

## **Education for the Love of Wisdom: The Ancient Greeks**

**Dr. Martha C. Beck**  
Lyon College  
United States of America

### ***Introduction***

This paper will argue that the goal of education in Ancient Greek culture was the development and continual exercise of the power of the human mind, nous in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. Aristotle gives a theoretical account of all of the powers of soul related to the power of mind. Aristotle argues that children must be properly educated from the time they are born in order to have the character strength and intelligence necessary to be able to exercise the power of mind in every aspect of their adult lives. I will begin with a very brief description of Aristotle's theory of the virtues and their related vices as he presents it mostly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Then I will argue that all the texts passed down to us from the Ancient Greeks are dedicated to cultivating the life of the person of practical and theoretical wisdom, the education of the mind. I conclude that the image of human nature and its education passed down to us from the Ancient Greeks still has a great deal to teach us today.

### **The Goal of Greek *Paideia*: the Education of the Power of the Human Mind (*Nous*)**

The cultural artifacts and institutions of the Ancient Greeks together show implicitly and explicitly the properties of the human mind which, in turn, explain the nature of its education.

Mind is natural. The human mind has evolved in response to a universe that is governed by the power of a Divine Mind. The Divine Mind is not personal, but a force that we know of indirectly, by the fact that when we inquire into the underlying principles and causes of the universe as a whole and of natural phenomena, we find that an underlying order does, in fact, exist. One of the purposes of human life is the exercise of the power of mind in the activity of scientific inquiry. Such inquiry would not be possible and would not yield results unless the universe as a whole exists and has evolved within a context of a greater order and limiting conditions.

The exercise of the power of mind is necessary for human beings to realize their nature as human beings. When human beings are unwilling or unable to exercise their minds, they become either pathetic and passive or violent and excessively aggressive. Humans have a natural drive to fulfill their nature. They must be educated to exercise the virtues and the power of the mind in order to be healthy, flourishing members of their particular natural species.

Mind is a kind of energy. It exists when it is being exercised. It is the only power unconnected directly to the human body or to any particular human experience. It begins to become active when a person steps back from the activities of daily life, or the exploration of natural things, or engagement in various kinds of human relationships and realizes that all aspects of life must be unified by a vision of the good. The mind begins to think itself, to realize it is a power over and above all the other powers. This power is triggered when a person makes the important change from reacting to what is around them to realize they have the power to choose for themselves what to do in a given situation and the responsibility to develop a view of good and evil, justice and injustice, truth and falsity, upon which they must base the choices they make. Human beings make a transition from living according to immediate appetites, to living by imitating what other people do or believing what other people believe, to living according to their own vision of the best life in general and the best choice they can make in a given situation. Young people make the transition to adulthood when they make this transition<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross and rev. by J.O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2 of the Bollingen series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1144b15-17. All quotes from the *Ethics* are from this text.

Mind is dialectical. It is exercised in a context. This might be a social context: making choices about how to treat other people, or it might be what Plato calls 'an inner dialogue of the soul with itself,' when one is debating about what to do or what to believe, reflecting upon various other positions before making a choice. Rational decision-making includes explaining why one possible choice among a number of alternatives is the best in a given situation. Once a choice is made, whether about what to do in a given situation, or about why one choice is better, the mind immediately begins to ask more questions, to look for the implications of one conclusion for a new set of questions or a new set of choices. The mind is always active, leading human beings to live lives of continual activity, whether in the field of politics, the sciences, the arts, social life, or any aspect of human life.

The worldview the mind seeks to understand is holistic and comprehensive. The mind seeks connections between nature and human nature, between natural evolution and cultural evolution, between the way authority is exercised in relation to one's spouse and children and the way it is exercised in relation to fellow citizens and to foreigners. The mind is continually seeking analogies and disanalogies, similarities and differences, between one aspect of human life and another.

The mind is incarnated. Conclusions arrived at by the power of mind always have consequences for how one should live, for every aspect of one's life. What one eats, how one eats, when, etc. are connected to one's position on the nature of the universe. One's personal, social, intellectual, artistic, political, and all other aspects of life are tied together. All the greatest good a person can achieve in life.

### **Aristotle's Virtues: the Necessary Precondition for the Exercise of Mind as an Adult**

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines the virtues as powers (*dunamai*) of the human soul. At the end of Book III, Aristotle discusses the two most immediate virtues and their corresponding vices, temperance and courage. Temperance is self-control in relation to immediate physical pleasures and pains, particularly the pleasures related to eating, drinking and sex. The extremes are self-indulgence, too much, and self-denial, too little. As is true for all the virtues, the person who possesses temperance as a character-trait is one who can do the right thing, for the right reason, in the right way, at the right time, etc. and will do this as a matter of habitual desire. A virtuous person wants to exercise the virtues because they are part of being a mature adult, of living a life of complete excellence (1117b25-1119b17). Courage is the virtue in relation to situations that involve something to be feared, such as an early death in war, sickness, old age and death, the loss of one's reputation, etc. The extremes are rashness, too much, taking unnecessary risks in dangerous situations, and cowardice, too little, running away from fearful situations or simply denying their existence (1115a6-1117b24).

Book IV (1119b18-1128b8) discusses the personal virtues, those we exercise in relation to people we know personally, are: 1) even-temperedness, the mean in relation to situations involving anger; 2) generosity, the virtue in relation to giving away money; 3) magnificence, the virtue in relation to spending large sums of money; 4) appropriate ambition, the mean in relation to achieving professional and social status; 5) appropriate pride, the mean in relation to accepting honors and giving them; 6) sociability, the mean in relation to putting up with various irritations in social life; and 7) self-knowledge, the understanding of one's own talents and strengths, without being boastful or self-deprecating.

