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ISOCRATES ON SOCRATES

While the biographical tradition associates Isocrates' intellectual formation most frequently with Gorgias, Prodicus and Theramenes, there is also another, much later and more dubious, tradition that connects Isocrates to Socrates. Despite the confident claim in the *Anonymous Life of Isocrates*, which states that Isocrates μαθητὴς δ'ἐγένετο φιλοσόφου μὲν Σωκράτους ('became the student of Socrates the philosopher'),[1] and a couple of anecdotes, describing Isocrates utterly distressed about the death of Socrates to the extent of wearing mourning clothes for a year, the association between Socrates and Isocrates is of late origin and of little plausibility.[2] However, the suggestion that there was some sort of intellectual association between the two men seems to carry irresistible attraction and it has never ceased to have prominent supporters.[3]

Their association surely owes much to the reading of Isocrates' *Antidosis* together with Plato's *Phaedrus* and to noticing Isocrates' only mention of Socrates in his *Busiris*. Whether or not the two actually met is a wild speculation and in itself not a very relevant question for this inquiry. It is surely true, however, that Socrates' trial and execution had a long-lasting impact on Athens and it is highly probable that devising a career in education and laying claims to philosophy just immediately after such a watershed moment must have forced Isocrates to think hard about the role of teachers and intellectuals in Athenian society. Although it was held among many (if not most) contemporaries that Socrates' death was unfair and undeserved – and therefore it was (and perhaps still is) probably unwise to criticize Socrates for an educated audience – Socrates' behavior at the trial and his (lack of?) ability to defend himself have nevertheless been a subject of debate and interpretation.[4] I believe that we should look at Isocrates, though clearly a non-Socratic thinker, also in this particular context. While most scholars regard Isocrates as a staunch rival of Plato, Aristotle and other Socratics,[5] it is productive to regard Isocrates together with his contemporaries as trying to negotiate the Socratic legacy while developing his own unique approach to education and philosophy.[6] This perspective will show that Isocrates' reflection of Socrates was more combative and critical than what has thus far been proposed.

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[1] Mandilaras (2003), 1.211.

[2] See Klaus Ries' excellent discussion of the details of this tradition (1959), 1–8.

[3] One of the most prominent and vocal defenders of this association was George Kennedy in his account of Isocrates (1963), 174–203. Others make this assumption mostly in passing, e.g. Janko (2006), 58 who writes that Isocrates was Socrates' pupil, or McCoy (2007), 9 who uncritically assumes that Isocrates was a 'follower of Socrates' and a student of Gorgias.

Before Isocrates opens his school in early fourth-century Athens, we hear from another philosophy school in Athens that is active in 423 BCE – Socrates' 'Thinkery' (or *Phrontistêrion*) from Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Granted that this is a comedy and not an actual school (nor actual Socrates) that is portrayed in the play, this idea of Socrates as school master and student magnet seems to have resonated well after his death.[7] Indeed, it is curious that of all the philosophical schools in Athens that we know emerged from the early fourth century onwards, Isocrates' was the only one *not* tracing its origins back to Socrates.[8] This tells us two things: first, Socrates' influence on his followers seems to have been such that it inspired later schools to be founded with a focus specifically on professionalization of philosophy, politics and education.[9] Second, as far as we can tell, Isocrates was the only advocate for professional schools who shows us another way of conceiving higher education in Athens. It is plausible, then, that when Isocrates discusses/critiques philosophers and the philosophical tradition, Socrates (rather than any individual Socratic) is the overwhelming and underlying 'martyr' of philosophy and education that he needs to grapple with. Why indeed did he not, unlike all other heads of philosophy schools, become a Socratic?

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[4] See also Cartledge (2009), 76–90.

[5] See e.g. Eucken (1983); Nightingale (1995); Haskins (2004); Wareh (2012); Muir (2019).

[6] In fact, Isocrates repeatedly diagnoses the cultural milieu of his contemporaries by reference to predecessors. See e.g. Isoc. *Against the Sophists* 19–21.

