protagoras was considerable—ten thousand drachmas,[4] and a drachma (approximately the equivalent of 2/-) was a qualified worker's daily wage. For a long time this was the standard practice, but prices began to fall rapidly and, in the following century, between 393 and 338, Isocrates was only asking a thousand drachmas,[5] and lamenting the fact that "blacklegs" were ready to carry on business at bargain rates of four hundred or even three hundred drachmas.[6]

Protagoras was the first to offer to teach for money in this way: there had been no similar system before. The result was that the Sophists did not find any customers waiting for them but had to go out and persuade the public to take advantage of their services: hence arose a whole publicity system. The Sophist went from town to town[7] in search of pupils, taking those he had already managed to catch with him;[8] to make himself known, to demonstrate the excellence of his teaching and to give a sample of his skill, he would give a sample lecture—ἐπίδειξις—either in a town through which he happened to be passing or in some pan-hellenic sanctuary like Olympus, where he could take advantage of the πανήγυρις, the international assembly that gathered there for the games. The ἐπίδειξις might be either a carefully thought-out discourse or a brilliant improvisation on some theme or other, a free debate on any subject chosen by his audience. This gave rise to the public lecture, a literary form which ever since those earliest days has been quite astonishingly popular.

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[1] *Prot.*, 317b.
[2] Pl., *Hipp. Ma.*, 281b; *Cra.*, 384b; cf. *Soph.*, 231d; Xen., *Cyn.*, 13.
[3] Pl., *Hipp. Ma.*, 282bc.
[4] D.L., IX, 52.
[5] [Plut.] *Isoc.*, 837.
[6] Isoc., *Soph.*, 3.
[7] Pl., *Prot.*, 313d.
[8] *Ibid.*, 315a.

Some of these lectures were open to anybody: Hippias, haranguing the crowd in the Agora, with the money-changers' table[1] quite close by, reminds one of the speakers in Hyde Park; others were for a select audience only, and had to be paid for even at this early stage:[2] indeed, unless we are being misled by the Socratic irony, there seem to have been different categories—publicity talks at an advertised price of one drachma, and technical lectures, at which the master contracted to give an exhaustive treatment of any scientific subject whatever, at fifty drachmas a seat.[3]

Naturally, this publicity was not carried on without some admixture of charlatanism. This is Greece, and long ago. In his efforts to impress his audience, the Sophist was not afraid to claim omniscience[4] and infallibility[5]—adopting a magisterial tone, a grave or an inspired manner, and pronouncing his decisions from a throne high up in the air;[6] sometimes, it seems, even donning the triumphal costume of the rhapsodist with his great purple robe.[7]

But these stage-effects were legitimate enough. The sarcastic criticisms they received from Plato's Socrates cannot outweigh Plato's own testimony to the extraordinary success this publicity achieved and the extent to which young people became infatuated with the Sophists. There is that scene at the beginning of the *Protagoras*,[8] in which young Hippocrates rushes to Socrates' house in the early dawn: Protagoras has just arrived in Athens and the great man must be visited without delay and be prevailed upon to accept him as an eventual disciple. This high estimation, which can also be traced in the profound influence that the great Sophists had on the best minds of their day—on men like Thucydides and Euripides and others—was not simply due to fashion and successful publicity-stunts: it was justified by the actual effects of their teaching.

The Art of Politics

We must now consider the content of this teaching. Its aim was to arm the strong character, to prepare him for political strife so that he would succeed in imposing his will on the city. This was apparently Protagoras' intention in particular: he wanted his pupils to be made into good citizens who could not only rule their own homes properly but also conduct affairs of state with the utmost efficiency. His aim was to teach them "the art of politics"—*πολιτικὴ τέχνη*.[9]

It was a purely practical aim: the "wisdom" and "valour" which Protagoras and his colleagues provided for their disciples were utilitarian and pragmatic, and they were judged by their concrete effectiveness. There was no time to waste in speculating, like the old physicists of Ionia, on the nature of the world and the nature of the gods: "I do not know whether they exist or not," said Protagoras,[1] "it is a difficult question, and life is too short." The important thing was life, and in life, especially political life, knowledge of the truth was less important than the ability to make any particular audience, *hic et nunc*, admit the probability of any proposition whatsoever.

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[1] *Hipp. Mi.*, 368b.