Book V (1129a1-1138b14) discusses, among other things, the virtue of justice and its various parts. Justice is the virtue exercised in relation to people one does not know personally, a fellow citizen with whom one lives under a common set of laws. A just person hits the mean in relation to:

1) making a profit in the economic sector of life; 2) the distribution of social goods and services so as to promote a strong and stable middle class, the foundation for a healthy political community; 3) the rectification of wrongs, punishing those who violate the laws appropriately; and 4) equity, the ability to apply the laws to particular cases in a way that recognizes all the nuances of each particular case that the laws, being universal, cannot take into account.

Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is the virtue of being able to make the right choice, for the right reason, in the right way, in every kind of situation. Aristotle discusses the powers of soul linked to practical wisdom most extensively in Book VI (1138b17-1145a11). He discusses many of the moral and intellectual powers of the soul and the way they should relate to each other to achieve the ultimate goal: practical and theoretical wisdom.

Some people with practical wisdom do not have theoretical wisdom, but the person of practical wisdom must always link the moral virtues to practical reasoning. Reasoning well about practical affairs requires the exercise of other virtues: 1) a good understanding of the object of wish. In a general sense, the object of wish involves having a clear vision of the fully developed human life and of the kind of political community that nurtures this development in as many citizens as possible. In a particular case, the object of wish might be to win a war;

2) a good grasp of the object of choice. Everyone wishes for good things, such as universal peace. The person of practical wisdom, however, has a clear idea of how to take such abstractions and figure out what to do each day in very particular situations that might lead toward such a goal or at least that would be most likely to prevent global politics from getting worse;

3) the ability to issue commands well. A person might be very good at figuring out the first two, but is unable to inspire others to do what he decides because he is too timid or too condescending or too intimidating. There is an art to knowing how to treat people so they, too, will agree with your position and will want to follow out your orders;

4) the power of understanding. A person of practical wisdom can evaluate the choices of other people and have mature opinions about whether what they did was, in fact, best in the situation and whether they exercised the virtues. Such talk is not 'mere talk,' but is necessary for developing the kind of wisdom one will need when being put in a similar or dissimilar situation. To be able to do what is best, one has to study what others have done and whether in hindsight what they did has been proven by history to be just or unjust, the best choice or the wrong choice;

5) the power of good sense. This is the ability to forgive and move on. Everyone suffers unjustly and, in turn, unjust suffering and many mistakes. People have to learn not to hold grudges or take revenge on those who made the wrong choice. Otherwise, a nation will be continually stuck in the past and unable to address the problems of the present and future.

6) The Greek expression for someone who can do what is best in a given situation is that she can 'hit the mark' rather than 'miss the mark' (1453a16). There is, claims Aristotle, a 'mark' to hit, the best choice, even though it is very difficult to do what is best in every situation (1138b20-25).

The art of legislation is the activity a person who has been elected into, appointed to, or inherited the task of making the laws. Like all other professions, the power to make laws can be done well or poorly and must be done to promote the well-being of all the citizens. The best laws promote the development of practical wisdom in as many citizens as possible to the highest degree possible. Yet no law can mandate that people be motivated to seek practical wisdom. When the character of the citizens is irrational, lawmakers are forced to make many laws whose goal is to punish citizens who use and abuse each other. In a corrupt society, the laws focus on the prevention of greater evils and on repressing people's desires. These laws are more authoritarian because when people do not control themselves the power of the laws and lawmakers must step in to force people to do what they do not want to do.

The spirit of the people is more important than the nature of the laws. Any set of laws can be used to promote trust and good will between citizens and promote human well-being. Any set of laws can also be used to undermine trust and good will and to promote individual self-interest at the expense of others. Some laws are better suited to a healthy political life than others, but the character of the citizens, both rulers and ruled, is still the most important quality of political life. That is why Aristotle focuses so much on the powers of soul necessary for the exercise of practical wisdom in whatever social and political role an individual takes on in adulthood.

Aristotle and the Greeks are accused of being 'elitist' because the standard they set is attainable by only a few. This makes human excellence inherently undemocratic. When we study the texts of Greek *paideia*, however, it becomes clear that the goal of this system of education is to develop the souls of as many members of the society as possible, including women and slaves, to the highest level they are able to achieve.

The mark of excellence in practical wisdom is not a leader who thinks he is better than anyone else but, rather, a leader who can weave people together and build mutual trust and good will between all the citizens. Some leaders are better at the art of statecraft than others. The term 'elitist' usually has negative connotations because it is connected with people who think they are superior when they are not. Often such people are born into families with wealth and political privilege and exercise power without having the virtues necessary to be able to do it well. Aristotle labels such people for who they are, the antithesis of practically wise.

### **The Texts of Greek *Paideia* and the Education of the Mind**

There are many common characteristics of the texts of Ancient Greek culture because they are all dedicated to the education of the mind. I am including among these texts epic poetry, particularly Homer, tragedy, history, and Plato's dialogues. The Pre-Socratic philosophers and Hesiod have some of these characteristics. Everyone who wants to live a complete life will aspire to becoming wise. This requires exercising all of the virtues to the greatest extent possible. Such a life will inevitably include putting oneself in, or finding oneself in, very difficult situations. Certain choices we have to make, often in critical situations that do not allow for a lot of thought, have a great impact on our personal lives, on the lives of those we know, and on the future of our societies.

The texts of Greek *paideia* focus on such situations, trying to educate audiences and readers about what they ought to anticipate if they want to live a full life. A number of Aristotle's criteria for tragedy as listed in his *Poetics*<sup>2</sup> apply to all the texts of Greek *paideia*. Greek *paideia* is poetry, not history. It focuses on the universal rather than the particular. It presents a mythos, a story, rather than facts about any particular historical event. The reason the texts are written as *mythoi* rather than historical facts is so that people can learn from hearing, seeing, or reading them. Audiences are intended to make analogies between the characters and situations represented in the texts and their own lives and the lives of those around them. The texts are intended to ultimately lead audiences to a higher level of happiness because they aim to educate human beings and human beings by nature desire to know. "Students," young and old alike, should recognize the universality of the situation and be able to make analogies between the patterns in the texts and their own lives or the lives of those they know.