[7] The clearest expression of the lasting impact of Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates is in Plato's *Apology* 18a–19c where Socrates himself laments the impression that the *Clouds* has made on the Athenians.

[8] Clarke, forgetting Isocrates, maintains that 'the later philosophical schools, with the exception of the Epicurean, all derived from [Socrates]' (1971), 58. Though see now Hessler (2018) on Socrates' influence on Epicurus and Epicurean philosophy.

It is an understatement to say that Isocrates disagreed with Socrates and with Socrates-inspired philosophical schools. The tradition itself was in development and Isocrates proposed, as discussed above, a fundamentally different kind of concept for a philosophical school. This school was predicated upon the principles of sophisticated rhetoric, persuasion and advantage (discussed above). The urgency with which Isocrates attacks Socratic philosophers and the courage he had to challenge Socrates as the fountainhead of what had started to become a standard conception of philosophy schools are best understood as political. While Isocrates promoted in his work public life and preparation for political participation in the city's governance, often specifically drawing attention to students who had excelled in relevant fields, Socratic dialogues underscore the importance of self-knowledge and promote a private study of true virtues in life. Isocrates' *Antidosis* is a good test case for their relationship.

It has been occasionally noted that Isocrates' *Antidosis* is much indebted to Plato's *Apology*.[10] A careful reader will quickly notice, however, that in this work Isocrates subtly constructs an image of himself as an educator who is more effective and useful for Athens than Socrates had been. In one section, Isocrates discusses the role of education in shaping successful newer-generation politicians and orators in Athens and subtly draws attention to the work he himself is doing at his school. When he warns the jurors to not make a wrong decision of convicting him, he says that he has surpassed everyone else in providing Athens an education in intellect (φρόνησις) and speech (λόγος) – the two important cornerstones in the Athenian way of life that have brought the city its international renown and success (*Ant*. 291–5). In other words, Isocrates' hard work in his school has enabled Athens to stand out internationally as the teacher of the rest of the world.[11]

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[9] See Ostwald and Lynch (1994), 594–5 on the way various Socratic schools traced their origins to the historical Socrates. Having emphasized the fact that Socrates exercised some kind of impact on his followers that inspired them towards founding their own philosophical schools, it seems equally true, as emphasized by Boys-Stones and Rowe (2013), viii that this should probably be regarded as a side-effect rather than primary focus or aim of the Socratics, and that they were primarily geared towards horizontal conversation with each other rather than vertical institution-building.

[10] Too (1995), 192–3; Too (2008), 24–6; Nightingale (1995), chap. 1; Ober (1998), 260–3; Ober (2004); Hunter (2012), 117.

While Socrates of the Socratic dialogues revealed the underlying ignorance and complacency of his fellow Athenians – that they actually do not know what they profess to know – Isocrates takes a different path and praises his fellow Athenians for already having outdone other Greeks in education. Athenians are the leaders of the world in education and this is due to the work teachers in Athens have been doing so successfully. There could not be a starker contrast. The Socratics and Plato in particular tell a story of Socrates' encounters with the polis as one of attempts and failures, some more, some less ridiculous, but altogether it seems fair to say that Socrates' interlocutors (at least in our extant Socratic dialogues) are shown to be full of confidence, even though deeper conversations reveal them to be ignorant and incapable of dealing with criticism. Socrates keeps throughout the dialogues a distance from his interlocutors and thus a distance from Athens and its institutions.[12] This distance is predicated on freedom that Socrates seems to enjoy, a freedom to scrutinize and criticize institutions and people who do not live up to their own convictions. We are not allowed to forget, however, that it was also this city that ended up executing Socrates.

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[11] *Antid*. 295: 'For you must not lose sight of the fact that our city is looked upon as having become the teacher of all able orators and teachers of oratory' (χρὴ γὰρ μηδὲ τοῦτο λανθάνειν ὑμᾶς, ὅτι πάντων τῶν δυναμένων λέγειν ἢ παιδεύειν ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν δοκεῖ γεγενῆσθαι διδάσκαλος).