[2] *Hipp. Ma.*, 282bc; Arist., *Rh.*, III, 1415b 16.

[3] Pl., *Cra.*, 384b.

[4] *Hipp. Mi.*, 368bd.

[5] *Grg.*, 447c; 448a.

[6] *Prot.*, 315c.

[7] Ael., *N.H.*, XII, 32.

[8] 310a.

[9] 319a.

Consequently this education developed in the direction of a relativistic humanism: this seems to be expressed in one of the few genuine fragments that have come down to us from Protagoras—the famous formula, "Man is the measure of all things."[2] A great deal of mischief has been done by trying to give this a metaphysical significance, turning its author into the fountain-head of phenomenalist empiricism, a forerunner of modern subjectivism. Similarly, on the strength of the few echoes that have come down to us from the *Treatise on Not-Being* by Gorgias,[3] it has been suggested that Gorgias was a philosophical nihilist (7). This is a gross exaggeration of the meaning of the passages concerned, which were intended to be taken at their face-value: neither Protagoras nor Gorgias had any intention of creating a system; both were simply concerned to formulate a number of practical rules. They never taught their pupils any truths about being or man, but merely how to be always, and in any kind of circumstances, right.

DIALECTICS

Protagoras is said[4] to have been the first person to teach that it is possible to argue for or against any proposition whatsoever. His whole system of teaching was based on antilogy. Of his *Discourses in Refutation* we now possess only the famous first phrase quoted above;[5] but we find echoes of them in the *Double Reasons*—*Δισσοὶ λόγοι*—a dull catalogue of mutually conflicting opinions compiled in about the year 400 by one of his disciples.

This, then, is the first aspect of the Sophists' education: how to learn to win any kind of argument. Protagoras borrowed his polemical method and his rigorous dialectic from Zeno of Elea, but at the same time he emptied them of their profound and serious content and kept only the bare skeleton, from which, by a process of systematization, he formulated the principles of eristics, a debating-method that was supposed to confound any kind of opponent by taking points he had himself conceded and using them as a starting-point for further argument.

In their different ways, Aristophanes' *Clouds* and Thucydides' *History* furnish remarkable evidence of the prodigious effect that this system of education, which was so brazen in its cynical pragmatism and so astonishing in its practical effectiveness, had on the people of the time. Its historical importance cannot be over-estimated: the tradition inaugurated by Protagoras explains the predominantly dialectical tone that was henceforth to dominate, for better or for worse, the whole of Greek philosophy, science and culture. The sometimes excessive use that the men of antiquity made of disputation as a means of discovery or proof, their facile over-confidence in it, their virtuosity at it—all this was part of the Sophist heritage.

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[1] Fr. 4 (Diels).
[2] Fr. 1.
[3] Fr. 1–5 (Diels).
[4] D.L., IX, 51.
[5] Fr. 1.

They were not content simply to take this intellectual instrument ready-made from the Eleatics: they did a great deal to perfect it, to refine dialectical processes and explain their logical structure. Naturally, such an advance had its ups and downs: not all the weapons in the armoury of sophistry were made of the finest steel, and, since the end justified the means, they looked upon anything that seemed effective as good. Their eristic, being no more than the art of practical debate, tended to put convincing rational argument on the same level as tactical tricks that are sometimes little better than low cunning (we are, after all, in the country of Ulysses). Genuine reasoning gave way to audacious paradoxes, which their naïve hearers, still new to the game, could not distinguish from Zeno's arguments, which though equally paradoxical had genuine logic behind them. It was not until Aristotle came along that they learned to distinguish between false "sophistries" and valid inferences. Nevertheless, though this kind of sorting-out had to be done later, the *Topics* and the *Refutations of the Sophists* in the *Organon* are simply a classification, a restatement, of a great mass of material, much of which goes back to Protagoras and his followers.

RHETORIC

Besides the art of persuasion the Sophists taught the equally important art of speech, and in this too practical effectiveness was their sole concern. In modern times the spoken word has given way to the all-powerful written word, and this remains true even today, despite the great strides made by the radio and the gramophone. But in ancient Greece, and especially in its political life, the spoken word reigned supreme.