The texts focus most of all on the plots, on what the characters do, the choices they make, because human happiness or unhappiness is the result of the choices people make. Aristotle points out that most people have good principles and opinions. *Paideia* texts give specific examples of characters who have good opinions but who misapply them, due to character-flaws or ignorance. The plots are well-organized, with a beginning, middle, and end. The stories include complication and unraveling. Usually the plot gets more and more complicated for the first two-thirds, something comes unraveled, some truth is exposed or choice is made, and everything else is the natural consequence of that event or revelation. The plots involve a transition from the world of appearances, the 'everyday' world of people living unexamined lives, to a reversal and recognition of a deeper, more meaningful and more powerful reality. After recognizing that reality, the story returns to the everyday world with an entirely different perspective.

The characters in the texts experience a transition from happiness to unhappiness. The characters are ignorant about themselves, about their situation, about the people around them, and make choices that lead to great suffering and unhappiness. The characters follow certain types, so that audiences can identify with or recognize those types in their lives. Some are better than average, some worse than average, some intermediate. Since most people belong to the intermediate types, the texts focus on mistakes in judgment made by these types. The main character has good intentions but makes the wrong choice, leading to disaster. The character 'misses the mark,' fails to do what is best in the situation in relation to someone they have affection for or someone they are related to.

The texts show audiences that we are, indeed, social and political animals by nature. We depend deeply on each other. We leave behind a legacy, a story, as well as a quality of family and community life for those who come after us.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2 of the Bollingen series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

The realization of the long-term impact of our choices is an indirect way of motivating people to want to take life seriously and pursue the love of wisdom throughout our lives. The texts focus most on the members of the most privileged families, not because they are naturally superior, but because their choices have the most impact on the lives of everyone else in their societies. Their lives are more complicated and they have more responsibilities to their cities. They are given privileges that require greater concern for and knowledge about what actions lead to the well-being of the society overall than less privileged citizens have.

Greek *paideia* implicitly shows human beings that they have the power of choice and that they are responsible for exercising it well. In the story of *Oedipus*, for example, it appears that Oedipus has been 'set up' by fate and by the gods. He appears to have had no control over his situation and hence is not responsible for killing his father and marrying his mother. The lesson of the play is not about Oedipus per se, but about the way Oedipus is living out a psychological pattern in the minds of men. Children are born completely dependent on their parents. Their characters are molded by their parents and other authority figures. Their emotional attachment to their parents is based on this dependency. One way that this dependency can get perverted is through a little boy's excess attachment to his mother and his competition with his father for his mother's affection. When this attachment is extreme, a man's entire worldview, his character and drives and beliefs about good and evil, justice and injustice, are distorted by his desire to compete with his father for his mother's affection. This complex is an obstacle to the development of practical wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Someone 'possessed' by these emotions is unable to 'hit the mark' in many personal, social, and political decisions.

The purpose of the play is to get audiences to recognize the way this particular complex is distorting their own judgment or that of other people they know. The distorted emotions need to be brought to consciousness, recognized as obstacles to the ability to function as a wise adult, and flushed out. Audiences should be able to leave the play, or call to mind the story, with a greater insight about the power of the Oedipus complex. They should rededicate themselves to removing this blindness from their souls. They should be motivated to point out to those who are 'possessed' by it that they need to flush it out of their psyches. The texts of Greek *paideia*, therefore, recognize the power of the unconscious and the power of social conditioning at a young age. They also recognize the power and responsibility of adults to live examined lives. Such a life requires recognizing and deliberately flushing out the psychological blindness we develop as a result of being raised in a particular context. Habits developed during childhood have to be reexamined and modified according to the insights of the mind. The very existence and nature of *paideia* texts presupposes both the depth of human blindness and ignorance and the human capacity and natural desire to transcend that ignorance and live wisely and well.

*Paideia* texts show that most people, those Aristotle calls the "intermediate types," can make serious mistakes about human character, their own and that of others. They can think they are wise but when put into a difficult situation find out they are not. They can get manipulated by the rhetoric of wicked people, who use words to distort the truth. They can fail to recognize those who are most virtuous. They can respect people with power too much and respect the poor or middle class too little. The texts intend to educate members of every social class, male and female alike. All citizens need to exercise their powers of mind to the extent they are able. *Paideia* texts teach all citizens to 'see through' the world of appearances, the world of social status, class, etc. and to see human characters for who they really are, good or evil, just or unjust. The best plots included characters that are true to type, characters whose desires, thoughts, and choices are universal and can be recognized by audience member. The plot is also very true to the human condition. It reflects a series of events that occur universally, so that audiences can again identify with the situations the characters and in and with the types of disagreements they have.

Ultimately, the texts want audiences to recognize the human condition for what it is, including the many, many ways human beings are ignorant and vulnerable. Audience members ought to identify with and have pity on, the character with good intentions that makes a terrible mistake. Audiences ought to fear for their own capacity to make the same mistake. They ought to advise their friends about how to avoid tragic mistakes in judgment. After experiencing pity and fear audiences ought to take great pleasure in the fact that they have learned something important from the text.

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<sup>3</sup> Martha C. Beck, *Essays on Paideia: Education for Practical Wisdom in Ancient Greek Tragedy and Philosophy: Finding the Connections between Tragedy, Plato, and Aristotle* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2011).

They can now live life more courageously because they know one more obstacle to living well and how to avoid it. Audiences know they have been educated.