[12] Socrates' conversation partners often claim expertise and/or authority in fields that are of particular importance to Athenian democracy: Nicias and Laches represent the military, Euthyphro claims authority on religion, Gorgias on rhetoric, Ion on

Isocrates paints a rather different image of his fellow Athenians. Even though there are problems in the jurisprudential system that Isocrates addresses in the first pages of his *Antidosis*, Athenians are generally cast as wiser than the rest of Greece, better educated and with appreciation for culture and education. There are some malicious characters who have brought the charges against Isocrates ('some sophists', Lysimachus *Antidosis* 2, 14), but rather than being pervasive in Athenian society these are the outliers. There is of course a hidden suggestion behind this portrayal of Athens, namely that Isocrates himself had an important role in shaping this superior Athens, that his school had in no small way contributed to the outstanding success of Athens. Furthermore, Isocrates seems to assimilate his own image as a successful teacher and a head of school with the international reputation of Athens as a teacher (διδάσκαλος) of the Greek world. Isocrates and Athens have started to look alike – Isocrates has become Athens.

Another point of difference between Isocrates and Socrates is, obviously, philosophy itself and how one ought to practice it. In what counts perhaps as the most programmatic passage in the Isocratean corpus, *Antidosis* 261–9 argues that astronomy, geometry and eristic dialogues are in themselves not harmful and as such benefit students as any training of the mind would (266), but they should not be called philosophy and they are useless as a preparation for real life. Therefore, these disciplines should not be practised too long nor be taken too seriously. This argument resembles another similar claim

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musical education, etc. Beversluis (2000) offers a sympathetic reading of Socrates' interlocutors in Plato's early dialogues and divides them into three categories: young men, established professionals and wealthy employers (28–9). Those of the latter two categories (experts and businessmen) are generally approached as being able to represent a particular field or institution (in a broad sense of the word).

made by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*,[13] except that Isocrates seems far less concerned with the personal fates of individuals than with the future of Athens more generally.[14] According to Isocrates, the Socratic quest for knowledge turns the youth from acting towards the wellbeing of the city towards prioritizing individual contemplation of personal virtues and happiness, thus depriving the city of educated and bright leaders. Isocrates' concern for the usefulness of philosophy to Athens constitutes one of the pervading themes of *Antidosis* and this theme will also be, as shown below, his primary departure from Socrates and his followers.

Isocrates talks about success and worldly rewards of his profession in the *Antidosis* (281–5) where he lists advantage or gain (πλεονεξία) as one of the cornerstones of his philosophy. Isocrates argues that there is a general misconception in Athens with regard to language and terminology used to denote certain activities and people. Meanings have been turned upside-down, Isocrates claims, and buffoons capable of mocking and mimicking rather than men of excellence are called 'gifted' (εὐφυεῖς, 285). Tracing these changes back to the so-called ancient sophists enables Isocrates to suggest that it is not really the general public, but rather the so-called 'philosophers' who have unhelpfully discredited the idea of advantage, which used to function as a positive term in the context of any intellectual activity. Most importantly, Isocrates is upset that wealth has recently, among his contemporaries, fallen into disrepute (*Antidosis* 159–60), and unfairly so.

I believe we arrive here at what appears to be an explicit confrontation with Socrates and his image as a teacher and philosopher. It is a central characteristic of Socratic teaching to closely scrutinize one's reliance on, and appreciation of, external characteristics such as wealth and reputation and challenge these as goals in themselves.[15] Socrates' search for definitions often challenged the original or common meaning of a notion and aimed to demonstrate that things (or hopes, beliefs, desires) are not always what they appear on the surface or what the tradition handed down to us has had us believe. Through his critical lens on the political and social structures at place in Athens, Socrates has built a distance between the observer and the object so as to better contemplate matters at hand and reach a more objective and timeless decision.[16] The move is away from the moment and political context towards contemplating important questions of ethics in a timeless space.[17] The philosopher who is capable of following this quest ought to be independent and free from pressures from society in order to live that kind of critical life prescribed by Socrates. This intellectual freedom is an important reason why Socrates never charged fees.[18] As Blank notices, the distinction between sophists and philosophers tended to be made on the basis of whether or not they charged fees for their activity.[19] Otherwise, Socrates argues, he would have to talk to those who pay him and would therefore not be free to pursue his path of questioning as he chooses to.[20]

