

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON ISOCRATES AND HIS ROLE IN RHETORIC AND PHILOSOPHY

Other than bare (and rare) name droppings, Isocrates is not explicitly mentioned or discussed by his contemporary writers and philosophers. This is not unusual for fourth-century BCE literary culture and does not mean that writer-philosophers were engaged in serious discussions only with the famous sophists and philosophers from the past. Quite the contrary, references in the works of fifth/fourth-century authors to their (mostly anonymous) critics and readers suggest an intense literary landscape and display a wide repertoire of solutions that are offered to shared concerns about the newest changes in politics, philosophy and education. It is plausible that suppressing the names of one's rivals was a standard way to play down their importance and increase one's own standing. Thus, in order to better understand Isocrates' sentiments regarding the intellectual climate of fourth-century BCE Athens, and the way his self-fashioned image resonated within this context, it is worthwhile to look at writers close to his time, with whom he might have been in dialogue and who make references to his work.

5.1 Alcidas

An important figure for our understanding of fourth-century BCE conceptions of written and spoken speech, and relationships between rhetoric, sophistry and philosophy, Alcidas and his *Against Those Who Write Written Speeches, or Against Sophists* (henceforth *Sophists*) is an important source for understanding the wider intellectual environment of Isocrates.¹

¹ Alcidas' relationship with Isocrates, especially their relative chronology and the contrasting positions of their works, has been an object of several studies. See most

There is a strong ancient tradition according to which both Alcidamas and Isocrates were treated as pupils of Gorgias.² Despite the fact that Isocrates only has critical comments to make about Gorgias,³ modern scholarship too is sometimes overly fascinated with establishing continuity of thought among ancient thinkers.⁴ Too has rightly questioned this uncritical approach to Isocratean apprenticeship with Gorgias.⁵ Given our lack of any direct evidence about it, we should rely on what Isocrates himself has to say about Gorgias and the latter's importance to his work. Hence, it seems very strange indeed to think that Isocrates singled out Gorgias from other sophists and saw him as his teacher in any meaningful sense. It is surely true, however, that Gorgias was an important (even inspirational) figure for thinking about higher education in Athens, and insofar as both Alcidamas and Isocrates are part of that tradition, it is no wonder that we'll find similarities and differences in their positions.⁶

Other than the superficial connection through Gorgias, the majority of scholars interested in the links between Isocrates and Alcidamas have focused on the chronological relationship of Alcidamas' work to Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*. It has

recently O'Sullivan (1992), chap. 2 and Mariß (2002), 26–55 who gives a useful summary and discussion of the scholarship on the relationship between Isocrates and Alcidamas. Citations of Alcidamas' fragments follow Mariß (2002).

² For the tradition on Alcidamas and Gorgias, see O'Sullivan (1992), 33–40. Following ancient biographers, most commentators on Isocrates also see him one way or another as the pupil of Gorgias. See, for example, Blass (1868), ii, 14; Norlin (1966), i, xii; Marrou (1965), 123; Kennedy (1963), 174–5.

³ Gorgias is explicitly mentioned only three times in the Isocratean corpus: twice in the *Antidosis* (155–6, 268) and once in *Helen* (3).

⁴ Indeed, a recent commentator suggests, for example, that their differences stem from developing different aspects of Gorgias into two distinct 'poetic' prose styles: 'Alcidamas followed the strange ἐκλογὴ of his master, while Isocrates tamed his extravagant σύνθεσις.' O'Sullivan (1992), 58 (cf. also 40).

⁵ Too (1995), 235–9.

⁶ Cf. Steidle (1952), 285. I do not agree with an overly nuanced reading of Friemann (1990), 308 who argues that rather than attacking each other, Alcidamas and Isocrates both appear to attack an altogether different position, i.e. they both are concerned with those who write in simple style and call themselves teachers of rhetoric. For the exact opposite conclusion, see Eucken (1983), 123. Both Alcidamas and Isocrates do have fundamental disagreements about how education should be transmitted and cultivated (through writing or orally) – it is not simply a matter of style.

been suggested that Alcidas' *Sophists* is a direct attack against Isocrates (his programmatic *Against the Sophists* in particular) and his school.⁷ Whatever the chronology, these texts indicate that Isocrates and Alcidas advocated opposing views on what a proper rhetorical or philosophical education should consist of, and this disagreement touches the very core of their respective educational practices. Alcidas enters the debate by defining it in terms of written versus spoken discourse, and advocates the latter as an appropriate aim for any student of rhetorical τέχνη (*Sophists* 1, 33). Isocrates distinguishes between a polished/good and an ignorant/bad composition, and seems to allow both written and spoken discourses to qualify for either category (i.e. of good or bad composition).⁸ Yet Isocrates also argues that a hallmark of good and wide learning is the ability to excel in written discourses, for they are, due to the high expectations of precision and argument, more difficult to compose satisfactorily (e.g. *Panegyricus* 11–12, *Antidosis* 49). Isocrates and Alcidas agree, however, that both written and spoken discourse are, generally speaking, part of a wider *paideia*; they disagree over what role each should play in education and in rhetoric more widely.

We have, admittedly, a rather minimal idea of Alcidas' educational practice, but his *Sophists* suggests that according to him the whole art of rhetoric is best studied by way of learning to speak *ex tempore* (1). This seems to mean memorizing the few crucial points one aims to make in a speech and otherwise improvising the rest. It is not entirely clear how this technique is put to practice in a schoolroom, but such shortcomings in detailed information might also stem from the narrow scope of his treatise: Alcidas' accusation speech

⁷ Different strands of interpretation are most recently discussed in Mariß (2002), 26–55. Along with O'Sullivan (1992), she takes a more skeptical view towards attempts to reconstruct the relative chronology between Alcidas and Isocrates. This is also the point of departure for the present discussion.

⁸ See also Usener (1994), 100–19 which collects and discusses Isocrates' use of λέγειν, γράφειν (and their derivatives). She concludes that Isocrates employs both notions to describe his own works and his activity as a writer/author.

(κατηγορία) seems primarily intended to attack his rivals rather than to provide details about his own school. It is clear throughout the text that Alcidamas is solely concerned with rhetoric and he identifies this as an art of public speaking (τὸ λέγειν). All six occurrences of the root *ρη in *Sophists* refer to either the practice or practitioner of rhetoric as either speaking or speaker.⁹ Alcidamas seems to understand this art as separate from philosophy, even though the distinction between the two is not explicit in this work.¹⁰ Based on our previous discussion about Isocrates' terminology, Alcidamas is very similar to Isocrates. Contrary to the latter, however, Alcidamas does not explicitly proclaim to teach philosophy.

Isocrates' rejection of spoken discourse as the primary basis for education becomes one of the definitive hallmarks of his work, and his advocacy of written discourses as providing the best foundation in education makes him stand out in the fourth-century BCE intellectual scene. It is indicative in this context that one of the few actual descriptions of a teaching situation in Isocrates, his *Panathenaicus* (264–6), shows Isocrates especially uncomfortable about public performance. In this passage, Isocrates argues that he has produced highly eloquent speakers in his school (despite his emphasis on writing skills), but also indicates that a spoken debate is too confrontational, emotional, and perhaps too similar to eristics, to be constructive. Stylistic differences between Alcidamas and Isocrates might indeed reflect their respective views on rhetoric and on its way of functioning.¹¹ Isocrates' meticulously polished 'written' style is perhaps intentionally lacking in the ability to stir emotions and manipulate the audience, something that is promoted by Alcidamas – and rightly so – as the key to success in public performances. In other words, we might be justified in regarding Isocrates' turning away from

⁹ ῥητορικῆς (1, 2), ῥήτορας (33), ῥήτορι (20), ῥήτωρ (11, 34).