### **The Unity beneath the Diversity of the Texts of Greek *Paideia***

Very briefly, I will discuss some of the kinds of texts that I think should be included in the texts of Greek *paideia* and the particular kind of focus they have. They all include most of the qualities and perspectives above and use the same sort of technique for the education of mind.

A. Greek mythology. The stories of the gods are universals, poetry, even though some Greeks took them literally, as stories of specific gods that lived on Mount Olympus. Each deity represents a sacred passion, one of the ways human beings transcend their own particular existence in order to pass down to posterity some legacy, beginning with offspring but going farther and in many different directions. Each deity also represents how people behave when they become obsessed with one particular sacred passion and ignore all the others. The deities do not hit the mean; they represent the extremes. They behave in the ways human beings do when they, also, are 'possessed' by this single god and ignore the rest. The gods come into conflict because each has his or her own bias and refuses to acknowledge the claims of the others. The stories of the gods are cautionary tales for human beings: do not get out of balance in this way or you will make this mistake.

1. Poseidon: god of the sea, earthquakes and underwater springs. He represents the powers of nature that human beings will never control. Human beings must not arrogantly try to defy these powers but must limit their choices by the constraints of natural necessity.
2. Demeter: goddess of fertility, both of the earth and of motherhood. She, too, represents natural necessity. Human beings must respect the fertility of the earth and always remember their dependence on Demeter. They must not harm babies and young children because they are the future of the society and of the human race.
3. Dionysius: god of wine and of the theater. He represents the emotional side of life as opposed to Apollo, the god of reason who is detached from his emotions. Human beings need to have a complete emotional release from time to time in order to maintain an overall healthy balance between emotion and thought. Without such a release, emotions become unnaturally repressed and people become self-righteous and condemn all emotional life.
4. Aphrodite: goddess of beauty and sensuality. She represents not only sexual pleasure, but the pleasures of vision, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. These pleasures can be sacred and spiritual, as long as they are connected to a well-lived life. Sexual pleasure should be connected to a life-long commitment to partners who raise their children together. The cultivation of the virtues in both the partners and their children is integrated with sexual desire.
5. Zeus: god of justice. He rules over the other gods and tries to get them to act in ways that promote or at least do not undermine social and political life. However, he makes mistakes. His sexual infidelity leads to all sorts of problems that even he, king of the gods, cannot control. His story is a cautionary tale to humans: do not separate sex from marriage. Not even Zeus can control the negative impact in all aspects of social and political life.
6. Athena: goddess of wisdom, justice, and just war. She is a counselor to her father, Zeus and does not make the mistakes he does. Her advice is usually good, although she also can make mistakes. Athena will defend her father's political order even when it deprives another deity of his or her just criticisms against it.
7. Apollo: god of reason, medicine, and (rational) music. He represents the activity of scientific inquiry, mathematics, logic, theoretical explanations, definitions, etc. This kind of thinking requires emotional detachment. In his leisure time, however, Apollo can be very emotionally immature in his relationships with women and can use his powers of calculating the most efficient means to a given goal in the service of an irrational goal.

8. Artemis: sister to Apollo, goddess of the hunt and midwife to pregnant women. She also represents emotional detachment as it is manifested in women. She does not want anything to do with men or with civilization in general, but would rather spend her time in the woods, apart from the corruptions of culture. At best, she reminds humans of the natural context within which they live. At worst, she becomes a man-hater, seeing all the harm men do to women and women's' great vulnerability and abuse at the hands of men.
9. Hera: goddess of honor and wife of Zeus. She seeks status in the best way a woman can it in a male-dominated society: by marrying the king of the gods. Social honor is a legitimate pursuit in life, both in the desire to receive honor and in the desire to confer it. Since people are by nature social and political, societies need to reward people who make great contributions to the well-being of their societies. Honor should be conferred in ways that inspire citizens to act justly and virtuously. Societies decay when rulers confer honors in ways that promote greed, power lust, or other vices. Hera herself cares more about honor than about justice and will seek to be honored even at the expense of justice.
10. Ares: god of war and of honor. He seeks honor in the most common way men seek it: being honored by acting bravely in battle. Ares is willing to commit great atrocities, to kill unnecessarily and to kill men on both sides of a war, just to show how brave he can be. Bravery in war is certainly needed when a society is attacked, but the love of bravery as an end in itself can lead a society into unnecessary and unjust wars.
11. Hephaestus: god of the forge, of crafts, the introverted son of Zeus and Hera. Hephaestus confronted Zeus about his infidelity. Zeus through him down Mt. Olympus and permanently wounded him. Hephaestus is an introvert who works all day at the forge, making ironworks that are works of art, although too often swords and shields that are used to fight unjust battles in unjust wars.
12. Hestia: goddess of the hearth. She protects the hearth at the center of every home and 'keeps the home fires burning,' She keeps alive the flame of dialogue with family and friends around the fire, awakening and preserving the light and activity of mind.
13. Hades: god of the underworld. He abducts Demeter's daughter, Persephone, and takes her to Hades to be his queen. He represents violence and the consciousness of death in the mind of every human being. The stories of the shades in Hades are designed to encourage people to live courageous and active lives while they can because life on earth is the greatest value, far superior to the exclusively reflective life in Hades. Yet the stories also show that humans must avoid doing evil while alive, even if it means a certain death, because they must live for eternity with the knowledge of the choices they made while alive.
14. Persephone: goddess of the underworld and victim of abduction and rape. She, the great victim, becomes the great victimizer. Those who have had irrational ambitions and have victimized others while alive will receive eternal victimization as the just punishment for the choices they made while alive. Her image ought to inhibit those who seek great power and wealth from wanting to commit the most heinous crimes to achieve their goals, 'knowing' they will, in turn, become victims for eternity after they die.

Although I cannot discuss the specific stories of the gods, in general they are stories of what happens when these various legitimate goals become obsessions and change from inspiring human beings to do great things driving human beings to become very destructive.