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[13] Pl. *Gorgias* 485e–6d where Callicles claims that philosophy, while a valuable part of liberal education, is unworthy and a waste of time for a serious adult.

[14] In Plato's dialogue there is of course a deep irony behind Callicles' words, which predict Socrates' death at the hands of Athenians. The tone driving Isocrates' treatment of philosophy emphasizes one's commitments to the city and so his worry seems to be primarily this: how to make sure that all talented young and wealthy Athenians end up fostering the polis? He seems to think that engaging in theoretical pursuits (philosophy) would keep some of the bright minds away.

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[15] E.g. Pl. *Apology* 30b2–3; see also Boys-Stones and Rowe (2013), chap. 2 for Socratics more generally. Antisthenes (Xen. *Symp.* 4.34–44) is sometimes taken as the most important testimonium for Socrates' (and, by extension, the Socratic circle's) views on wealth.

[16] This is not to say that Plato's Socrates is particularly invested in criticizing Athenian institutions, but rather that his quest for truth and knowledge is always already intertwined with thinking through critically our inherited and predetermined positions that pertain to governance and to city politics more generally. Furthermore, the kind of distance that we are talking about here does not mean that Socrates was not himself involved in matters of the state: he had allegedly distinguished himself in battle (and thus completed compulsory military service) and had served as a juror. However, the fact that he had fulfilled the basic criteria of Athenian citizenship does not mean that he was involved in (promoting) Athenian institutions in any deeper way.

[17] Obviously references to and implicit suggestions regarding the contemporary moment remain pervasive throughout the dialogues, but Socrates is overwhelmingly portrayed as somehow outside the usual social norms, as prioritizing the more abstract vision over the concrete decision. Schofield (2006, 20) talks about Socrates' 'quietist activism'.

[18] Despite the opposite suggestion in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, other contemporary theatrical evidence confirms the image that Socrates did not charge fees and was poor: Eupolis fr. 352 Kock, Ameipsas fr 9 Kock; see Blank (1985), 7 for further discussion.

Isocrates sees things differently.[21] According to him, everyone does everything for the sake of either pleasure, gain or honor.[22] This, he says, is a fact and teachers who are preparing students to become leaders in the city or to simply manage their affairs cannot and should not downplay the importance of these three motivations. In other words, Isocrates seems to regard these three as legitimate and justified goals for one's actions. He himself talks often about his reputation, thus giving the idea that to be well regarded by one's fellow Athenians is of great importance to him and thus also a valid concern for any Athenian. Unlike Socrates, who discourages his interlocutors from following the so-called external motivations, urging them to continuously search for truth and happiness, Isocrates acknowledges the relevance of pleasure, gain and honor in the existing political and economic system and is determined to highlight the potential of higher education as a direct path to achieving these goals. Coming after Socrates and reflecting on his provocative views of education, Isocrates might appear as a conservative advocating for traditional societal norms.[23] As such, he may not seem to bring much new to the ongoing discussion. As someone, however, trying to introduce (for the first time) institutionalized professional higher education to the intellectual and political landscape of Athens, his emphasis on demands for schools to cultivate the political elite of the city makes Isocrates' position stand out from the rest. By making financial demands, Isocrates reminds his students that his school participates in the economy of the city, that it is not an autonomous self-absorbed entity somewhere in the outskirts of Athens,[24] but rather an integral part of the city's ongoing development.

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[19] Blank (1985), 1 with references to Xenophon *Cyn.* 13.8 ff. and Aristotle *Soph. el.* 1.1, 165a22.