¹⁰ Alcidamas uses the root *φιλοσοφ three times: φιλοσοφίας (2, 15), where it seems to be meant in quite a broad sense, something of an 'intellectual'; φιλοσοφίαν (29) is applied to Alcidamas himself. The similarity of Alcidamas' use of φιλοσοφία to Isocrates' is pointed out in Muir (2001), 41 and Mariß (2002), 97–9.

¹¹ O'Sullivan (1992), 59.

the performative qualities of speech, which were highly advocated by the sophists (and Alcidas), towards the less spontaneous and meticulous prose as a response to the debates about the moral quality of rhetoric. Isocrates' written style aimed to be the result of scrupulous training and deeper learning, which would elevate the level of discussion and prevent his students from scoring 'cheap points' by appealing to the irrational and/or emotional expectations of the audience.¹² After all, it is undisputed that Isocrates was deeply concerned with the moral status of rhetorical teaching, and this might explain his appropriation of 'philosophy' as an all-encompassing παιδεία that strives to help its practitioners towards 'reasonableness' (ἐπιείκεια; *Against the Sophists* 21). In that sense, whether Alcidas intended to oppose Isocrates specifically or not (and it is more likely that he intended to encompass in his criticism *everyone* who promotes education through writing, including Isocrates), they do end up occupying opposing positions and, as such, offer valuable perspectives on each others' arguments. Isocrates emerges from Alcidas' criticisms as a teacher who fails to prepare students for success in the courts, whose writing lacks in emotions and who, as a consequence, is not able to move his audience.

5.2 Plato's Isocrates

Plato's engagement with Isocrates is complex and has been the subject of substantial scholarly controversy. There are two explicit references to Isocrates in the *corpus Platonicum*: there is Socrates' famous prophecy concerning Isocrates in the *Phaedrus* (278e–9b), and a passing reference in the *Thirteenth Letter* to some of Isocrates' students (360c).¹³ In addition,

¹² Isocrates' style is referred to as 'sober' in Cole (1991), 128; on Isocrates' definition of philosophy as having an 'almost heroic vapidness' see Wardy (1996), 96.

¹³ In the pseudo-Platonic letter, the link to Isocrates becomes very loose: Helicon is said to have been associated with the students of Isocrates (13.360c). Other than providing another useful source for understanding how the Isocrateans might have worked as a group, there is not much direct relevance to the present discussion of the reception of Isocrates in Plato.

there are passages in Plato's dialogues, in *Euthydemus* (304d–6d) and *Theaetetus* (172c–7b), where Isocrates' name is not mentioned but which have been interpreted either as responses to Isocrates or at least as criticisms of intellectual practices that greatly resemble those of Isocrates.¹⁴ Finally, there is an entire dialogue of Plato, the *Gorgias*, which focuses on politics and rhetoric and where views rather similar to that of Isocrates are subjected to substantial criticism. Let us take a closer look at Plato's references to Isocrates and examine the extent to which this engagement played an important role in shaping Isocrates' subsequent reception.

The most explicit reference to Isocrates in Plato's corpus comes at the end of the *Phaedrus*, where – almost as an afterthought – Phaedrus reminds Socrates of his friend (ἑταῖρος, 278e4) who should be informed about the outcomes of their discussion on rhetoric. Even though Socrates' response 'which one?' (τίνα τοῦτον) suggests that the association between himself and Isocrates comes to him as a surprise, the fact that he does not refute this connection nevertheless sets a positive tone to the relationship as portrayed in the passage. Generally, Plato uses ἑταῖρος to refer either to immediate interlocutors of, or simply to people close to, Socrates.¹⁵ In fact, later in the tradition ἑταῖρος was also understood as a byword for Socrates' students, and this particular passage is clearly the source for later claims that Isocrates was Socrates' pupil.¹⁶ Regardless of the neutral or even borderline-encouraging connotation of the word here, Socrates' account of Isocrates has been taken by most interpreters to be ironic in its intent, thus encouraging scholars to look for further evidence of the differences between Plato and Isocrates that might demonstrate more clearly that Plato's arguments on rhetoric and false

¹⁴ There are many attempts at more precise *Quellenforschung* on the relationship between Plato and Isocrates. A landmark publication on this subject is Eucken (1983). Recently, see also Wareh (2012) for a different methodological approach to the question.

¹⁵ Socrates addresses, for example, Callicles as ὦ φίλε ἑταῖρε in *Gorgias* 482a, but more importantly it is the unnamed stranger who refers to Socrates as Crito's ἑταῖρος in *Euthydemus* (305a), analyzed below.

¹⁶ Nails (2002), 180.

philosophy are explicitly targeted at Isocrates. Isocrates' works appear just too dissimilar to Plato's conception of philosophy – and Plato is often read as a fundamentally non-compromising author on philosophical method – to accept any kind of positive interpretation of their relationship through this passage.¹⁷ Indeed, it is quite difficult to read this passage of the *Phaedrus* without at least considering an ironical attitude: the two important thinkers were contemporaries and opened philosophical schools in Athens around the same time, schools that offered completely different understandings of higher education and philosophical excellence. Perhaps philosophically most significant is their different treatment of knowledge and opinion. Howland offers a compelling discussion on the difference and rivalry between Plato and Isocrates by comparing specific passages from the *Phaedrus* and Isocrates' *Helen*. In *Phaedrus* 262c, Socrates argues that the orator has to use definitions to arrive at knowledge of the topic and that it is not enough to work with opinions, for without systematic understanding of the matter at hand it is impossible to produce the expected result consistently. In his *Helen* (5), however, Isocrates argues that pupils should be instructed in practical affairs, 'bearing in mind that likely conjecture about useful things (περὶ τῶν χρησίμων ἐπιεικῶς δοξάζειν) is far preferable to exact knowledge of the useless (περὶ τῶν ἀχρήστων ἀκριβῶς ἐπίστασθαι), and that to be a little superior in important things is of greater worth than to be pre-eminent in petty things that are without value for living'. Isocrates claims that in some matters it is possible to reach a state of knowledge, but that these areas are so remote from human life and interests that it is actually not worthwhile to dedicate one's life to studying them. It is possible to achieve a level of confidence, however, in areas which do pertain to human interests, but this is attained primarily through experience (ἐμπειρία) rather than theoretical

¹⁷ See for example Howland (1937), 152 who argues that the 'whole dialogue must be considered primarily as a direct and comprehensive attack on the educational system of Isocrates'. The particular target in Howland's view is Isocrates' *Helen*.

discussion. This experience will not result in absolute knowledge and the ability to predict the right course of action in every possible circumstance, but it does boost one's skills in coping with unexpected situations in the best possible way in most cases. They both use the language of knowledge versus opinion, thus clearly indicating that they are participating in the same debate though advocating opposing positions. It seems straightforward to then conclude that the two must have been each others' fiercest rivals. And yet, why would Plato suggest such ambivalence about Isocrates at the end of the *Phaedrus* if indeed they were in every possible way each other's worst enemies?