This was in a way recognized officially by the practice that was instituted in Athens well before 431[1] of delivering a prepared speech at the funeral of soldiers fallen in battle. But public speaking was not merely decorative: the democracy of antiquity knew only the direct method of government, and consequently it had most respect for the kind of politician who was able to impose his own point of view in the citizens' assembly, or in the various councils, as a result of his powers of speech. Eloquence was no less important in the law-courts: there was a great deal of litigation in Athens, both private and public—political trials, court enquiries into morality and the rendering of accounts, etc.—and here again the successful person was the one who could get the better of his opponent in front of a jury or panel of judges.[2] As Plato's Sophist, Polos of Agrigentum,[3] declares, skilful orators, like tyrants, can have anyone they dislike condemned to death, or to confiscation of their property, or to exile.

In this field too, the Sophists discovered that it was possible to develop and teach a particular technique for passing on the best lessons of experience in a condensed and perfect form: this was Rhetoric (8).

[1] Thuc., II, 34. [2] Pl., *Hipp. Ma.*, 304ab. [3] *Grg.*, 466c.

The master of rhetoric was Gorgias of Leontini, who is historically as important as Protagoras. Rhetoric indeed arose, not in Elis, nor even in Greece, but in Sicily. Aristotle attributed its rise to the sudden spate of proceedings for the recovery of goods that developed after the expulsion of the tyrants of the Theron dynasty at Agrigentum (471), and those of the Hieron dynasty at Syracuse (463), and the ensuing annulment of the confiscations which they had decreed. This helped to encourage eloquence in both politics and law, and Sicily's example is supposed to have prompted the Greeks to apply themselves with all their penetrating logic to this problem of effective speaking. Beginning with empirical facts, they gradually formulated general rules which when codified into a body of doctrine could serve as a basis for a systematic training in the art of public speaking. The first teachers of rhetoric—Corax and his pupil Tisias—appeared in fact in Syracuse, probably not later than 460; but the original founder is generally considered to be Empedocles of Agrigentum,[1] who taught Gorgias (9).

With Gorgias, rhetoric appeared fully-fledged, with its own method and principles and set forms, all worked out in minutest detail. The whole of antiquity lived on this achievement: even in the final decadence writers were still embellishing their meretricious art with the three "Gorgiac figures" which the great Sophist had formulated: antithesis, balance of clauses (*ἰσόκωλα*) and final assonance (*ὁμοιοτέλευτον*) (10).

We shall have occasion later to study this technique in detail. Once fixed, it never developed much further, except to become more precise and systematized. Here it will be sufficient to give a brief description of how rhetoric was taught from the time of Gorgias onwards. It was divided into two parts, theory and practice. First of all the Sophist instructed his pupil in the rules of the art: this was his *τέχνη* (Tisias, if not Corax, had already produced this kind of theoretical treatise, and a few fragments of the similar work by Gorgias remain). In all essentials—as for example in the ground-plan of the judicial speech—the main outlines of classical theory seem to have been fixed by the time of the Sophists, although of course they had not then achieved the degree of detail that is to be found in treatises of Hellenistic and Roman times. In the fifth century the teaching of rhetoric was not so precise: the rules were very general and students soon got on to practical exercises.

The master prepared a model and gave it to his pupils to copy. Like the *ἐπίδειξις*, the sample lecture, the speech might have a poetical or a moral or a political subject. Gorgias transposed into his florid prose the mythological "panegyrics" that had been so beloved by lyric poets like Simonides and Pindar—the panegyric of Helen,[2] the apologia for Palamedes.[3] Xenophon has left us an account of a speech by Prodicus on the subject of Heracles at the cross-roads of vice and virtue;[4] Plato in the *Protagoras*[5] shows us Protagoras improvising on the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus and again on the subject of justice; and in another dialogue,[6] through the mouth of Hippias, we hear Nestor imparting instruction to Neoptolemus. There are also references to a eulogy of the city of Elis[1] by Gorgias. Sometimes a fantastic or paradoxical subject was used as an excuse for pure virtuosity, and the result was a eulogy of peacocks or mice. Other teachers preferred a more directly utilitarian approach: Antiphon for instance was only concerned with the eloquence of the law-courts: his *Tetralogies* give examples of all four speeches necessary in any given case—accusation, defence, reply and rejoinder. The cases were imaginary, but Antiphon also seems to have published real pleadings, which he composed as a logographer, so that they could be studied by his pupils.

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[1] Arist., *ap.* D.L., VIII, 57.

