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Plato's and Isocrates' Traditions in the Development of Educational Theories in the History of Culture

Oleg BAZALUK¹

Abstract: *The article deals with the philosophical analysis of ideas, which have influenced the development of the theories of education in the history of culture. The chosen strategy helps the researcher not only to structure in a certain way gained by the empirical and theoretical way knowledge in the sphere of education but also to use the obtained results to create a new theory. Due to received generalisations, the author systematised the diversity of the theories of education in histories of culture according to the two lines of development: Plato and Isocrates. The author concludes that the competition and complementarity that exist between the theories of education of Plato's and Isocrates' lines represent education as a matrix that forms a certain direction of self-realization of human generations in the history of culture.*

Keywords: *Greek culture, education, paideia, theories of education, Plato, Isocrates*

§ 1. We will first clarify our terminology. We consider education according to Plato's views *as the moulding in accordance with an ideal*. Werner Jaeger, an authoritative researcher on education in Ancient Greece, argued that Plato was perhaps the first to use the word mould, *πλάττειν*, as the act. However, even before Plato, Protagoras viewed education as the act of shaping the soul, and the means by which it was carried out as formative forces (Jaeger, 1946: 314).

When considering this question, Ilsetraut Hadot noted that Plato was the first to study the possibility of the relationship between knowledge and virtue, and on its basis, he built an education system. "Plato's education system should ultimately lead to a real culture, to *παιδεία* in the true sense of the word, that is, to the harmonious development of the individual, the peak of which was the acquisition of wisdom as an art of living" (Hadot, 2002: 11).

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Thus, thanks to the Greeks, the education becomes a culture for the first time: that is, it becomes a process by which the whole personality is modelled on a fixed pattern.

§ 2. We define our research strategy. We chose the strategy proposed by Alexander Lyubishchev in the book “Lines of Democritus and Plato in the History of Culture” as a basis (Lyubishchev, 2000). Following Lyubishchev’s logic, we divided the entire volume of information on education in the history of culture into two lines: Plato and Isocrates. Lyubishchev preferred Plato’s line, because in it: “...the spirit of Hellenic culture was most fully expressed” (Lyubishchev, 2000: 110). In Lyubishchev’s view, the originality of Plato’s line in the history of culture consists in four features (Lyubishchev, 2000: 110):

1. The free creative theorization, which does not neglect experience but gives it a supplemental meaning.
2. The synthetic character of theorization: from the holistic consideration of the research problem to the single one.
3. The absence of dogmatism as well as the cult of personality, which limit the possibilities of science.
4. Rationalism, which is fundamentally different from sceptical rationalism of the opposite line.

We defined more exactly Lyubishchev’s strategy by the knowledge gained from the recognised researchers of the history of education in Ancient Greece: Werner Jaeger, Henri-Irene Marrou and Ilsetraut Hadot.¹ In order to explain Lyubishchev’s strategy, we were also helped with the research works of Pierre Hadot (Hadot, 2005), Eugene Afonasin (Afonasin et al., 2016), Luc Brisson (Brisson, 2017), John Dillon (Dillon, 2017), Panos Eliopoulos (Eliopoulos, 2015), Maria Antonietta Salamone (Salamone, 2017), Viacheslav Meshkov (Meshkov, 2016) and others.

We shall reveal the main meaning and features of the lines of Plato and Isocrates in the development of educational theories in the history of culture.

§ 3. Werner Jaeger, Henri-Irene Marrou, and others assert that all the theories of education in Ancient Greece take their origin from “Homer’s

¹ (Jaeger, 1946; Jaeger, 1947; Marrou, 1998; Hadot, 2002).

education" (ομηρική παιδεία).¹ In "The Republic", Plato wrote the following: "...when you meet encomiasts of Homer who tell us that this poet has been the educator of Hellas, and that for the conduct and refinement of human life he is worthy of our study and devotion, and that we should order our entire lives by the guidance of this poet we must love and salute them" (*Republic*: 10.606e).