Another, and in my view more plausible, reading of Plato's mention of Isocrates in the *Phaedrus* emerges once we take seriously the sheer number of references to education and to rhetorical teachers in particular in the dialogue. Leaving aside the poets (Homer, Stesichorus, Sappho, Anacreon, Sophocles), whose frequent mention in the dialogue is interesting in its own right, Socrates brings up Lysias, 'wise men' offering rationalizing accounts of myths (229c4), Simmias the Theban (242b3), Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Theodorus (261c2; Thrasymachus also 271a4), a representative Laconian critic (260e5), Zeno (261d5), Theodorus, Evenus, Gorgias, Tisias, Prodicus, Hippias, Polus, Licymnius, Protagoras (266d4–7e5; Tisias longer discussed also 273a5–4a4), Adrastus (269a4), Pericles and Anaxagoras (269e2–70a6), and finally Isocrates (278e4). With the possible exception of Pericles/Anaxagoras and Isocrates, all other references to (rhetorical) teachers are overtly disparaging, and Lysias, treated here as speechwriter *and* teacher, seems to have become by the end of the dialogue the byword for the kind of rhetoric that ought to be rejected, explicitly, without hesitation. By contrast, *Phaedrus* evokes Isocrates at the end as a curious case ('what shall we say he is?'), though introducing him as 'beautiful' (καλός) already puts us in a positive mindset. Socrates fulfils *Phaedrus*' cautious questioning about Isocrates when he confirms that the latter is not indeed to be classified together with all the rest represented by Lysias, prophesying that he will be important and that there

is ‘some’ philosophy in this young man. Finally, Socrates suggests that he himself will deliver the content of this current conversation to his ‘favorite’ (παίδικοῖς, 279b2), much as Phaedrus should inform his favorite Lysias. Rhetorical education is divided, in this last section of the *Phaedrus*, into two: there are those many who operate like Lysias, and then there is Isocrates, who stands out from the rest by offering ‘some philosophy’ and growth to his students. Socrates unashamedly sides rather with Isocrates though this is not to say that he agrees with the latter. Isocrates still needs to hear the content of this conversation, about the tools and goals of rhetoric and its relationship to philosophy. Significant differences between Socrates/Plato and Isocrates ought not to be downplayed, sure, though setting this passage in the broader context of rhetorical teaching available in Athens both at the time and during Plato’s time, strongly suggests that Isocrates is sincerely, if relatively to the particular context,¹⁸ praised for the (somewhat philosophical) kind of education that he promotes in Athens.¹⁹ As Socrates says, Isocrates is naturally capable beyond the speeches of Lysias, but also has a nobler *êthos*, character or ethics (279a4–5). This *êthos* and Isocrates’ attention to sound moral education in Athens are precisely what elevate and distinguish him from politicians like Callicles and sophists like Thrasymachus, whose positions are in some respects not very far from those of Isocrates.

¹⁸ Erbse (1971) makes a similar argument, though he refers to Isocrates consistently as an orator/rhetor or as a teacher of rhetoric and speech. I hope to have shown by now that Isocrates could be legitimately called a philosopher or thinker and I think this is not irrelevant to our rethinking of Plato’s praise of Isocrates. The fact that Isocrates emphasizes philosophy and does not conceive of himself strictly as a teacher of rhetoric is precisely the reason why he ought to be understood as having been mentioned by Plato in this dialogue as a positive role model for rhetoric. See also Laplace (1995) for a comparison between Plato’s and Isocrates’ criticisms of *logographoi* and rhetoric.

¹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Eucken (1983), who offers perhaps the most comprehensive argument about the rivalry between Plato and Isocrates, does not focus on this passage and chooses to find controversies and direct attacks on each other’s work elsewhere in the Platonic corpus. Some problems in Eucken’s valuable, if not always convincing, *Quellenforschung* are highlighted in Hudson-Williams (1985).

A somewhat comparable image of Isocrates emerges from the concluding section of Plato's *Euthydemus* (304d–6d) with an important difference that Isocrates is not mentioned by name.²⁰ Even if some inconsistencies remain in the 'caricature' of Isocrates,²¹ Plato introduces in this section a critique of a particular type of intellectual that is in a broad sense compatible with Isocrates: this is a man who partakes in political life to some extent but does not participate in court proceedings (305c), who considers himself most wise (304d5: ἀνὴρ οἰόμενος πάνυ εἶναι σοφός), who has some (superficial) familiarity with politics and philosophy, but does not know any of these subjects thoroughly (305c7: μεθόρια φιλοσόφου τε ἀνδρὸς καὶ πολιτικοῦ; 305d8: μετρίως μὲν γὰρ φιλοσοφίας ἔχειν, μετρίως δὲ πολιτικῶν). This man, although considering himself most wise, is unable to confront sophists like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in public debates (305d5–7), and is not honest about his publicly visible inability. Even if this passage is not meant to criticize Isocrates exclusively, it does seem to map rather well onto the previous analysis of Isocrates in the *Phaedrus* and is in agreement with many characteristics that Isocrates himself uses to introduce his *philosophia* and to criticize his rivals. Most striking in this description is the use of the word *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία), and this might add additional weight to the suggestion that it is Isocrates and his appropriation of the term 'philosophy' that are the explicit object of discussion here.²²

Crito describes the discussion he had with a person who witnessed Socrates' exchange with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Despite initially seeming to praise the show

²⁰ Most commentators on the dialogue suggest this: Gifford (1905), 18–20; Hawtrey (1981), 190; Guthrie (1986), 282–3. As well there are numerous discussions on the relationship between Isocrates and Plato more generally: e.g. Ries (1959), Eucken (1983), and more recently Michelini (2000), Palpacelli (2009), 220–6 and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014), 143–53.

²¹ For example the fact that the critic is associated by Crito at first with forensic writers (304d6: εἰς τὰ δικαστήρια); this association is dropped in the later part of the discussion (305c).

²² I differ here in some significant details from the analysis of Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014), 151, whose evaluation of Isocrates' notion of philosophy is heavily informed by, and openly dependent on, Plato.

(304e), the stranger, when asked what he himself learned from them, retorts and says that there was nothing to learn, but (presumably) simply to enjoy the debate: they showed ‘merely the sort of stuff that you may hear such people babbling about at any time – making an inconsequent ado about matters of no consequence’ (τί δὲ ἄλλο [. . .] ἢ οἷάπερ αἰεὶ ἂν τις τῶν τοιούτων ἀκούσαι ληρούντων καὶ περὶ οὐδενὸς ἀξίων ἀναξίαν σπουδὴν ποιουμένων). It seems, then, that the stranger is upset about the fact that in this debate unimportant matters were treated as if they had serious and relevant consequences. Crito’s reply is itself problematic and highly provocative: ‘but surely . . . philosophy is a charming thing’ (ἀλλὰ μέντοι [. . .] χαρίεν γέ τι πρᾶγμα ἐστὶν ἢ φιλοσοφία). Crito is the first to define the exchange between Socrates and the brothers as philosophy and, furthermore, to declare it to be charming regardless of the potential dangers that the stranger had highlighted. The stranger reiterates that (whatever Crito means by) philosophy is of no worth whatsoever (305a1: οὐδενὸς μὲν οὖν ἄξιον), and to demonstrate this he mentions how Socrates, who agreed to take part in such a debate, made a laughing-stock out of himself, for ‘the business itself and the people who follow it are worthless and utterly ridiculous (φαῦλοί εἰσιν καὶ καταγέλαστοι)’. The anxiety about appearing ridiculous and the energetic attempts to associate oneself with serious and important things certainly evoke the image of Isocrates as the candidate for the stranger in this passage.

After having heard Crito’s summary of their exchange, Socrates offers an analysis of an intellectual type: Prodicus had allegedly called such people somewhere in-between philosophy and politics (305c7: μεθόρια φιλοσόφου τε ἀνδρὸς καὶ πολιτικοῦ). Socrates argues that even though these kinds of people are only ‘moderately versed in philosophy and moderately too in politics’ (305d8), and cannot thus claim to know the subjects in the depth necessary, still one ‘ought to recognize their ambition (συγγιγνώσκειν τῆς ἐπιθυμίας) and not feel annoyed with them’, for one should applaud ‘anyone who says anything that verges on good sense (ἐχόμενον φρονήσεως πρᾶγμα), and labors steadily and manfully in its pursuit’

(306c6–d1). Without any further elaboration, Socrates suggests here that while these people are not fully entitled to φιλοσοφία and are lacking in the depth of their knowledge, there is nevertheless something valuable in their pursuits in that they have good intuitions and ideally cultivate some of this also in their students or followers.