[2] Fr. 11.

[3] Fr. 11a.

[4] *Mem.*, II, 1, 21–34.

[5] 320c–322a.

[6] *Hipp. Ma.*, 286ab.

These sample speeches were not only delivered to an audience; they were also put into writing so that the pupils could study them at their leisure.[2] Later they would be told to use them as models in compositions of their own, and in this way begin their apprenticeship in the art of rhetoric.

But an effective speech needs more than a mastery of form; it needs content—the ideas and arguments demanded by the subject; and so there was a whole branch of rhetoric devoted to *invention*—where and how to discover ideas. Here again the Sophists' analytical attitude enabled them to formulate a whole mass of ingenious rules, and they developed a complete method for extracting every possible topic from any given case—a method in which rhetoric joins hands with eristic and makes full use of its discoveries.

The Sophists had not been blind to the fact that many of their developments could be applied to different circumstances. Hence arose a number of standard passages, on, for instance, how to flatter judges, how to criticize evidence obtained by torture, and so on (in this way Antiphon composed a collection of *Exordiums* suitable for every occasion). Even more pat to the purpose were general reflections on topics of universal concern—justice and injustice, nature and convention. By skilful manipulation any subject could be reduced to the simple ideas that the Sophists' pupils knew all about in advance—the famous "commonplaces"—*κοινοὶ τόποι*—whose existence and fecundity the Sophists were the first to discover. And so they engaged on a systematic exploration and exploitation of these great themes: it was from them that ancient education, and consequently the whole of classical literature—Greek and Roman—derived their permanent taste for "general ideas", for those great moral themes of eternal import which, for good and for ill, form one of their most characteristic features, and which, despite the wearisome monotony and banality to which they so frequently led, were also responsible for their profound human value.

GENERAL CULTURE

But a grotesquely inadequate picture of the Sophists' education would be given by an exclusive insistence on these general and formal aspects of rhetoric and eristic. The perfect Sophist—like Plato's Gorgias[3] and Hippias[4]—had to be able to speak and hold his own on any subject whatsoever: this meant that his competence had to be universal, his knowledge had to extend over every kind of specialized study. The Greeks had a word for it: he must have a "polymathy".

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[1] Fr. 10.
[2] *Phdr.*, 228de.
[3] *Grg.*, 447c; 448a
[4] *Hipp. Mi.*, 364a; 368bd.

The Sophists varied in their attitude towards this aspect of culture, as I have suggested. Some seem to have had nothing but contempt for the arts and crafts and to have enjoyed using purely theoretical arguments against anyone who claimed to know anything about them;[1] whereas others proclaimed a universal curiosity and aspired—or seemed to aspire—towards every kind of knowledge. Hippias of Elis[2] is an outstanding example of this: Plato shows him boasting to the crowd of onlookers at Olympia that everything he was wearing was the work of his own hands: he had made the ring on his finger, engraved the signet, made his own massage-kit, woven his own cloak and tunic, embroidered his rich girdle in Persian fashion. . . . Modern scholars are divided about the real extent of this "polymathy", as to whether it was just a sham or genuine knowledge (11).

It is known from other sources that Hippias taught a system of mnemonics,[3] and some think that all this imposing learning meant no more in practice than providing the orator with the minimum amount of knowledge necessary to enable him to pose as an expert without ever getting caught out. This judgment seems rather harsh. Polymathy and mnemonics are two different things: the latter was retained in classical rhetoric as one of its five parts, and it had a purely practical purpose—to help the orator to learn his piece by heart. As for the former—we can of course have no idea how much technical knowledge Hippias possessed about the mechanical arts, or how much genuine interest Prodicus had in medicine;[4] but at least there is no doubt that Hippias was highly competent in all branches of science.

Plato vouches for this in mathematics;[5] and goes on to show Hippias[6]—unlike the more limited and utilitarian Protagoras—insisting that the young men in his charge should restrict themselves to a solid study of the four sciences that had been developed since the time of Pythagoras—and which were later to form the mediaeval Quadrivium—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and acoustics (12). This is a fact worth emphasizing: the important point is not whether or not the Sophists contributed to the progress of mathematics—for Hippias was not alone in his interest: Antiphon worked on the squaring of the circle[7]—but the fact that they were the first to recognize the great educational value of these sciences and the first to incorporate them into a standard teaching-system. They set an example that was never to be forgotten.