The Homeric epic's educational significance lies in the fact that there was a formulated moral ideal, to which the Greeks in most followed throughout the history of Ancient Greece. Marrou formulated this ideal in one phrase: "it was a heroic morality of honour" (Marrou, 1998: 30). "Just as the Middle Ages bequeathed us *the imitation of Christ* at its end, so the Greek Middle Ages conveyed *The Imitation of a Hero*" to Classical Greece through Homer" (Marrou, 1998: 33).

The Greeks called a moral ideal in one word – kalokagathia (καλοκαγαθία), that is, "the existence of beauty and valour in man." In the word combination kalokagathia (καλοκαγαθία), the concept of kalos (καλός) means "beautiful", it is not by chance that it comes first. For a long time, it showed the priority purpose of education to each Greek, that is, the achievement of physical beauty with a sort of erotic "aura".² The second place in this word combination takes the concept of agathos (αγαθός) that means "good" or "valorous", "valour" (αρετή) in the knightly sense, highlighting the moral purpose of education. To be worthy of the glory of the Gods, the glorification in the epic, the perpetuation in the memory of descendants, that was a moral ideal of the Greeks.

Generalizing the information and somewhat exaggerating the conclusions, we note that the split of "Homer's education" according to the lines of Plato and Isocrates began from Socrates and the Sophists.³ Socrates saw in education, first of all, the possibility of finding the truth and achieving moral ideals.⁴ In turn, the Sophists believed that education

¹ (Jaeger, 1946; Marrou, 1998: 29).

² Jaeger and Marrou wrote about it reasonably well (Jaeger, 1946; Jaeger, 1947; Marrou, 1998).

³ As Werner Jaeger's, Henri-Irene Marrou's, and Ilsetraut Hadot's research showed, these lines and, accordingly, the theories of education not only confronted each other but also quite often combined, mutually opposing other educational practices (Jaeger, 1947; Marrou, 1998; Hadot, 2002).

⁴ In order to be more precise, then the education for Socrates was, first of all, a concern for the perfection of the soul. Plato wrote about it in the "Apology"

should pursue more utilitarian purposes, filling the basic needs of society. For example, it should prepare leaders, experts, striving to achieve the set goals at all costs.¹

The split in “Homer’s education”, namely, in the part *agathos* (αγαθός), in the understanding of the moral ideal, “valour”, that is in two lines of development that occurred around the 6th century BC, led to the two major events in the history of education (and also the culture in general!). Firstly, there was a change of emphasis in the word “*kalokagathia*” in the understanding of the Greeks, and as a result, the spiritual upbringing became more important than physical education. How accurately this transition was marked by Marrou: in history of the Greeks “the culture of warriors was replaced by the culture of scribes” (Marrou, 1998). Secondly, rivalry occurred between two traditions, schools of education, which, in our opinion, continues to this day. At the origins of the first philosophical tradition, there was Plato; at the origins of the second rhetorical tradition, there was Isocrates.

§ 4. Socrates never spoke of “*paideia*”, considering this term as discredited by the educational practices of his time, above all, the professional training given by the Sophists.² However, the ideas of Socrates and his lifestyle played a crucial role in the new understanding of *paideia*. For example, in the “Apology” Plato represented Socrates as the embodiment of courage and greatness of spirit (Plato, 1990); in the “Phaedo,” he described the death of Socrates, as an example of his heroic

(Plato, 1990: 29d-30b). Werner Jaeger, revealing a Socratic hierarchy of values, and with it, new, dearly-graduated theory of goods, wrote that “spiritual goods take the highest place, physical goods below them, and external goods like property and power in the lowest place” (Jaeger, 1947: 39).

¹ Jaeger came to the following conclusion: “From its first appearance, therefore, the aim of the educational movement led by the sophists was not to educate the people but to educate the leaders of the people” (Jaeger, 1946: 290).