Coming as it does at the end of the dialogue, one cannot help but draw parallels to the *Phaedrus*, which suggested – in a rather comparable way – that there is ‘some (kind of) philosophy’ (τις φιλοσοφία) in Isocrates and predicted he would grow beyond his current rhetorical studies towards philosophy proper. Surely there were other practitioners of philosophy or proponents of education in contemporary Athens who could have been included in this characterization. However, the position of this observation at the end of the dialogue and the language used to describe the stranger (calling himself most wise, advocating against too deep engagement with philosophy, etc.) do seem to fit perfectly with Isocrates in particular. Isocrates seems to have been exemplary during his time and has certainly remained a unique case study of philosophy and rhetoric for contemporary readers. Hence, it does seem reasonable to consider Isocrates as an intended recipient of this evaluation and to be applauded over some of their other contemporary rivals.²³ This almost benign rejection of Isocrates as a second-rate (or third-rate in this passage) thinker might have had a less devastating effect on the reception of Isocrates than, for example, Socrates’ portrayal of the ‘immoral sophists’, such as Callicles and Thrasymachus. Sketching out a more or less acceptable alternative to his own philosophical project, Plato seems to become an influential source for subsequent attempts to conceptualize and revive Isocratean philosophy. While the *Phaedrus* was surely a prominent place for Isocrates’ rehabilitation as a student of Socrates and a positive role model for philosophical rhetoric, an

²³ Socrates’ positive comments are often forgotten; paradigmatic is Sudhaus’ reaction (1889), 53: ‘Dass die Schlussepisode gegen Isokrates geht, wird jetzt wohl Niemand mehr bezweifeln.’

attitude that seems particularly prominent in the works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus of the first century BCE, the *Euthydemus* further confirms this image of Isocrates but also indicates briefly the shortcomings of Isocratean philosophy.

This explicit mention of Isocrates at the end of the *Phaedrus* and potential references to Isocrates in the *Euthydemus* have inspired critics to launch into a wider examination of other dialogues by Plato in order to find support for their interpretation of Isocrates as one of the main rivals of Plato. Some scholars have regarded, for example, the digression about the philosopher in Plato's *Theaetetus* (172c–7b) as a critique of Isocrates. Eucken argues that the digression in *Theaetetus* is to be regarded as Plato's critique of the 'rhetorical man' (*rhetorischer Mensch*) more generally and should be regarded not as an *ad hominem* attack on Isocrates, but as an attack on an image of the intellectual that, however, encompasses the essential features of Isocratean philosophy/education.²⁴ Even though Socrates draws a marked dichotomy between forensic speakers and philosophers, and Isocrates can be regarded among the former group only at a significant stretch,²⁵ some of the fundamental characteristics of the two types of men as portrayed by Socrates – it has been argued – do map out the central disagreements between Isocrates and Plato. While Isocrates focuses on the 'here and now', Socrates emphasizes the triviality of sense perceptions and of life embedded in political or oratorical activity. For Socrates' leading

²⁴ Eucken (1983), 75, 276–81.

²⁵ Isocrates himself denies having written forensic speeches, though he surely did and five have been preserved in his corpus. However, there are aspects in Socrates' description of the 'orators' which would be difficult at first sight to connect with Isocrates. For instance, the idea of lacking in time that characterizes orators under the pressure of courtroom conventions and the inability to pursue a topic properly can hardly characterize Isocrates who took, according to himself, at least ten years to complete a speech (*Panegyricus*), and appears to emphasize the thoroughness in his studies contrary to the practice of other sophists. Isocrates is hostile towards courtroom oratory and denies his involvement in this practice during his youth. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that Isocrates' students were, highly likely, to pursue careers in public offices, law courts and so on. Hence, even if not a critique of Isocrates' person *per se*, Isocrates' philosophical school would have cultivated characteristics that emerge in the 'orator' in contrast to the values of the 'philosopher cohort'.

philosophers (κορυφαῖοι [φιλοσοφῶν], 173c7), true knowledge and wisdom lie in contemplation of the eternal and in aiming to be united with the divine as soon as possible (176a8–b1). Isocrates, as demonstrated above, does not believe in the human capacity to achieve systematic and abstract knowledge of things worth knowing about, thus acknowledging beliefs (δόξαι) as the closest one can get to (practical) wisdom. These beliefs will inevitably depend on all kinds of stimuli coming from the world around us and thus are fundamentally rooted in our environment and context.

Next to the epistemological disagreements,²⁶ another important divergence between Plato and Isocrates, or the respective images of philosophers that they would advocate, goes back to the notion of 'ridiculousness'. In fact, Socrates' digression in *Theaetetus* 172c4–6 is inspired by the recognition that philosophers appear 'laughable' (γελοῖος) to others around them: 'how natural it is that those who have spent a long time in the study of philosophy appear ridiculous (γελοῖοι φαίνονται) when they enter the courts of law as speakers (ῥήτορες)'. Socrates describes this ridiculous appearance as a necessary characteristic of a philosopher who spends all her time contemplating things that lie beyond her physical experience of the world.²⁷ Isocrates, quite to the contrary, is keen to establish authority, a sense of seriousness and relevance to his educational methods. According to him, philosophy is what can be considered useful, and anyone who appears ridiculous in pragmatic affairs will have misunderstood the ultimate goals of philosophy (e.g. *Helen* 4–6). In his *Antidosis*, for example, Isocrates has his associate explain the difference between himself and the 'showing-off sophists'. The latter are sometimes ridiculed (καταγελάειν) and sometimes praised by the auditors,

²⁶ Note that the disagreement between Plato and Isocrates is not over the difference between knowledge and belief, but about their usefulness. The belief/knowledge distinction is implicitly maintained by Isocrates.

²⁷ It is perhaps relevant that at the end of the *Phaedrus* (277e3–8e2) Socrates suggests that one ought not to take written texts too seriously and, in fact, it would be ridiculous indeed if one did so. Now if we ought to see a rebuke of Isocrates anywhere in the *Phaedrus* it might be in this sentence, for it is hard to imagine an author who takes his writings more seriously than Isocrates.

whereas Isocrates is not (147–8). Sophists are associated multiple times with the most ridiculous situations (ὁ δὲ πάντων καταγελαστότατον), be that for distrusting their students (*Against the Sophists* 5), or for trying to convince with implausible arguments (and not by deeds) that they have relevant things to say about political knowledge (*Helen* 9). Isocrates is also concerned for Athens appearing ridiculous if his views on *logoi* and education are neglected (*Antidosis* 297).²⁸ Finally, in a passage of the *Archidamus*, Isocrates demonstrates perhaps his strongest stance on ridicule: he states that ‘it is preferable to suffer annihilation rather than derision at the hands of our foes’ (89: αἰρετώτερον ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ἀναστάτοις γενέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ καταγελάστοις ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν).²⁹ In sum, Isocrates agrees with Plato that hypothetical theorizing as described in this digression will inevitably lead to the ‘ridiculous state’ of the philosopher, but while this is something Plato accepts as a side-effect, Isocrates views it as an ultimate failure of the profession.

Epistemologically and emotionally, therefore, the views put forth in this digression seem to position Socrates/Plato and Isocrates on opposing axes and in direct and fierce antagonism. However, the drama of the dialogue is more complicated than that. The fact that all quests for knowledge end in *aporiai*,³⁰ that there is no mention of the forms and recollection, and the presence of the digression in the middle of the dialogue which seems to have little to do with other themes of the dialogue,³¹ have kept commentators on their toes. Indeed, as has been noticed before, next to expressing a rather exaggerated view of orators or law court officials, this passage of the

²⁸ Other passages where Isocrates warns against appearing ridiculous: *Archidamus* 37, 84, *Busiris* 31, *Helen* 46, *To Philip* 101, *Panegyricus* 169, 176, *Trapezitikus* 21, *Antidosis* 56.

²⁹ The idea of derision as the ultimate tool of humiliation is also suggested in *On the Peace* 149.

³⁰ Of course, the aporetic nature of the dialogue does not mean that an account of knowledge cannot or has not been given in the *Theaetetus*. Cf. Bostock (1988), esp. 272–4; Sedley (2004), 178–81.