Hippias showed the same lively interest in a variety of erudite studies: his own works included geographical tables (names of peoples),[8] "archaeological" tables (mythology, biography, genealogy),[9] and above all historical tables such as his catalogue of Olympic winners[10]—the first of a whole series of similar investigations and the beginning of scientific chronology in Greek history, of scientific history in the modern sense of the word. Finally, there was his more purely literary erudition, though here he was not alone—a reader of the *Protagoras*[1] might consider Prodicus the specialist in this field, with his passion for synonyms and his remarkable exegesis of Simonides—but in fact all the Sophists engaged in literature with the same enthusiasm.

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[1] Pl., *Soph.*, 232d; 233b.

[2] *Hipp. Mi.*, 368bc.

[3] *Ibid.*, 368d.; Xen., *Conv.*, 4, 62.

[4] Fr. 4.

[5] *Prot.*, 315c; *Hipp. Ma.*, 285b; *Hipp. Mi.*, 366c–368a.

[6] *Prot.*, 318e.

[7] Fr. 13.

[8] Fr. 2.

[9] Fr. 4; 6.

[10] Fr. 3.

This last fact had such important consequences that it is worth while inquiring how it came about. We often find that when they start discussing literature the argument soon degenerates into a quibble about some tiny point of language or thought—for example, we find Protagoras remarking that Homer uses the imperative mood where the optative would be expected,[2] and that Simonides contradicts himself from one verse to the next[3]—and so one is inclined to wonder whether the Sophists studied the poets simply to show off their brilliance in argument. For apart from the field of general ideas, which was soon exhausted, poetry supplied the only material in contemporary culture that could be treated in this way.

But even if this was their attitude in the beginning, it was not long before the Sophists deepened their method of approach and turned the criticism of poetry into a special kind of mental exercise, a way of studying the relationships between thought and language: in their hands the study of poetry, as Plato makes Protagoras say,[4] became "the most important part of the whole of education". Here too they were pioneers, for, as we shall see, classical education was to enter wholeheartedly along the way which they had opened up, the way taken by every literary culture since. When we see Hippias comparing the characters of Achilles and Ulysses,[5] we seem to be attending one of our own literature classes and hearing one of those endless comparisons between Corneille and Racine which French children have been making ever since the time of Mme de Sévigné and Vauvenargues.

Thus, even though many of the early questions raised about literature were simply an excuse for dialectical fireworks, they soon led the Sophists and their pupils to study the structure and the laws of language seriously: Protagoras composed a treatise "On Correctness of Diction"—*’Ορθοέπεια*,[6] Prodicus studied etymology, synonymy and precision of language;[7] Hippias wrote about sound and syllabic quantities, rhythm and metre.[8] In this way the Sophists laid the foundations of the second pillar of literary education, the science of grammar (13).

THE HUMANISM OF THE SOPHISTS

This rapid review will have given some idea of the many innovations which the Sophists introduced into Greek education. They opened up a number of different avenues, of which some were explored more than others, and of which none was explored right to the end. They were pioneers who discovered and set in motion a whole series of new educational tendencies, and though they did not advance far in any one direction themselves, from their time onwards the general

[1] 337a *seq.*; 358a *seq.*

[2] Arist., *Poet.*, 1456b 15.

[3] Pl., *Prot.*, 339c.

[4] *Prot.*, 338d.

[5] *Hipp. Mi.*, 364c *seq.*

[6] Pl., *Phdr.*, 267c.

[7] *Cra.*, 384b.

[8] *Hipp. Mi.*, 368d.

direction was fixed, to be followed later. Their fundamental utilitarianism would in any case have prevented them from penetrating to the depths.

But we must not be too ready to blame them for this, for their distrust of over-specialization was one of the noblest and most lasting characteristics of the Greek genius: its sense of reasonable limits, of human nature—in a word, its humanism. The child and the adolescent should study, "not to become experts but to educate themselves"—*οὐκ ἐπὶ τέχνῃ, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παιδείᾳ*.[1] The Sophists' best pupils, Thucydides and Euripides, agree with Gorgias that philosophy is a good thing, but within limits, only to the extent that it helps to form the mind and leads to a proper education.[2]

This was a bold solution of a difficult problem, for there is a fundamental antinomy between scientific research and education. If a young mind is made a slave to science and treated merely as an instrument in furthering scientific progress, its education suffers, becomes narrow and short-sighted. But if on the other hand too much emphasis is laid on the open mind, on a purely humanistic culture, there is a danger of superficiality and unreality. This problem has still not been settled (14): it was certainly not settled in the fifth century B.C. when against the solution offered by the Sophists there arose the stubborn opposition of Socrates.