² (Jaeger, 1947: 59). In the notes to the second volume, Jaeger wrote that Socrates by introducing new terminology tried to isolate himself from the Sophists. For example, the association of teacher and pupil, conversation = teaching (διαλέγεσθαι), school = leisure (σχολή) and pastime = lecture (διατριβή). Later these words were borrowed by professional teachers. “Thus, the educational technique so carefully developed by the Sophists conquered the personality and spirit which were the basis of Socrates’ teaching” (Jaeger, 1947: 380).

contempt of life (Plato, 1993).¹ "For the followers of Socrates, for those who laid the foundation of Plato's line in the development of the theories of education, paideia became the sum-total of "all that was his" – his inner life, his spiritual being, his culture. In the struggle of man to retain his soul's liberty in a world full of threatening elemental forces, paideia became the unshakable nucleus of resistance" (Jaeger, 1947: 70).

Socrates called to take care of one's soul, rather than concentrated on achieving earthly goods. "The care of the soul" in the understanding of Socrates is the necessity of "taking thought for wisdom and truth and the perfection of one's soul" (Plato, 1990: 29e). For the rationalized worldview of the Greeks, the way to genuine life based on spiritual values, spiritual self-improvement is a completely new space of self-realization.

However, as the great Goethe said: "In the beginning was the Deed!" Jaeger showed how deeply Plato and Socrates' other pupils were struck with a conscious choice of death over life by their Teacher (Jaeger, 1947). Without sacrificing his ideals, having drunk a bowl of poison on his own free will, Socrates proved the strength of spiritual values, of which he regularly spoke and, accordingly, the domination of the soul over the body. It is not for nothing that in the history of culture the life and death of Socrates are closely interwoven with the life and death of Jesus Christ. The first was a kind of the moral pattern for the second.

Pierre Hadot believes that by his choice, Socrates asserted that philosophy is, in essence, *a way of life* (Hadot, 2005). The fundamental difference between sophists and philosophers was that the first ones preached the magic of words, aimed at mastering dispute and speech skills, and the latter considered philosophy as *a life choice, as the necessity of self-transformation*. In view of this, Plato wrote his dialogues not to inform, but *to form* – to mould in accordance with the life and death of Socrates, as the ideal of the life and death of the true philosopher. Socrates' life choice allowed us to consider the philosophy not only as a conscious choice of a certain mode of life as the "fundamental philosophical choice,"² but also as the *art of death*.¹

¹ This question was considered by Jaeger (Jaeger, 1947: 76).

² On this subject, Pierre Hadot has written: "Generally speaking, I personally tend to conceive of the fundamental philosophical choice, and hence the effort toward wisdom, as the transcending of the partial, biased, egocentric, egoist self,

In the era of Plato, the philosophical tradition was distinguished by three main features (Hadot, 2005): a) the concern to exercise political influence, but according to the norms of the platonic ideal; b) the Socratic tradition, i.e. the will to discuss, provide training in accordance with the “questions and answers” method; and c) the most important thing in Platonism is intellectualism, i.e. the separation of soul and body, the tradition of the *liberation* of soul from body. Neoplatonists consider this tradition at the level of understanding a life as a life of thoughts, a life through reason, spirit, or according to Hadot’s terminology in a “universal perspective.”² For example, according to Plotinus “the soul must rise from its individual level to the level of the Universal Soul or even the Divine Intelligence, in which the whole ideal system of the Universe is located” (Hadot, 2005: 211).

§ 5. Plato was able not only to convey the basic ideas of Socrates about the soul, the necessity of “taking care of the soul,” *phronesis* (φρόνησις) that was Socratic aspiration to know the good, etc., but also on their basis to develop holistic theory of education, in accordance to which, up to the present time, the human generations have been formed. If Socrates had said that knowledge of the good was man’s goal and his standard, then Plato sought to find the way to this goal, by asking what was the nature of knowledge.³ Hence, the highest educational value of the theories of education according to Plato’s line is the striving for truth through rational cognition and the possession of true knowledge. Here is what Plato wrote about this in the dialogue “Hippias Major” (Plato, 1990: 298b):

Hippias: “Perhaps, Socrates, these things might slip past the man unnoticed.”

in order to attain the level of a higher self. This self sees all things from a perspective of universality and totality, becoming aware of itself as part of the cosmos and encompassing, then, the totality of things” (Hadot, 2005: 139).

¹ Socrates’ words in *Phaedo*: “Other people are likely not to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead” (Plato, 1993: 64a).

² See [Hadot, 2005].

³ See [Jaeger, 1947: 85].