[20] Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.6, 1.6.5, *Apology* 16; Plato *Theaetetus* 150c–1b. Plato critiques the sophists who have to teach whoever pays them: *Prot.* 313d5, *Euth.* 271d3, *Meno* 70b2 and 91b2, *Hippias Maj.* 282c4.

[21] An argument has been made, most recently by Blank (2014), that Isocrates might not have charged fees from his Athenian students, but only from those coming overseas. I find this suggestion quite implausible, also because it would be hard to explain why Isocrates would then choose not to mention it.

[22] ἡδονῆς ἢ κέρδους ἢ τιμῆς ἕνεκα φημὶ πάντας πάντα πράττειν, *Antidosis* 217. This contrasts Plato's 'categorization of actual and non-ideal political communities into those motivated by pleasure (democracy, *Rep.* 557d and 559b–d), wealth (oligarchy at *Rep.* 551a) and honor (timocracy at *Rep.* 548c)'. Too (2008), 197.

[23] De Romilly (1954) discusses Isocrates as a moderate in his contemporary political landscape; see also Bringmann (1965), esp. 83. Of more recent commentators, Too (1995), 103–12 associates Isocrates explicitly with conservative thought, but (unlike de Romilly) provides no further clarifications as to what this term might mean in

Given the potential costs of running a professionalized institution of higher education, managing such an enterprise must require fees higher than what we hear were asked by the itinerant sophists. It is no surprise, then, that Isocrates comes back to the issue of money again and again throughout his writings.[25] One of the most direct engagements with this topic is in his *Antidosis*, where after discussing the wealth (or lack thereof) of Gorgias, Isocrates turns to discussing the changing intellectual climate when it comes to charging fees for one's professional activity (159–60). Isocrates explains that when he started out his business he was full of hope to recover the lost fortunes of his heritage and gain prominence through his hard work and education. Now, however, he finds himself surprisingly in a position where his foreign students who have brought him much financial support are continuously holding him in high honor, whereas Athenians on whom Isocrates has spent his resources are the ones to bring him on trial on the charge of being (too) wealthy.[26] These references to the

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the fourth–century BCE context. See also Poulakos and Depew, 'Introduction' to their co-edited *Isocrates and Civic Education* (2004), which also makes pervasive associations between Isocrates and conservative politics (in the US?) without making any effort to explain the relevance of this political terminology to the fourth-century BCE context.

[24] While we have a rather good sense of the location of Plato's Academy at the outskirts of Athens and of other philosophers, as far as I know we are not as well informed about the location of Isocrates' school.

[25] Examples: *Antidosis* 155, 240; *Areopagiticus* 31–4; *Against the Sophists* 3.

[26] In another revealing passage from his early *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates admonishes the sophists not for charging fees, but for charging too little for the great promises in education that they make (*Against the Sophists* 3: 'although they set

financial side of the 'education business' (and there are many more scattered around his works) are certainly indicative of Isocrates' vision of the field: money and fame matter, they reveal the place one occupies in the real economy of the city and it would be at the peril of dooming education and philosophy to irrelevance to deny that. Holding such a position sets Isocrates in direct conflict with Socrates and his followers, and thus the entire mainstream of philosophical schools that trace themselves back to Socrates.

Despite his explicitly critical reception of Socrates, Isocrates never explicitly confronts Socrates, though he does mention him once. In the *Busiris* Isocrates criticizes the work of Polycrates who had written two paradoxical discourses: a praise of Busiris and an accusation speech against Socrates. Even though Isocrates then goes on to rewrite the praise for Busiris,[27] he argues against Polycrates not because one ought not to accuse Socrates, but rather because his accusation speech looked more like praise.