³¹ McDowell, for example, has described the digression as containing material ‘which in a modern book might be served by footnotes or an appendix’ (1973, 174).

Theaetetus also provides a caricatured depiction of philosophers to the effect that it is highly dubious that Socrates actually endorses this way of life any more than that of the orators. Indeed, the philosophers are described as oblivious to life happening around them, unaware of politics, of customs and laws, of feasts and trials, and most importantly, the philosopher 'doesn't even know that he doesn't know all these things' (173e1). This can hardly be a positive characterization of philosophers. In the end, it is Socrates rather than the idealized leaders of philosophy (κορυφαῖοι) who is occupying the position of a truly desirable middle measure, having a grasp – as much as striving towards achieving knowledge – of the things in the world.³² Hence, if we are to locate Isocrates somewhere in this digression, it seems that he resembles the position of Socrates more than he does that of the orators. Even if he did have an early career as speechwriter, he has made a name for himself and gathered reputation rather as a teacher and head of a philosophy school. Isocrates is very negative about orators and other writers of political speeches (except for himself, of course) and recognizes the place for theoretical knowledge, even though he strongly advocates using theoretical philosophy as a tool for intelligent participation in the city's politics. In other words, within the crude distinction between orators and philosophers, Socrates and Isocrates seem closer to each other than they seem to either of the extremes. Hence, this passage can hardly be taken as a criticism of Isocrates, and even less so as an explicit critique of the Isocratean school. If anything, it seems to recognize the importance of a school like that of Isocrates, which is trying to find a middle way between the two highly problematic extremes.

Finally, there is Plato's *Gorgias*. Some see this dialogue as Plato's school-founding manifesto, written as a response to Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, which has in turn been taken to be a manifesto for Isocrates' newly opened school.³³ One of

³² Rue (1993). See also Sedley (2004), 65–74. ³³ Eucken (1983), 38–43.

the chief reasons for this position is the discussion over tuition fees, for which Socrates (Plato) criticizes the sophists and, implicitly, Isocrates. Eucken maintains that this debate shows most clearly the way schooling was regarded by Plato and, being critically opposed to the views of Isocrates, he argues – mistakenly in my view – that ‘Die Akademie wird so gesehen gegen Isocrates gegründet’.³⁴ While we know that Isocrates charged tuition fees, like the sophists, it does not necessarily follow that Plato’s dialogue was directed solely against Isocrates and his practice. Be that as it may, stronger arguments of anti-Isocratean sentiments can perhaps be found in the knowledge versus belief discussion. This is developed in the first part of the dialogue in the exchange between Socrates and Gorgias. By having introduced a distinction between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and belief (πίστις), Gorgias is eventually forced to agree with the following definition of rhetoric (454e9–5a2): ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, πειθοῦς δημιουργὸς ἐστὶν πιστευτικῆς ἀλλ’ οὐ διδασκαλικῆς περὶ τὸ δίκαιόν τε καὶ ἄδικον. Socrates, developing this line of thought further, demonstrates that Gorgias’ conception of rhetoric might end up having serious and contradictory moral implications. Gorgias, who advocated at the beginning of the dialogue a neutral concept of rhetoric (456c–7c), is forced to accept by the end of the discussion that ‘it is impossible for the rhetorician to use his rhetoric unjustly or wish to do wrong’ (461a5–7), thus admitting a contradiction to his views on rhetoric. What is relevant for the Isocratean context is the way in which Socrates develops the argument from the distinction between knowledge and belief into a question about the moral foundations of rhetoric.³⁵ Isocrates would, however, insist that he would not be able to teach morally depraved students in the first place. Overall, his insistence on the moral aspects of his *logoi* seems strong enough to make us suspect that as much as the image of Gorgias might have been associated with that of

³⁴ Eucken (1983), 41.

³⁵ Admittedly, in his works Isocrates uses primarily δόξα and not πίστις to express ‘opinion’.

Isocrates (through a potential teacher–student link), Isocrates could hardly have been conceived as the object of criticisms expressed in this passage.

Perhaps more than in previous passages, Isocrates has sometimes been associated with the views of Callicles at the later stages of the dialogue, where the latter argues that philosophy should be pursued only as a training of the young, but that grown men should abandon this and get involved with ‘real’ politics.³⁶ There are some textual markers that indicate that reference is made indeed to a position rather close to the one advocated in the *Euthydemus* and having similarities with the way Isocrates fashions himself and is portrayed by his contemporaries.³⁷ Callicles introduces the argument from nature and claims that laws are made in favor of the weak and for their protection against the strong (483b4–c2). Socrates would be able to understand this position if he would only abandon philosophy and pass to greater things (484c4–5). For ‘philosophy is a charming thing (χαρίεν) if a man has to do with it moderately (μετρίως) in his younger days; but if he continues to spend his time on it too long, it is ruin to any man’ (484c5–8). There are many verbal references here to the last part of the *Euthydemus* and therefore the connection to Isocrates – if indeed he is to be identified among the recipients of Socrates’ ‘mediocre thinker’ in that passage – springs immediately to mind. The description that follows this claim closely approximates the characterization of true philosophers in the *Theaetetus* section analyzed above, where Socrates mentioned elements that positively define the philosopher (ignorance of ‘worldly matters’, ridiculousness in private and public gatherings), but in this passage Callicles intends these features to be anything but complimentary to the profession. According to

³⁶ E.g. Irwin (1995), 95.

³⁷ It is surprising that more has not been made in recent scholarship of their potential similarity. Rossetti (2018), 282 expresses the same sentiment when he briefly notes the resemblance of the views of Isocrates and Callicles, but in his analysis of Socrates and contemporary philosophy decides to completely neglect Isocrates and his potential contributions. The most detailed discussion of their relationship is still Sudhaus (1889), 55–60.

him, philosophizing in excess makes one ‘ignorant (ἄπειρον) of everything that ought to be familiar (ἔμπειρον)’ to a καλὸς κἀγαθός (484c9–d2): they are ignorant of the laws of their city, of the terms of negotiation in private and public affairs, of human pleasures and desires. As a consequence, this business of philosophy itself becomes ridiculous (καταγέλαστον, 485a7) and those practising it seem to Callicles most similar to those grown men who lisp and play tricks (ψελλιζόμενοι καὶ παίζοντες) like children (485b1–2). Both activities, philosophizing and playing, are acceptable as a stage in one’s educational training, but not appropriate in advanced age with increased responsibility and experience. Comparing philosophy to frivolous tricks also resembles the way in which Isocrates rejected theoretical philosophy as irrelevant and useless activity for example in his *Helen* (4–6). There is indeed a sense of anxiety about appearing ridiculous and useless that informs both Callicles’ and Isocrates’ views on what true philosophy ought to be about.

First off, however, Callicles is characterized as an aspiring as well as promising politician and not as a teacher or even a sophist proper.³⁸ This is an important difference, for if indeed Plato intended his readers to recognize Isocrates in the figure of Callicles, the portrayal of Callicles as an active and vocal politician in this dialogue would make any such explicit link impossible.³⁹ If anything, we might wonder whether Callicles could stand for a potential student of Isocrates rather than Isocrates himself.⁴⁰ This is a tempting avenue for two

³⁸ It is interesting that of all influential characters created in Plato’s dialogues, that of Callicles is perhaps among the most enigmatic. We do not know anything about Callicles beyond this dialogue, and the lack of historical context has invited scholars to see other contemporary rivals as speaking through this character. See Dodds (1959), 12–14 for a more detailed discussion of the historical context and scholarship around Callicles.

³⁹ Dodds (1959), 12 highlights the incomparable dynamism and energy in Isocrates and Callicles (as portrayed in Plato) and thus rejects Sudhaus’ speculation to see Isocrates behind Callicles as absurd. It must be said, however, that Dodds’ opinion, whether correct or not, rests on his preconceptions about Isocrates as ‘respectable and unadventurous’, which are not supported by any evidence and longer discussion.