Socrates: "No, by dog, Hippias – not past the man before whom I should be most ashamed of talking nonsense."

Hippias: "What man is that?"

Socrates: "Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus, who would no more permit me to say these things carelessly without investigation than to say that I know what I do not know."

In the seventh book "The Republic," the famous myth of the cave proves the understanding of knowledge as a liberating force that relieves the soul from ignorance (Plato, 1994). In the dialogue "Gorgias," Plato called ignorance the worst of evils (Plato, 1990: 527e). Plato restored the lost unity of knowledge and life, thereby giving the opportunity of acquiring the knowledge of absolute values to which Socrates had aspired. Plato believed that became possible only thanks to a philosophy, which, in his understanding, was the highest form of education.¹ Plato wrote that the way to obtain true knowledge was "a long detour."

"Only those who are fifty years old, who have survived the tests and approved themselves altogether the best in every task and form of knowledge must be brought at last to the goal. We shall require them to turn upwards the vision of their souls and fix their gaze on that which sheds light on all, and when they have thus beheld the good itself they shall use it as a pattern for the right ordering of the state and the citizens and themselves throughout the remainder of their lives, each in his turn, devoting the greater part of their time to the study of philosophy, but when the turn comes for each, toiling in the service of the state and holding office for the city's sake, regarding the task not as a fine thing but a necessity; and so, when each generation has educated others like themselves to take their place as guardians of the state, they shall depart to the Islands of the Blest and there dwell. And the state shall establish public memorials and sacrifices for them as to divinities if the Pythian oracle approves or, if not, as to divine and godlike men" (Plato, 1994: 7.540bc).

A philosopher, in the understanding of Plato, possesses a more profound knowledge of the truly valuable things in life than others do. That is why, according to Plato, only the philosophers are the "bearers" of the *kaloskagathos*.² In Plato's theory of education, the philosopher is a new ideal of man, a pattern for deliberately molding human character.

¹ Werner Jaeger wrote at length about it (Jaeger, 1947: 85-86).

² (Jaeger, 1947: 268).

Aristotle (a disciple of Plato) made an important contribution to the development of the Platonic tradition in education (Aristotle, 1983). We note the contrast that Aristotle introduced between science (ἐπιστήμη) and education (παιδεία), which most Greeks understood what we now call the “general culture”. In the concept of Aristotle’s general culture “Only a philosopher can truly “know” anything, because he has a knowledge of higher principles; and whoever did not study the “first philosophy,” he would forever remain only “educated” (πεπαιδευμένος), even if his education is universal” (Hadot, 2002: 20).

Considering Aristotle’s contribution to the development of the Platonic tradition, John Sellars showed that despite Socrates (and therefore Plato) and Aristotle were committed to the pursuit of knowledge, between their philosophies as a way of life, there was a clear metaphilosophical division, which led to the formation of the scientific and humanistic conceptions of philosophy in the history of culture (Sellars, 2017). Socrates pursued knowledge *in order* to live a philosophical life, while Aristotle lived a philosophical life *in order* to pursue knowledge. This important difference led to the fact that along with Socrates’ humanistic image of philosophy, which was concerned with what it meant to be human and how to live a good human life, Aristotle’s scientific image of philosophy emerged, providing a disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.¹

§ 6. It must be recognized that Plato and his understanding of paideia as a new way of life, which was oriented towards new values and ideals, set a bar too high for his epoch. According to Henri-Irenee

¹ John Sellars literally said the following: “It seems, then, that we have a clear metaphilosophical division between Socrates and Aristotle. Both are committed to the pursuit of knowledge and both offer an image of an ideal life involving the pursuit of knowledge, but nevertheless there is a clear difference when we turn to their ultimate motivations. Socrates pursues knowledge in order to live a philosophical life, while Aristotle lives a philosophical life in order to pursue knowledge. This is a subtle but, I think, important difference. It is also the difference between what I earlier called the scientific and humanistic conceptions of philosophy. Aristotle’s scientific image of philosophy is a disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; Socrates’ humanistic image of philosophy is concerned with what it means to be human and how to live a good human life” (Sellars, 2017: 8).