B. Hesiod's *Theogony*. Although much can be said, the main point I want to make here is the story of the gradual evolution from nature to culture in the creation story of Hesiod. The universe began with four forces: Chaos, Gaia (earth), Thanatos, and Eros (desire). Gaia gave birth to Uranos (sky). Collectively they gave birth to many other natural forces and beings.

One of their sons, Chronos, eventually took over power forcefully from his father because Uranos abused his power. Chronos, in turn, feared that one of his children would forcefully overpower him, so he ate them. Zeus got away and eventually took over as the new king of the gods, the god of justice. Zeus, in turn, was afraid that one of his children would overpower him.

The main theme here is the gradual evolution from nature to culture. Each generation moves toward a higher level of culture and civilization. If the fathers would admit their limitations, recognize the higher stage of development of their children, and allow their children to take over, the transition could be non-violent. It is going to happen anyway. Evolution is both natural and necessary. Each generation is born into a more complex situation and hence develops more complex powers of the soul. Each generation must also acknowledge the powers of nature that will never go away. Zeus cannot deny the power of time or the basic powers of nature when he is trying to rule over all the other gods and create a just social order.

As I will explain, the stories of Greek tragedy, of Homer, and Plato's dialogues also include the relation between the generations. They all show that young people need to be mentored by adults who are wiser than they are, but they also need to be released from the authority of their fathers to make their own decisions and mold their own lives according to their own understanding of what is just and best. If they have been mentored well, they will make better decisions. If they have been overpowered or corrupted by their elders, they will make poor decisions. They will reject all of the past rather than add on to what their parents have already achieved. They will become destructive rather than creative.

C. Homer: *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* is the story of two 'cities,' the Trojans and the Achaeans. Neither city is dedicated to the love of wisdom.

Troy is a monarchy whose ruler, Priam, is dedicated to the accumulation of wealth. He and his people try to bribe their way to peace and happiness. The Greeks do not take the bribes. Priam also indulges his son, Paris, by allowing him to bring Helen into the city even when the Trojans all know the Greeks will come to get her. Paris is allowed to break the hospitality agreement between the two city-states. Such agreements are the only way to prevent war. When cities cannot trust each other to abide by such agreements, they must continually build up a military to protect themselves against possible attack at any time. In the end, Troy is completely destroyed, due to the bad decisions of its leaders. The majority of the citizens know their rulers are wrong and want to give Helen back, but they are powerless. They suffer greatly for the irrational behavior of their absolute rulers.

The Achaeans are a group of city-states, each one governed by a ruling family. They elect Agamemnon to lead them, but Agamemnon also abuse his power, first by taking the daughter of a wise elder priest at Delphi as his concubine, they by giving her back and taking the concubine of Achilles, the most outstanding young soldier. The middle-aged generation is abusing both its elder wise men and its best youth. Achilles, in turn, rebels and refuses to fight, leading to a ten-year extension of the war. The Greeks are guilty of wanting power and control, first over each other and then over Troy. This conflict between members of the privileged elite lead to great suffering for everyone else. As with the Trojans, the majority of citizens know both Agamemnon and Achilles are wrong but they are powerless to do anything about it. They suffer greatly for the ignorance and irrationality of their leaders.

Each city-state also has leaders who achieve high levels of human excellence, Hector among the Trojans and Nestor and Odysseus among the Greeks. Those who are best do not have the authority to rule their cities. Hector cannot change his father's mind. Nestor and Odysseus are able to advise Agamemnon and Achilles. Agamemnon ignores good advice at first but eventually follows it. Achilles never learns. When he returns to battle, it is for all the wrong reasons, even though he helps the Greeks to eventually win the war.

The gods and goddess are on different sides, but Zeus stays on the side of the Greeks, even though he also acknowledges the justice in the souls of some of the Trojans. The Greek cause is just while the Trojan cause is not, even though the Greeks go to many extremes and make many mistakes during the war and even though the Trojans achieve high levels of excellence in many respects. Even this truncated version of the plot should make clear that the story is filled with the kinds of characters and tragic mistakes in judgment described earlier as characteristics of Greek educational texts.



The character of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* is Homer's ideal for the excellent human life, even though he commits the worst evil, pride, and pays a heavy price for it. Because of his pride, Odysseus suffers at the hands of Poseidon, god of the sea, who prevents Odysseus from getting home for ten years after the war was over. Odysseus is a conscientious member of the Greek army, a good ruler over his city, a good husband, father, and son. During the war, he suffers at the hands of the irrational behavior of others for ten years. Then he suffers for ten years due to his own irrational behavior. He does not give in to self-pity or fear, even though there are plenty of reasons he might feel sorry for himself or be afraid of what will happen next. He refuses Calypso's offer to stay on her island and enjoy an eternal Paradise with her, including his own immortality. He wants to return home, to live an excellent human life, not the life of a god in paradise. He is faithful to his wife who suffers and endures just as he does. His father has been an excellent role model for him and he, in turn, is a great model for his son. The *Odyssey* describes Telemachus leaving home in order to, as his mother says, 'make a life in story' for himself. Like his father before him, Telemachus must now make his own choices, live his own life, make a history he can look back on and be proud of and pass on his story to posterity, especially to his own children.

Following the patterns as listed above, Homer shows all human types, those better, worse, and intermediate, and their relationships with each other. He shows that everyone has a reason for what they do, even when they make the wrong choices. In his story, the intermediate types know what their rulers ought to do, but are powerless to do what is best. Homer is teaching audiences how to recognize corruption in their rulers. He is also showing them the how to avoid the most common mistakes in judgment in the kinds of situations they are likely to confront. Homer seems to believe that a society run by the rule of law and the vote of the majority is more likely to lead to the best public policy than either a monarchy or an aristocracy. Homer's work reveals the reality underneath the world of appearances. It exposes the characters as they are, not as they are often presented and packaged to the public. It teaches listeners to become critical thinkers about their own lives and the lives of everyone in their societies, rulers and ruled alike. Homer wants to cultivate practical wisdom in as many citizens as possible to the highest level they can achieve.