⁴⁰ As far as I can tell, this idea has been proposed before only by Gotschlich (1871), 4 who claims that ‘in Kallikles sei recht eigentlich ein aus der Isokrateischen Schule hervorgegangener politischer Redner gezeichnet’.

reasons: first because of the overt similarity of some ideas presented by Callicles in the dialogue, and secondly because of the sympathy and respectful treatment Callicles receives from Socrates despite supporting positions completely opposed to him. Despite the emotional turmoil portrayed in the dialogue it is worth noting that Socrates maintains throughout a respectful tone to Callicles and considers him the best conversational partner due to his sufficient education, frankness and goodwill towards Socrates (487a–8b1). At the end of the dialogue, Socrates laments that they both have fallen far back in education (doing philosophy moderately evidently has important drawbacks). He then invites Callicles to abandon his previous guide to life and instead to join in with Socrates in the quest for proper understanding of justice and excellence in life and death (527e). Much as Socrates had shown goodwill and understanding towards Isocrates in the *Phaedrus* and, arguably also, in the *Euthydemus*, Callicles is depicted as a promising young person with potential to embark on the right path. Socrates' criticism, among other matters, seems to be directed at the superficiality of his education and thought and, as such, we could read from their encounter an implicit criticism of any school that leaves education incomplete while giving its students an impression of having reached some level of maturity of thought. In other words, in comparison with his peers, Callicles stands out in a positive way as a somewhat educated and passionate conversation partner. However, his schooling has not been thorough enough to render him capable of following and fully participating in a philosophical discussion.

This may be a more general criticism of some philosophical schools at the time, though based on our knowledge of the various authors and educational institutions the only real candidate for this kind of criticism is the Isocratean school. Such a review that emphasizes both the positive and negative traits of an Isocratean education is in line with the way Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Euthydemus* engage with Isocrates and his influence in Athens. Unlike many commentators, therefore, I regard the portrayal of Isocrates in Plato to be rather positive though with important caveats. While Isocrates is to be

applauded for turning young men to philosophy in a broad sense, for cultivating youth who would appreciate notions like virtue and tradition, justice and excellence, he is also to be criticized for the incomplete philosophical program offered in his school. In the end, despite some central disagreements between Plato and Isocrates on philosophical education, they probably share more in terms of their views of intellectual life than either of them does with some of the more radical sophists.

5.3 Isocrates and Aristotle

We can say frustratingly little with confidence about the relationship between Isocrates and Aristotle, despite the increasing scholarly interest in their interaction.⁴¹ Isocrates himself makes no reference to Aristotle, but there are two works by Aristotle that seem to engage with Isocrates: the *Protrepticus* and the *Rhetoric*.⁴² Looking at the portrayal of Isocrates in the latter is straightforward and requires no explanation, for Isocrates is mentioned there by name and is the most frequently quoted contemporary in the whole work. Seeing an Isocratean connection in the *Protrepticus* is more speculative and requires further comment. I will start with the *Protrepticus* as much as it has been taken to be the earlier of the two.

⁴¹ E.g. recent work by Haskins (2004), Hutchinson and Johnson (2005), Wareh (2012), Collins II (2015).

⁴² There have also been hypotheses based on FG_{GrHist} 1026 F₃₄ (= Diogenes of Laertius 2.55) that Aristotle wrote an early dialogue *Gryllus* in which he allegedly attacked Isocrates (who is also credited with a eulogy of Gryllus) as the chief opponent to academia and representative of contemporary rhetoric. As Too (1995), 12 reminds us, there is no further information about Isocrates having written a work titled *Gryllus* and the association with Aristotle is also very weak. See a longer discussion of this fragment in Bollansée (1999b), II A5. It has to be said, however, that the supposed controversy between Aristotle and Isocrates, mentioned in Bollansée, does not rest on any actual evidence, but on the general (misguided) assumption that the two were bitter rivals. This view will be examined here in more detail.

Isocrates and Aristotle
Aristotle's Protrepticus

The history of recovering Aristotle's *Protrepticus* is full of scholarly controversy, and all these debates have now received a new dimension in the forthcoming edition by Hutchinson and Johnson.⁴³ Even though the *Protrepticus* was proposed for a while to have been composed as a speech, in an Isocratean manner, reading of ancient biographical information together with Cicero's *Hortensius* has shifted scholarly opinion towards a dialogue form.⁴⁴ Hutchinson and Johnson go further than that and argue that this dialogue featured three interlocutors: Aristotle himself, Isocrates and Heracleides Ponticus.⁴⁵ Whether or not such hypothetical reconstruction is to be trusted, Isocrates has been considered by most scholars to constitute a crucial background to our understanding of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, both in terms of its content and format.⁴⁶ Indeed, the writing of a protreptic work, irrespective of where it belongs in Aristotle's composition,⁴⁷ means that Aristotle was actively engaged with the educational rivalry in Athens, much as most

⁴³ More detailed overviews of the scholarship can be found in Düring (1961), who gives a good overview of the scholarship from 1957–61; Rabinowitz (1957), although negative in its conclusions, gives a good account of the scholarship prior to 1957. Most recently, Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) provide a helpful overview of the scholarship from 1961 onwards. The most up-to-date information about their reconstruction of the work is collected as a webpage: www.protrepticus.info. For references to the *Protrepticus* I use Gigon (1987) together with Hutchinson and Johnson (2015).

⁴⁴ This conclusion is to be preferred mainly due to external evidence: in the lists of Aristotle's works, the *Protrepticus* was mentioned among dialogues; Cicero's *Hortensius* was (highly likely) a protreptic dialogue which allegedly took its cue from Aristotle (and assumedly from his *Protrepticus* in particular). A good discussion of Cicero's thoughts on the dialogue form is Schofield (2008), 74–84. See also Hirzel (1895), 276 and Gottschalk (1980), 9 with further bibliography and references to ancient evidence.

⁴⁵ On the dialogue form of Heracleides Ponticus, see Fox (2009). As far as I can tell, there is no actual evidence of the names of these three in any of the fragments that we have and the attribution of speakers is purely speculative based on the views detected in the fragments. I would therefore be very cautious about any grand claims like those in the unpublished essay (but published and available on the website) that maintains that the *Protrepticus* was written as a response to Isocrates' *Antidosis* (1).

⁴⁶ Schneeweiss (2005), 235–6 n. 227.

⁴⁷ Many have speculated that it belongs to Aristotle's early works when he was still part of the Academy. E.g. Jaeger (1948), 54; Berti (1997), 402. Most recently, see van der Meeren (2011), xxii–xxxi.

philosophers probably were. Unfortunately, we can only speculate about the role Isocrates might have explicitly played in this work.

Since we cannot say much about the generic category of the *Protrepticus* nor be sure whether Isocrates was explicitly mentioned in the work, I will confine the following brief analysis to looking at some of the generally agreed views advocated in this work and contrast them to Isocrates, in order to see if Isocrates could indeed have been regarded as a recipient of Aristotle's criticism of philosophical education in Athens.

The first point of comparison emerges in the formal address of the *Protrepticus*, which – according to Stobaeus – appears to have been to Themison, a king of Cyprus.⁴⁸ There is almost no information about Themison and one can only assume that he must have been a man of importance in Cyprus if Aristotle decided to address him in the *Protrepticus*.⁴⁹ As Jaeger has pointed out, it is somewhat paradoxical that a work which aims to encourage pupils to take up a theoretical life (βίος θεωρητικός), or a life of contemplation (as contrasted to the 'practical' life of Isocrates), is eventually addressed to a political actor ('the man of deeds').⁵⁰ Indeed, this address would be easily conceivable in the case of Isocrates who exhorts his audience to practical philosophy, but it seems less appropriate for the purposes of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. But it could have also been a more generic trait of protreptic works that often address an individual with the aim of engaging and exhorting a wider audience to take up philosophy.⁵¹ A similar approach is apparent also in Isocrates' 'Cyprian orations', which, although

⁴⁸ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* iv.32.21 (frag. 54 Gigon). The *Protrepticus* was 'addressed' rather than 'dedicated' to Themison. See Jaeger (1948), 56.