THE SOCRATIC REACTION

Any account of the educational movement of the fifth century would be incomplete if it omitted to mention this other great original spirit, whose thought was no less fruitful than the Sophists'. Paradoxically, the exact nature of his thought is very difficult to ascertain, for whilst our sources are abundant, and whilst they all agree in emphasizing its importance, they do everything they can to obscure its nature and make it impossible to grasp: this is true of the caricatured presentations of it in the comedy of the time—in Aristophanes and Eupolis and Amipsias (15)—and in pseudo-biographical renderings like Plato's; and Plato was probably Aristotle's only source. Even honest Xenophon, tame and pedestrian as he is, has not always been accepted as reliable (16).

Fortunately, there is no need for me to tackle this problem, with all its formidable complexity, here; it will be sufficient to discuss the comparatively simple matter of Socrates' contribution to this problem of education, first raised by the Sophists. He belonged to their generation, and he too, in his own way, was an educator.

I shall not be so rash as to dogmatize about the precise nature of his teaching: I confess that I find myself slightly shocked by the recklessness of the kind of historian who boldly engages to correct the distorted picture given in *The Clouds* by means of a few glimpses of the Cynical School of Antisthenes and then goes on to conclude that the school round Socrates was populated exclusively by scholars and ascetics (17). But, lacking the confidence to paint such a decided picture, one may nevertheless hazard the guess that in major matters Socrates must undoubtedly have appeared as the critic and rival of the great Sophists

[1] Pl., *Prot.*, 312b.

[2] *Grg.*, 485a; Thuc., II, 40, 1; Eur. *ap.* Enn., *Fr. Sc.* 376.

ranged against him by Plato. And, by and large—any attempt to go into the matter in detail would mean getting lost in a maze of argument—his objection seems to reduce itself to two main points.

In the first place, Socrates appears as the mouthpiece of the old aristocratic tradition; politically, he seems to be "the centre of an anti-democratic clique" that includes people like Alcibiades and Critias and Charmides. When he charges the Sophists with being too exclusively concerned with political *virtù*, with effective action, and thus in danger of relapsing into an attitude of cynical amoralism, he takes his stand on the traditional values, first among which, in the matter of education, was ethics, "virtue" in the distinctively moral sense which it has acquired in modern times (as a result, in fact, of the Socratic teaching).

Again, because the Sophists had too high an opinion of the value of their own teaching and too much faith in its infallibility, Socrates—who was less commercially-minded than they were—harked back to the doctrine of the old masters, that education was primarily a matter of gifts and of discovering a simple method of developing them—a conception that was at once more natural and more serious. As we have seen, the famous problem debated in the *Protagoras*—"Can virtue be taught?"—had already been discussed by the great aristocratic poets Theognis and Pindar, and the tentative or at least somewhat qualified solution which Plato represents as having been Socrates' own was the very solution that those poets had suggested as the only one consonant with the noble tradition of which they were the representatives.

Secondly, faced with the fundamental utilitarianism of the Sophists' education, the narrow anthropomorphism which sees every branch of study as an instrument, a means to increased power and efficiency, Socrates asserted the transcendent claims of Truth. Here he comes forward as heir to the great Ionian and Italic philosophers, to that mighty effort of thought directed with such high seriousness towards the unravelling of the mystery of things, the mystery of the nature of the world and Being. This great effort Socrates now redirected, preserving its strict integrity, from things to man: it is by Truth and not by any power-technique that he will lead his pupil to ἀρετή, to spiritual perfection, to "virtue": the ultimate aim of human education is achieved by submitting to the demands of the Absolute.