#### D. Greek tragedy: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*<sup>4</sup>

Sophocles' play, *Philoctetes*, has three main characters, a young man, Neoptolemus, a middle-aged man, Odysseus, and an older man, Philoctetes. Each exhibits the character-traits most common among people of their age group, following Aristotle's descriptions of the stages of life in his *Rhetoric*, with the exception of Odysseus, who is a corrupted version of Aristotle's description of what middle-aged people ought to be like.

Odysseus represents the middle-aged person who is ruling his 'city,' in this case the Greek troops. He has to get Philoctetes' bow before the Greeks can win the war. There are three ways a person can get someone else to act: force, fraud, or persuasion. Odysseus does not think he can persuade Philoctetes. He cannot use force because the Oracle has said Philoctetes must come willingly. So, he decides to use fraud. Odysseus knows he cannot deceive Philoctetes because he was the person who dumped him on the island of Lemnos in the first place. So, he uses Neoptolemus as his tool, asking Neoptolemus to tell a lie in order to get Philoctetes to give him the bow 'willingly.' Odysseus acts on the principles that 'the end justifies the means.'

Everyone who exercises power will be continually faced with situations that require convincing people to act in certain ways. The people do not always want to do what the ruler thinks is best. Sometimes the people refuse because the ruler's judgment is wrong and unjust. Sometimes the ruler is right and the people are wrong. The three methods for getting people to do what you want them to do are force, fraud or persuasion. Odysseus assumes that Philoctetes will not listen to rational persuasion. So, he chooses deception. He decides to use the good will and social vulnerability of one of the best young men to do the dirty work. This is not a good way to educate future rulers in the art of leadership.

Neoptolemus represents an archetype of the coming-of-age of every young person moving into adulthood. At the beginning of the play, he trusts his authority figures and assumes they are just and wise. When Odysseus tells Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes, the young man is at first surprised. The *Iliad* describes Neoptolemus as a young man of strong character and great promise.

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<sup>4</sup> Martha C. Beck, *Interpreting Sophocles' Philoctetes Through Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy: How Do We Educate People to Be Wise?* (Lewiston : Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

Neoptolemus describes himself as the son of Achilles, hence from a noble family that does not engage in such activities. Odysseus is abusing his power to give or deprive Neoptolemus of social respect, the first step toward opportunities for professional success. If Neoptolemus agrees to do it, he will be honored and given more opportunities. If he refuses, he will be ostracized by society and will be denied opportunities he deserves. Like all young people, Neoptolemus must decide how much he will compromise the moral principles he was raised to follow in order to be accepted and successful in his society.

Neoptolemus agrees to go through with Odysseus' plan. When he meets Philoctetes, he is impressed with the humanity and civility of the old man. Even though he has been isolated from society for ten years, Philoctetes is not a barbarian. He longs for family and home. He knows his life on the island of Lemnos is not life for a human being. Philoctetes also recognizes a level of nobility in Neoptolemus. They develop a friendship bond. When Philoctetes falls into a swoon, Neoptolemus has an opportunity to steal the bow, leaving Philoctetes without any way to get food, hence to certain death. Neoptolemus refuses, even when Odysseus threatens to destroy his reputation.

Neoptolemus recognizes that he has the power of choice, that he should not always trust his authority figures or obey them. When Philoctetes wakes up and finds out Neoptolemus has lied to him, Philoctetes refuses to give Odysseus the bow and to go to Troy so the Greeks can win the war. Neoptolemus then recognizes that Philoctetes is also wrong: he has become a bitter old man. Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes he ought to come to Troy, help the Greeks win, and then return home to a hero's welcome and be reunited with his family, friends, and city.

Aristotle describes Neoptolemus' coming-of-age experience in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI. Neoptolemus has made the transition from living according to habit and imitation to living according to the power of reason. Neoptolemus begins the play as a well-intentioned and well-bred young man. He has watched his authority figures, listened to them, and tried to imitate them in order to achieve the highest level of human excellence he knows of. At this point, his natural capacity for deliberation and practical wisdom becomes active. He becomes conscious of his own power of choice and of his responsibility to reflect, to use his own reasoning powers as the guide to his choices. He does not merely refuse to do what he is told. Rather, he gives reasons, and the right reasons, for refusing Odysseus' request and for criticizing Philoctetes' choices. He has made the first step toward living the life of an adult. By the end of the play, Neoptolemus emerges as the character who issues commands well. Although Neoptolemus has made the right choice in this situation, however, it is not clear that he is developing a strong moral character. Instead, he might grow up to imitate Odysseus' cynical attitude and to use his own powers of rhetoric and manipulation to achieve irrational goals or irrational means to reasonable goals.

Philoctetes is the archetype of the old man who has suffered unjustly, both at the hands of the gods and of men. He was an honorable and just man who accidentally stepped on Artemis' sacred ground and was bitten by a snake. The wound was permanently infected and filled with a puss that had a horrible smell. Philoctetes periodically began moaning and went into a swoon because of the pain. On the way to Troy, the other soldiers in the ship could not stand the smell and the moaning. They asked Odysseus to dump Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos. Philoctetes had a magic bow he received from Heracles when he helped Heracles in one of his labors. The bow indicates that Philoctetes, indeed, was a good man.