Niall Livingstone has argued that Polycrates wrote the accusation speech against Socrates primarily because he regarded Socrates as a hero of his profession and therefore someone very hard for any educator to attack.[28] Given that in this work Isocrates clearly conveys a very negative opinion of Polycrates, it might look obvious to assume that Isocrates is defending Socrates and, thus, that his relationship to him is one of admiration.[29] Indeed, he chooses to offer a proper

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themselves up as masters and dispensers of goods so precious, they are not ashamed of asking for them a price of three or four minae!'). See also Plato's *Sophist* 234a7 and *Apology* 20a–b for a similarly critical attitude. Most ancient sources challenge the view that sophists earned little and there certainly seems to have been a commonplace understanding that such education was expensive and unaffordable for the average Athenian (see e.g. Socrates' reflections on it during his youth in *Laches* 186c). For a more thorough discussion, see Blank (1985), part 1.

[27] This is probably an explicitly provocative maneuver from Isocrates. By that time, defense speeches for Socrates had become standard rhetorical exercises and served as a way to display one's excellence. By bringing up this reference and then disappointing the reader with offering a discourse on a different – more valuable? – topic, Isocrates is playing with generic expectations and downplaying the valorization of Socrates.

[28] Livingstone (2001), 36.

[29] This seems to be also what Livingstone (2001), 38 proposes.

praise of Busiris rather than a 'correct' accusation of Socrates! However, it is also plausible that attacks such as those leveled against Socrates by Anytus, Meletus and Polycrates (even though all on different levels and probably with different motivations) were in Isocrates' view so serious attacks against the position of intellectuals and teachers in Athens that regardless of the individual differences and disagreements, it was a matter of urgency that they be refuted *tout court*.[30] But more specifically, it is striking that Isocrates' criticism of Polycrates revolved around the figure of Alcibiades: Isocrates claims that Polycrates has falsely given the ever-talented Alcibiades to be a student of Socrates. Most Socratic philosophers thought long and hard about how to distance Alcibiades from Socrates and how best to address the claim that Socrates was responsible for the damage that Alcibiades inflicted on Athens. Isocrates instead embraces the excellence of Alcibiades and claims that Socrates was never his teacher in the first place, thus effectively belittling the influence Socrates as a teacher had on Athenian politics.[31] Isocrates' claim might be best understood as a twist on the paradoxical subject itself,[32] but either way it is hardly supportive of Socrates as a venerated teacher and role model.

As suggested before, Socrates' trial plays a fundamental role for our understanding of Isocrates' *Antidosis*, which is arguably one of the most multilayered fourth-century engagements with Socrates' trial that we have. This work is clearly set in competitive dialogue with many other contemporary literary-philosophical works that reflect on this watershed moment, but more than anything else, it seems that the *Antidosis* is imbued with a competitive attitude towards Socrates and his philosophical/educational heritage.[33] Isocrates had also participated in a court trial that he – similarly to Socrates – lost.[34] As Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, Isocrates imagines the real reason behind his failure at the trial to lie in fundamental misunderstandings that have arisen around his school and his personality. Yet, it would be dangerous for Isocrates to sound too much like Socrates, to suggest that his influence in the city has been primarily negative, that he has not made any political impact and – above all – that engaging in higher education inevitably means taking distance from the political life of the city. The pervading ideas of the *Antidosis* are, therefore, inspired by the desire to demonstrate the relevance of his school and philosophy to Athens and, thereby, implicitly criticize the core of what Socrates – the head of school – was standing for. Thus we see Isocrates who is hopeful that the jury will eventually recognize the truth about him (28, 169–70), confirm his importance to the cultural milieu of Athens and pay their due respect.[35] It is curious that Isocrates had explicitly decided to side with his audience and listeners, being confident that his words *will* make a difference. This is yet another instance where Isocrates consciously adopts an opposite view to Socrates, envisioning himself to be an effective teacher and educator in Athens in contrast to Socrates. Indeed, Socrates may have been a teacher of sorts in Athens, but he was not a teacher of Athenians nor useful for the city. Isocrates, instead, aims to be both.

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[30] It is also possible that by the mid fourth century an accusation against Socrates would no longer have been particularly fashionable given Socrates' re-evaluation as a paragon philosopher, teacher and citizen. See above and Zanker (1995).