⁴⁹ Chroust (1973), 119–25 reviews the ancient evidence for Themison and concludes that 'it is well-nigh impossible to identify this Themison'.

⁵⁰ Jaeger (1948), 55–6. Chroust (1973) interprets this paradox in the light of political rivalry between Isocrates and Aristotle.

⁵¹ Surprisingly little has been done with regard to ancient protreptic discourses. For a general overview, see Jordan (1986). A more detailed overview of ancient evidence for the protreptic genre is provided in Slings (1995) and van der Meeren (2002) and (2011). Collins II (2015) is the most recent discussion of Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates on protreptic genre, but adds little new to the existing literature on the topic.

probably intended to be read by the wider public, are addressed to a particular person and the exhortation to philosophy closely follows the individual development of character. Overall, however, Isocrates' use of a personal address stands out from the comparison with Aristotle's *Protrepticus* as more developed and incorporated into the speech. In Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, Themison and his royal status do not seem to play any larger role in the work, contrary to Isocrates' *To Nicocles* where the personal address serves to give a *raison d'être* for the work. In fact, compared to other (protreptic) examples – Plato's *Euthydemus* or Isocrates' Cyprian orations – Aristotle's *Protrepticus* appears as the most *a*-personal: aside from the address, the main body of the text (or what has been suggested to constitute the main text) appears to contain general arguments and discussions on the nature of philosophy and the aims of 'good life' more generally, rather than engaging itself with concrete examples or individuals in particular.

The wider philosophical controversy between Isocrates and Aristotle concerns the 'usefulness' of philosophy. Isocrates dismisses in his discourses (e.g. *Antidosis* 261, *Helen* 3) the idea that philosophy should be identified with strictly theoretical pursuits, and attempts to establish and popularize his own understanding of philosophy as a practically oriented broader educational framework. According to him, a wise man is someone who is 'able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course', and a philosopher a person 'who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight' (*Antidosis* 271: φιλοσόφους δὲ τοὺς ἐν τούτοις διατρίβοντας, ἐξ ὧν τάχιστα λήφονται τὴν τοιαύτην φρόνησιν). Furthermore, someone who wants to contribute to society should 'banish utterly from their interests vain (μάταιοι) speculations and all activities which have no bearing on our lives' (*Antidosis* 269). Wilms argues that behind Isocrates' understanding of philosophy is the wider cultural conception of τέχνη: Isocrates avoids explicitly equating φιλοσοφία with τέχνη, but his comparisons with other 'arts' (e.g. medicine) indicate that he views the acquiring of

φιλοσοφία and its function in similar terms as τέχνη.⁵² Hutchinson and Johnson claim to be able to recognize this Isocratean position in fragment 74.1 of the *Protrepticus*, which exhibits a comparable position to the *Antidosis* passage above, renouncing a practice that is interested in ‘goods themselves’ without being able to make use of them.

Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* appears to promote two central aspects of philosophy: firstly, arguably in response to the Isocratean pragmatic view of philosophy that limits ‘good things’ only to those that have instrumental value, Aristotle argues that there are things which are truly good and worth pursuing for their own sake (fr. 73.61).⁵³ Furthermore, access to these fundamental ‘goods’ (that are then the basis for other arts and skills) is granted to philosophers alone (fr. 73.67–8).⁵⁴ Isocrates, who values education and philosophy above other pursuits, would probably not challenge the idea that access to fundamental ‘goods’ is the purview of philosophers, even if we should probably think here of the Isocratean kind of philosopher in particular. Isocrates might also agree with the fact that some things are worth pursuing for their own sake, though he might disagree that we should see philosophy as a thing rather than as a tool towards better governance. Secondly, Aristotle argues that philosophy is what makes us truly human: since the function of the soul is thinking, those who fulfil this function are more alive and fulfil the ‘human condition’ more than those who do not dedicate themselves to philosophy (fr. 73.72). In addition to this, the tradition has preserved a famous and clever argument from the *Protrepticus*, which, however, is not cited by Iamblichus in his *Protrepticus*.

⁵² Wilms (1995).

⁵³ Τὸ δὲ ζητεῖν ἀπὸ πάσης ἐπιστήμης ἕτερον τι γενέσθαι καὶ δεῖν χρησίμην αὐτὴν εἶναι, παντάπασιν ἀγνοοῦντος τινὸς ἔστιν ὅσον διέσθηκεν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα διαφέρει γὰρ πλείστον. τὰ μὲν γὰρ δι’ ἕτερον ἀγαπώμενα τῶν πραγμάτων, ὧν ἄνευ ζῆν ἀδύνατον, ἀναγκαῖα καὶ συναίτια λεκτέον. ὅσα δὲ δι’ αὐτὰ, κἂν ἀποβαίη μηδὲν ἕτερον, ἀγαθὰ κυρίως [...]. Cf. Hutchinson and Johnson (2015), 50–1.

⁵⁴ καὶ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων τεχνῶν τὰ τε ὄργανα καὶ τοὺς λογισμοὺς τοὺς ἀκριβεστάτους οὐκ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν πρώτων λαβόντες σχεδὸν ἴσασιν, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῶν δευτέρων καὶ τρίτων καὶ πολλοστῶν [τοὺς τε λόγους ἐξ ἐμπειρίας λαμβάνουσι]. τῶ δὲ φιλοσόφῳ μόνῳ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἀκριβῶν ἢ μίμησις ἔστιν· αὐτῶν γὰρ ἔστι θεατῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐ μιμημάτων.

According to this argument, if anyone claims that philosophy should not be studied they are in a self-refuting position, for in order to argue for this point they are already using the tools of philosophy and are, thus, automatically committed to it (εἰ μὲν φιλοσοφητέον, φιλοσοφητέον, καὶ εἰ μὴ φιλοσοφητέον, φιλοσοφητέον: πάντως ἄρα φιλοσοφητέον).⁵⁵ Hutchinson and Johnson suggest that this might have been Aristotle's reply to Isocrates in the dialogue, but this is not entirely persuasive. Since Isocrates also makes use of the term φιλοσοφία and appropriates it to his own school of thought, the power of the argument is diminished as Isocrates would not deny (on a very general level) that 'one ought to philosophize'. Isocrates would reject the view that philosophizing ought to be understood as a theoretical pursuit. In other words, if we should speak of the *Protrepticus* as a response, at least on some levels, to Isocrates, it remains unclear from any of those central claims of the work how and why they ought to be read as a direct attack on Isocrates. On the face of it, it seems to make better sense to understand Aristotle's *Protrepticus* in a broader Athenian educational and political context as a work that has no time to spend on criticizing fellow philosophy rivals on smaller disagreements and hidden remarks, and instead as a manifesto that is focused on the bigger picture: how to draw students to philosophy more generally (rather than to politics, medicine, craftsmanship and so on) and thus improve general morality and education in the city as a whole.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The evidence for this argument is preserved in Lactantius *Divine Institutes* 3.16.396b, Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 6.18.5, Alexander of Aphrodisias *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics* (at 11.3 110a2), Sextus Empiricus *Against the Logicians* II, Iamblichus' *Letter to Sopater on Dialectic* (cited in Stobaios *Anthology* 11.2.6), Olympiodorus *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* 119a–20d, Elias *Prolegomena to Philosophy* (3.17–23 Busse), David *Prolegomena to Philosophy* (9.2–12 Busse). For an analytical discussion of this argument see Castagnoli (2010), 187–97.