Now the Oracle has said that the Greeks will not win the war unless Philoctetes leads the troops with his bow in hand. This makes sense, since war involves so much unjust suffering. There is much to fear. The just can die while the unjust live. If Philoctetes can learn to forgive and forget the past, even when he has suffered so unjustly for so long, he will be an inspiration to the troops to fight bravely. They would be less likely to worry about who lives and who dies and whether they suffer unjustly. The Oracle had great insight when it made this demand. However, as Odysseus predicted, Philoctetes at first refuses to come. Philoctetes cannot get over his long-suffering past. He cannot forgive Odysseus and move on.

Every old person has to make the kind of choice Philoctetes had to make. Human life is by nature vulnerable. We suffer, and we suffer unjustly. We suffer from illness, accidents, ageing, false friends, military conflict, etc. A complete human life involves many types of personal, social, and political interactions, which often break down for various reasons. By the time they are old, people have suffered a great deal, justly and unjustly. Old people have to decide whether to give in to self-pity and fear. If they give in to fear, they become obsessed with surviving as long as possible and suffering as little as possible.

They inspire fear in others, leading them to live less active and less complete lives. If they can forgive and forget, they will inspire the youth and those in middle-age to avoid self-pity and fear and to live courageously and justly. The Oracle was sending the message to Philoctetes to forgive and forget, to go to Troy and bring about the triumph of the more just cause over the less just.

The play fits all of the criteria for Greek *paideia* listed above. First, the entire genre of myth, tragedy and all the texts of Greek education are kinds of poetry, as opposed to literal history. Clearly Sophocles' Odysseus in this play is radically different from the Odysseus of Homer. He constructs the three characters so they represent archetypes in the midst of an archetypal kind of situation, reacting in an archetypal way, making an archetypal type of mistake and suffering the consequences. Because Sophocles is a poet and writes in myths rather than merely recording historical events, his audiences can make analogies between the characters in the play and their own lives and the life stories of those they know. By recognizing the connections, they can learn the lessons being taught.

The plot is organized according to Aristotle's criteria for a well-organized plot. The play has a beginning, middle and end. The plot gets more and more complicated until two-thirds of the way through. At the climax, the world of appearances, where each character is playing the role assigned to him by those in power, to the underlying truth. The powerful are corrupt and unjust while the powerless are just. This revelation of the truth leads each character to experience a reversal of fortune. At the beginning of the play, Odysseus is corrupted by power, Philoctetes is corrupted by unjust suffering and Neoptolemus is psychologically blind and ignorant of the characters of the other two. Odysseus experiences a reversal from happiness to unhappiness, from being respected to being condemned and ignored.

His mistake in judgment leads to his loss of authority. Neoptolemus experiences a reversal from blind obedience to authorities to the ability to see for himself what is best. He changes from the mistaken beliefs that he ought to follow the commands of others to his understanding that he has the capacity and responsibility to tell the others what to do and why. Philoctetes experiences a reversal from his anger, isolation, and bitterness, to venturing into a new life, with the help of a noble young friend. Neoptolemus and Philoctetes make the transition from ignorance to wisdom. Odysseus does not learn from his mistake.

The characters are types and true to type. They are better, worse, and intermediate types. They represent every human begin at some point in life. At some point in life, in respect to some aspect of life, everyone will be tempted to obey unjust rulers to gain social status, to abuse power to achieve an immediate goal, or to become bitter and angry and refuse to live a full life. People usually get over these obstacles to practical wisdom, however, and go on to live more wisely and justly.

The characters are related by a bond, in this case the bond of being fellow-citizens. They need each other because they are all Achaeans fighting for a common and just cause, the violation of hospitality agreements. They come from the privileged families because the decisions they make have more impact on the well-being of the society than the choices of less powerful and privileged citizens.

They all have the power of choice, even though it is limited in many ways. The choices they make among the options they have make a profound difference on themselves and their fellow-citizens. They are much more powerful than they think they are. They are all 'victims' of fate, or of the human condition. Everyone gets in similar situations. Everyone feels trapped, caught between a limited number of options, none of which seem very good. This should not make them passive. They should not think of themselves as victims of circumstances or of the power of others. Rather, they have the option of making choices that empower them and those around them. Like Oedipus, they did not choose their original position, but they can learn what it is and then make choices that set an example for everyone because everyone is in those situations.

The play, like all texts of Greek *paideia*, does not preach, does not give a definition of virtue. Rather, it shows that virtue, as Aristotle says, is an *ergon*, a way of living. Audiences learn by seeing the analogies between their own lives and the lives of the characters. They learn the reasons why one choice is better than the other. They make the transition from living according to what they were told or by imitating those around them to making choices based on reasoning and on good reasoning. The plot, the story, of people's lives, is connected to their reasons for living the way they live.

Like all *paideia* texts, the play tries to motivate people to want to love wisdom for the rest of their lives because it shows the great need for such a love throughout life, from youth, to middle age, to old age. The text presents an honest image of the human condition, with its vulnerability and with the power of choice. It aims to educate people so they can live more complete, active lives. Those who learn from the text realize that they were more ignorant about their own situation before seeing the play than they are afterward. They can go away from the play with greater wisdom and courage to live well.

### Plato's Dialogues and Greek Paideia

I have argued elsewhere<sup>5</sup> that Plato's dialogues also follow these criteria for Greek *paideia*. Briefly, Plato's so-called 'early' and 'middle' dialogues show how the great democratic society of Athens destroyed itself. These dialogues are set in Athens when the city was at the peak of its power. It will not be long before the Athenians lose the Peloponnesian War and then elect Critias, who exercises a dictatorial reign of terror, all in the names of 'a return to traditional values.' Plato shows that the most important factor in this self-destruction was the belief that what made Athens a great democratic society was that it provided citizens with the most freedom. Citizens were given the power to decide how to live, without any interference from other citizens, from the laws, or from those in power.