[31] Isocrates offers praise of Alcibiades also in *On the Team of Horses* (16).

[32] If it was common knowledge that Socrates was Alcibiades' teacher, then Isocrates' claim would do exactly what paradoxical writings aimed at: take a common subject and turn it on its head.

[33] The possibility that Isocrates is fashioning himself as the 'new' Socrates is proposed, but quickly rejected, by Haskins (2004), 39. Others, too, seem to make a nod

Finally, there may also have been some urgency in Isocrates' perceived need for a new vision for higher education and its role in the city. As some studies point out, there were hesitant attitudes towards wealthy aristocratic Athenians after the Peloponnesian war that seem to have resulted in the

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towards this interpretation (e.g. Blank 2014), but they never posit a competitive relationship between the two. It is always Isocrates who admires and attempts to emulate Socrates the teacher.

[34] It is also possible that the story about his previous court trial for an *antidosis* 'exchange' process was a fiction. If indeed it was a fiction, one could easily see the benefits of inserting it in his narrative. It serves the purpose of showing Isocrates as very wealthy (enough to be challenged for an *antidosis*), without actually saying it openly.

[35] Even though at some sections of the speech (e.g. 154) Isocrates addresses different members of the audience – much like Socrates in Plato's *Apology* – he also says that he will not rest until he has convinced everyone of the truth about him (196–7).

continuous decrease of active political elite running the city.[36] By the end of the fourth century BCE, Aristotle's *Politics* and the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* both describe contemporary Athens as the most radical form of democracy, arguing that citizens and decrees rather than laws rule the city.[37] Further, Claire Taylor has drawn attention to comparative evidence from the fifth and fourth centuries that suggests that the participation and influence of wealthy elite in Athens had significantly declined in the fourth century BCE.[38] In this context, we might look at Isocrates' political discourses as aiming at popularizing his school among the upper-middle- and high-class Athenian citizens and, no less importantly, as attempts to cultivate their preparation for a political career.

If indeed there was a perception that the political elite had lost its influence and importance in Athenian politics, Isocrates' discourses seem to suggest two things: first, by challenging Socrates as the fountainhead of contemporary philosophical schools that promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth in isolation from active day-to-day life in the city, Isocrates is drawing attention to the increased danger that this kind of philosophical education will turn Athenian leadership even more apathetic to contemporary politics and thus further reduce the influence of the elite and educated leadership in Athens. In other words, Athenian educated elite should look to Isocrates rather than Socrates for a proper guidance in reaching a truly accomplished civic life.[39] Secondly, Athens in her complex political context of the fourth century BCE cannot really afford to lose the voice of the educated (upper-class) Athenian and therefore other philosophical schools should be held to the task of preparing and advocating political careers for the educated (and wealthy) Athenians.[40] Therefore, Isocrates' challenge of Socrates as the paragon citizen and exemplary teacher of Athenians might not have been motivated simply by hopes for personal glory (though that should not be ruled out in the case of Isocrates), but was also – or even primarily – seen as a result of contemporary political necessity for anyone who cared for the future of the stability of the Athenian polis.

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[36] Sinclair (1988), 43.

[37] Arist. *Pol.* 1274a7–11, *Ath. Pol.* 41.2. For discussion, see Ober (1998), 98.

[38] Taylor (2007), 89.

[39] Isocrates is here quite possibly challenging the entire Socratic tradition of philosophy. Nightingale (2004) mentions Isocrates as the most prominent proponent of so-called 'pragmatic philosophy', but since she never mentions other less prominent ones it is possible that she too would view Isocrates as the only prominent educator who runs against the mainstream Socratic view that prioritizes *theoria* over practice.

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[40] For information about the contemporary political struggles, see e.g. Hansen (1983), Sinclair (1988), Ober (1998), Osborne (2000), Taylor (2007). Isocrates himself happily demonstrates his success in preparing students for successful political careers. Primary example he uses is the famous Athenian general Timotheus.