This two-fold opposition should not be exaggerated, of course: it was not so great that the two attitudes could not be confused, as can be seen in Aristophanes, and as the trial in 399 proved all too tragically. Socrates and the Sophists came under the same head as daring innovators, leading the youth of Athens along new paths. One must go further: the Sophists had awakened so many different ideas, and between them taken up so many different attitudes, that Socrates was not equally opposed to them all. His moral gravity and his acute sense of the inner life brought him close to Prodicus (as their contemporaries realized, indeed); and although Hippias's "polymathy" with its erudite pretentiousness was utterly remote from Socratic "ignorance", nevertheless in their search for the living springs of knowledge the two were united in a single, continuous, indefatigable pursuit of unshakable truth.

The tracks cross and become misleading. It was the great achievement of the generation to which both Socrates and the Sophists belonged to put a large number of ideas—some of them contradictory—into circulation: to plant in the soil of the Greek cultural tradition a number of seeds that promised to be highly fruitful. But at the moment all this varied luxuriant growth was intertwined: it was to be the task of the succeeding generation to sort it out and to select those elements which could be combined into a coherent and definitive system.

It is no exaggeration to say that in the field of Greek education the Sophists accomplished a veritable revolution.

INTELLIGENCE VERSUS SPORT

With the Sophists Greek education finally forsook its knightly origins. If they were not yet exactly scribes they were already scholars. As seen from the outside by Aristophanes, they seemed to be the possessors of a mysterious wisdom, a technical knowledge frightening to the ordinary man and overwhelming for their pupils, who are described emerging from their "thinking shop" —φροντιστήριον—lean, pale, and stupefied.[1] Xenophon, though less inclined to caricature, is no less outspoken: he is fiercely critical of the Sophists' education at the end of his treatise *On Hunting*[2]—a sport dear to the "old education" and of great value as a direct preparation for war.[3]

Thereafter, Greek education became predominantly a matter of the intellect and ceased to emphasize the value of sport. Not that sport disappeared: it went on for centuries; but it began to decline and fade into the background. This change in educational values was all the more marked because technique became increasingly important not only in the matter of learning but in sport too; so that the gap between the two kinds of training grew wider and wider.

I have already mentioned the place of honour occupied by sport in the earliest Greek culture. This exaggeration of its importance proved fatal to it. As in our own day, the universal interest in sporting affairs, the glory of being a champion and the feverish desire to win great international competitions, led to the development of professionalism, and this gradually put an end to "amateur athletics". Because of the terrific competition, only highly-specialized experts could expect to be chosen, and for these, sport was simply a job, and a narrow one at that (18).

In their efforts to improve they developed special techniques, special training, special diets: the trainer Dromeus of Stymphalus (the Olympic long-distance champion in 460 and 456) discovered the advantages of meat as a training-diet.[4]

Sport became a commercial racket. In Pindar's time pan-hellenic champions had often come from the greatest aristocratic and even from reigning families; from the time of the Peloponnesian War onwards they were nearly all professionals, recruited increasingly from the rural and least civilized districts, Arcady and Thessaly. Often they were coarse and brutal men, utter strangers to the noble ideals of the early aristocracy. Even their "sporting feeling" became dubious, like that of our modern professionals; and just as the latter can be bought by clubs whose one aim is to win, so we find the runner Astylos of Croton, as far back as 480, induced by the tryant Hieron to let himself be classified as citizen of Syracuse.[1]

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[1] *Nub.*, 184–186. [2] *Cyn.*, 13. [3] *Ibid.*, 12. [4] Paus., VI, 7, 3.

And so on the one hand sport became a specialized pursuit, whilst on the other the Sophists demanded greater efforts from their pupils on the intellectual plane. The unstable equilibrium which in the last chapter I suggested as a fleeting possibility was henceforth destroyed. There would always be sport in Athens, but it was no longer the main object of youthful ambitions. The youths who, with the enthusiasm of adolescence, flocked to Protagoras[2] before the sun was up, and then, like Phaedrus, went off after his lecture into the fields to meditate on the words of his ἐπίδειξις,[3] could no longer raise any enthusiasm for athletics. And if they did not show the same indifference to worldly success, a brief visit with Plato or Xenophon into the select circle of an aristocratic banquet is enough to show how far, within the unchanging framework of the "symposium", the content of the highest Greek culture had been transformed since the time of old Theognis. The intellectual, scientific, rational element had become, and was to remain, predominant.

[1] *Ibid.*, VI, 13, 1.

[2] Pl., *Prot.*, 310a *seq.*

[3] *Phdr.*, 227a.