Although Plato appears to condemn Homer, a careful reading of Plato's *Republic* should make clear that Socrates is condemning the "Homer" of the Athenians, the way the Athenians have perverted Homer. The Athenians are interpreting Homer to be promoting irrational desires when Homer is actually exposing those desires in order for people to flush them out of their souls. Homer is using the techniques of Greek *paideia*, as are the tragedians, Hesiod, and even Plato himself. But the Athenians do not understand the foundations of their own cultural tradition, either the view of the human soul and the power of the human mind implicit in those texts or the kind of educational method used to educate the power of the mind. Readers should have their own experience of reversal and recognition from the world of appearances to the world of a deeper reality as they read Plato's dialogues. Socrates only appears to be condemning Homer. At a deeper level, Socrates is promoting and even living out a way of life very similar to the life of Nestor, one of Odysseus' mentors and role models.

Throughout these dialogues, Plato shows his readers that the Athenians abused their 'freedom' to live in ways that undermined the stability of their society, leading eventually to its destruction, both from without and from within. Some chose to live self-indulgent lives, not bothering to develop any expertise or to contribute to the city in any way. Others chose military careers and tried to rally the military to build a political empire. Some chose to get wealthy, using the military to build an economic empire, exploiting the conquered for their wealth, and taxing allies. Others simply wanted personal power at the expense of everyone else.

The citizens either forgot or denied that the city was based on the development of the virtues in all the citizens, especially the power of practical wisdom. The city's founders created laws and provided numerous venues for citizens to discuss public affairs. They wanted to promote a culture where citizens helped each other to develop all the moral and intellectual virtues described by Aristotle and exhibited by Socrates. In order to preserve a free and open society and avoid the need or desire for an authoritarian ruler the citizens would have to make good decisions about public policy, especially in very difficult situations. Citizens were given the responsibility to hold their leaders accountable for ruling well. If the leaders were corrupt or incompetent, citizens had the responsibility to elect better leaders. Citizens had to be able to recognize political rhetoric designed to manipulate the public into voting for and following the policies of would-be leaders whose goal was personal power and/or wealth without any concern for the public good.

Plato's dialogues show how every sector of Athenian society was corrupted either by the tragic but ignorant good intentions of citizens or by the corruption of citizens who abused their power. 1) The *Laches* shows lack of leadership in the military and in politics; 2) The *Charmides* shows the naiveté of the youth and their manipulation by the ambitious, in this case Critias; 3) The *Protagoras* shows how the educational system was corrupted by the sophists; 4)

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<sup>5</sup> Martha Beck, "Plato's *Phaedo*: Integrating the Insights of Science and Religion into a Philosophical Way of Life," Athens, Greece: *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Inter-disciplinary Research* Vol. XVIII no. 1 (2007): 32-47.

The *Gorgias* shows how the teachers of rhetoric corrupted the decision made in the Assembly and in the courts. Those trained by sophists could manipulate the majority to make the wrong choices. 5) The *Phaedrus* shows the corruption of the tradition of educating the youth through the voluntary mentoring of an adult. The older and wiser adult was supposed to aid the young in the transition to adulthood. 6) The *Symposium* shows the corruption of desire. The corruption of Eros, passion, is connected to corruption in the arts, the military, the medical profession, the legal profession, and politics.

In the end, enough citizens with enough power were able to manipulate enough 'average' citizens to drive the city into destruction. Citizens expected to be entertained at the theater. They expected to be manipulated in the Assembly when they were voting on public affairs and in the courts when they were acting as jurors. Enough citizens 'forgot' or never were taught the underlying foundations of Athenians culture. They ignored the need to cultivate the virtues. They traded in the exercise of practical wisdom for personal freedom to live in any way they wanted at any given moment. The city could not survive for long when no one acted in a way that would preserve it.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the many different kinds of texts passed down to posterity by the Ancient Greeks follow the same model for education because they have the same goal: the education of the power of mind, especially practical mind. The texts collectively give a comprehensive image of the human condition, with all of its limitations as well as its great powers. The texts collectively show human beings that they have the power of choice, that they have the power of practical wisdom, and that they ought to desire to exercise their power of practical wisdom throughout their adult lives. If they fail, they will bring great pain and suffering to those they care about most, both during their lives and long after they are dead. The texts show that we all leave behind a legacy of some kind. We all have a responsibility to pursue the particular sacred passions that we feel most called to pursue and to pursue them diligently, in the face of many obstacles and unjust suffering of all sorts. We also must balance out the various sacred passions, changing our focus at different stages in life. Further, we must acknowledge the sacred passions that drive other human beings and create a society where all of them are recognized and nurtured.

The texts show those aspects of the human condition that will never change. Yet they do not teach us that we ought to be passive in the face of our fate as human beings. Rather, the texts aim to trigger an active response to the situations we find ourselves in. Giving in to self-pity and fear only makes everyone's lives much worse. The texts give us every reason to want to pursue excellence, not out of fear of divine punishment or for the sake of divine reward but, rather, motivated by the recognition of how much is at stake. It makes a great difference whether we love and seek wisdom all of our adult lives or whether we turn away from living complete and complex lives. The texts teach indirectly, by showing what happens when people turn away from wisdom, in order to trigger the desire for wisdom. This desire is the necessary precondition of a lifelong commitment to continual self-examination and conversation with others. However, this commitment alone is not sufficient. Some characters are committed to the pursuit of wisdom but make serious mistakes anyway. The love and pursuit of wisdom, then, are together both necessary, but not sufficient, for making the right decision in every situation involving personal choice.

The texts themselves provide the only hope for human kind. Without this kind of education, the human condition is hopeless. People are doomed to make all the same mistakes, over and over. The education exists because there is hope; there is a path out of the cave of ignorance and irrationality. The power of the human mind is that hope, that path. The education of that power is the best way to create the conditions necessary for people to live well. The model of Greek *paideia* is the best model I know of for the education of the human soul. I know that I do not know, however, and am eager to discover the models passed down to posterity by all the world's cultural traditions.

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