⁵⁶ Hutchinson and Johnson (2005), 196–7 argue that Aristotle's *Protrepticus* was one of his most widely read philosophical-programmatic works. It is odd indeed not to find in ancient commentators any other reference to Isocrates' involvement in the work. If it did feature Isocrates as a character, it certainly does not seem to have had a negative impact on Isocrates' popularity in subsequent reception. Overall, I find it rather implausible that Aristotle even intended with his *Protrepticus* a more

Aristotle's Rhetoric

Isocrates' role in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is at once simple and complex. He is the most often quoted contemporary individual in the work,⁵⁷ and this is relevant even if only in suggesting that Aristotle was familiar with Isocrates' works and felt comfortable exhibiting his acquaintance with the latter. At the same time, the *Rhetoric* displays no deeper engagement with Isocratean thought and philosophy – all quotations are restricted to examples of his style and argumentation without any hint about the way in which Isocratean philosophy might be positioned in the context of Aristotle's own views.⁵⁸ It is therefore tempting to conclude that Aristotle intends to treat Isocrates solely as a stylistic figure who has no relevant rhetorical, philosophical or educational innovations that would prompt Aristotle's response in the context of his philosophical discussion of rhetoric.⁵⁹

Isocrates is explicitly mentioned in twelve passages of the *Rhetoric*,⁶⁰ but there are also numerous implicit references to and paraphrases of Isocrates' work.⁶¹ None of these passages discusses or even briefly mentions Isocratean philosophy or educational theory. In none of the direct references to Isocrates does Aristotle take a polemical attitude to Isocrates. Quite the contrary, Aristotle evokes examples from Isocrates' works when he needs to explain different aspects of rhetorical

technical and overt criticism of Isocrates. Moreover, one should also be careful when taking Cicero (and his *Hortensius*, for example) as an informative source about the possible generic outlook of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, for the context of philosophical exhortation is very different in fourth-century BCE Athens and first-century BCE Rome. I hope to address this topic elsewhere in more depth.

⁵⁷ Cf. Benoit (1990), 252. In fact, as far as I can tell, Isocrates is the second (only after Socrates) most frequently mentioned author in the whole work.

⁵⁸ References to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* follow Kassel (1976). Translations are adapted from Kennedy (1991).

⁵⁹ Dow (2015) seems to share this view, though he does not elaborate on the possible influence of Isocrates for Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and confines his argument to a brief footnote, where he suggests that Gorgias, Thrasymachus (i.e. the sophists) and Plato appear more likely inspirations for the *Rhetoric* than Isocrates.

⁶⁰ 1368a20, 1392b11, 1399a2, 1399b10, 1408b15, 1411a29, 1412b6, 1414b27, 1414b33, 1418a31, 1418a34, 1418b26.

⁶¹ Veteikis (2011), 3. He claims that Aristotle makes around forty references to Isocrates in his *Rhetoric*.

compositions and topics. As these passages show, Isocrates is referred to in all books, but most often in the third book which is dedicated generally to style. Intriguingly, there is one passage with a direct reference to Isocrates which seems to have a sarcastic undertone. When describing the differences between deliberative and forensic oratory, Aristotle claims that the former is more difficult because there are fewer ‘tricks’ one can use and appeal to. Yet, when at a loss ‘one must do as the orators at Athens and Isocrates (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ῥήτορες ποιοῦσι καὶ Ἴσοκράτης), for even when deliberating, he brings accusations against the Lacedaemonians’ (1418a29–31). It is worth pointing out that Aristotle mentions Isocrates together with Athenian orators, but also keeps him separated from that group (‘as the Athenian orators *and also* Isocrates’), suggesting thus that he does not properly belong in that group either. Indeed, Isocrates seems to remain somewhere in-between various categories and Aristotle himself does not appear to have a very defined opinion about Isocrates. It may be a coincidence that Isocrates is mentioned so frequently as a source for stylistic examples in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, but it certainly seems that he was not relevant or provocative enough for Aristotle’s philosophical enterprises. Based on the little evidence we have, perhaps it is most wise to conclude that Aristotle remained uninterested in Isocrates’ philosophy though he might have considered him excellent enough to be used as an example in the context of argumentation and composition.

Two relatively recent accounts of the relationship between Aristotle and Isocrates have proposed opposing explanations for the state of our scarce evidence of Isocrates in Aristotle. Haskins has interpreted this move by Aristotle as minimizing ‘the political importance and timeliness of Isocrates’ writings by tearing them into stylistically interesting but ultimately decontextualized fragments’.⁶² Admittedly, the emphasis Isocrates lays on the stylistic aspects of his work certainly gives good ground for Aristotle to make such a categorization.

⁶² Haskins (2004), 78.

At the same time, Haskins' arguments from our lack of evidence are purely speculations. Indeed, the fact that Isocrates has no place in Aristotle's other works might simply suggest that Isocrates is either not taken seriously as a philosophical rival or that his conception of philosophy, popular as it may have been, is simply uninteresting for Aristotle. One might entertain the fascinating position, as Haskins does, that Aristotle had a larger goal in mind when writing Isocrates out of the history of philosophy, to actively discredit him, but there is no real evidence that would support such a speculative interpretation and, as such, it will be cast aside until further evidence should emerge. Wareh, on the other hand, is another extreme and offers a far more sympathetic engagement between Aristotle and Isocrates than he can substantiate with evidence.⁶³ In an inspiring as much as frustrating inquiry into the mutual influences between Aristotle, Isocrates and their respective schools, Wareh suggests that many central insights of Aristotelian ethics and politics can be traced back to the 'Isocratean' challenges and insights in contemporary philosophical debates. As appealing as this view may sound, there is little evidence to prove, for example, that what Wareh treats as strictly 'Isocratean' may not have been simply a commonly shared view, a substratum of a broader debate, that thus emerges in the works of both.⁶⁴ These speculations must, too, be abandoned until further information should arise on the relationship between Aristotle and Isocrates.

Yet even without suggesting that Aristotle wrote Isocrates deliberately out of philosophy (as we now understand it), it is nevertheless plausible that Isocrates would have received in later reception a more serious consideration (including in modern scholarship!) had Aristotle explicitly discussed his

⁶³ Wareh (2012).

⁶⁴ There are several other criticisms that could be voiced against Wareh's study. In particular, the lack of clarity of the argument and sometimes misleading use of source texts is frustrating enough to prevent more serious engagement with the otherwise valuable provocation in Isocratean scholarship. The discussion of Isocrates' students and school is, nevertheless, very valuable. For a generally positive evaluation of this book, see Edwards (2013).

views on philosophy and rhetoric in his works. Aristotle, who remains in many respects a highly valuable pillar for our understanding of the philosophical canon, who collects arguments and fragments of pre-Socratics that have otherwise been lost, seems (for whatever reason) not to have found in Isocrates a productive conversational partner. This very fact may indeed have shaped the reception of Isocrates and fixed his position somewhere between philosophy and rhetoric. Not quite philosopher, because he is not mentioned in the philosophical canon, but not quite rhetorician, because his works and activity could not be categorized under any of the three main branches of rhetoric as defined by Aristotle: deliberative, epideictic and judicial. On the other hand, this in-betweenness has enabled Isocrates also to be considered, from time to time, a legitimate philosopher who ought to belong in the philosophical canon and whose views of the practical side of philosophy offer a refreshing opportunity to access philosophy without getting bogged down too deep into the difficult terminology of some philosophical schools. In fact, the silence of Aristotle and praiseful attitude of Plato's *Phaedrus* probably encouraged rather than hindered the spread of Isocrates' works and influence in Greece and, later on, from Greece to Rome. In other words, Plato's overtly positive praise in the *Phaedrus* and hidden criticisms in the *Euthydemus* and *Gorgias*, together with Aristotle's neglect of Isocrates, paved the way for the emergence of Isocrates as an alternative teacher of philosophy, who was oriented towards the practical and who emphasized the responsibility of elite members in society to maintain the well-being of the political community.

