



## The Paradoxes of Aristotle's Theory of Education in the Light of Recent Controversies

Ernest-L. Fortin

Volume 13, numéro 2, 1957

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019956ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019956ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Fortin, E.-L. (1957). The Paradoxes of Aristotle's Theory of Education in the Light of Recent Controversies. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 13(2), 248–260. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019956ar>

## The Paradoxes of Aristotle's Theory of Education in the Light of Recent Controversies

---

The reader who examines closely the passages in which Aristotle discusses the teaching of philosophy to young men may well wonder whether the practice of the ancients was not at variance with their principles in this matter. According to a well-established custom to which the Platonic dialogues already bear witness and of which various traces are discernible at that time, the young student who wished to take up the study of philosophy under the tutorship of a competent master did so immediately upon completing the cycle of preliminary studies at the school of the grammarian and the rhetor. Yet on two occasions at least, Aristotle, who seems to have conformed to that tradition, questions the advisability and, indeed, the very possibility of teaching philosophy to a boy of that age. Professor Étienne Gilson, who, with his customary brilliance and flair for the paradoxical, has recently brought this difficulty to the attention of his colleagues,<sup>1</sup> assumes that it has not been adequately answered by Aristotle himself and expresses wonder at the fact that it has never been noticed or, if noticed, not felt as serious by students of classical and Scholastic philosophy. Whether Mr. Gilson's eloquent plea will prompt any professor of philosophy to drop his courses and start searching for another job is more than doubtful. It does invite us to look into the problem, however, and that, after all, is perhaps the only point the author was really trying to make.<sup>2</sup> A more careful

---

1. É. GILSON, "Note sur un texte de saint Thomas," in *Revue thomiste*, Vol.LIV (1954), pp.148-152, in which no attempt is made to provide a solution. In a lecture on this topic, published almost simultaneously under the title, *Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues*, Princeton, 1953, the same author takes a more positive stand: having apparently succeeded in casting out St. Thomas with Aquinas, he proceeds to reintroduce him into the classroom by suggesting that, in the case of the Christian, faith may come to the rescue of reason and assist it in grasping the more abstract notions of metaphysics; cf. p.17. He is the first to grant, however, that this answer, which he regards as tentative, would have no value for a pagan like Aristotle. See also the discussion of Prof. Gilson's views by D. H. SALMAN, "L'enseignement de la philosophie aux jeunes d'après Aristote, saint Thomas et M. É. Gilson," in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Vol.XI (1955), pp.9-24. — The present article reproduces in slightly expanded form some remarks found in our book, *Christianisme et culture philosophique au cinquième siècle: la querelle de l'âme humaine en Occident*, Paris, 1959, pp.177-189.

2. *Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues*, p.25, n.10: "It is always untimely to question the wisdom of current practice. One of the most frequent answers to such questions is: then what do you suggest we should do? My only answer to this is: we should put our heads together and consider the problem..." Cf. *ibid.*, p.18: "It may well be that... (my) conclusion does not prove satisfactory. Then one should not waste

scrutiny of the texts invoked will not only reveal that the alledged inconsistency is merely an apparent one but also bring to light an important and often neglected aspect of classical education. For the sake of clarity, let us begin by relating briefly and without commentary the contents of the two passages in question.

In Book I, chapter 3, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle deals succinctly, by way of introduction to the whole treatise, with the manner in which moral science should be studied and then asks to whom this science should be taught. We are told in this connection that the young man is not an apt student of moral and political philosophy for two reasons. On the one hand, he lacks the experience of life and of men. This experience can come only with time and it is indispensable in this case, since it is precisely human actions that constitute the subject of ethics and provide its proper principles.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the young man does not dominate his passions sufficiently. From a purely speculative point of view moral philosophy presents little interest. The only real profit that may be gained from its study is that it help us become better men by facilitating the development of the moral virtues. In order to obtain this result, however, one must be prepared to regulate his conduct according to the dictates of reason. It so happens that the young man, and the description here fits the person who is young in character as well, is easily led astray by the unruliness of his lower appetites. Rather than follow the injunctions of reason, he is more likely to pursue each object as passion directs.<sup>2</sup>

Book VI, chapter 8, reverts to the same topic from a slightly different point of view. Dealing this time with the intellectual virtues, Aristotle again stresses the fact that young men, being inexperienced, are not yet in a position to acquire practical wisdom.<sup>3</sup> To this consideration he now adds that, for that matter, they are not good metaphysicians or good natural philosophers either. The science of metaphysics is not readily accessible and presupposes a training that they can hardly be expected to possess at that early age. At best,

---

any time on refuting it. The only useful thing to do would be to find another answer to the problem raised by the texts of Thomas Aquinas."

1. *Nic. Ethics*, I, chap.3, 1095 a 2.

2. *Ibid.*, 1095 a 4 sq. Cf. SHAKESPEARE, *Troilus and Cressida*, II, 2, 163-171 :

Paris and Troilus, you have both said well ;  
 And on the cause and question now in hand  
 Have glaz'd, but superficially ; not much  
 Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought  
 Unfit to hear moral philosophy.  
 The reasons you allege do more conduce  
 To the hot passion of distempered blood  
 Than to make up a free determination  
 'Twixt right and wrong . . .

3. *Nic. Ethics*, VI, chap.8, 1142 a 14 sq.

they will be able to repeat the words they have heard, without any true understanding of their meaning. As for natural science, it embraces the entire realm of nature, which, by reason of its vastness, requires years of investigation. Aristotle himself, as we know, spent much of his life exploring it, cataloguing its various species and subspecies, and tracing their "history." What the young student lacks this time is an adequate experience, not of life, but of nature, on which this science rests.<sup>1</sup> There is, in reality, within the province of philosophy, only one field in which he has any chance of being distinctly proficient at that age, namely, mathematics. Less abstruse than metaphysics, and less dependent upon the knowledge of singulars than natural philosophy, this discipline can be mastered without too much difficulty and become the object of a truly scientific inquiry even on the part of an adolescent.<sup>2</sup>

If one accepts this reasoning, the efforts of the philosopher who attempts to communicate his knowledge to young minds are doomed in advance to failure. Instead of wasting his time and that of his students, he would be better off, as Hamlet says, to buy a cart and conduct mules. One could only smile indulgently at the naiveté of a teacher who, with owlish seriousness, would begin by explaining to his pupils the futility of his trying to impart to them any real knowledge of philosophy, and then calmly set about the task of exposing his science in great detail to these same and by now utterly bewildered students. Not only ancient education but a large portion of Mediaeval education and of our own as well, in the degree to which it takes its lead from Aristotle, would be the victim of a gross illusion. The question, we gather, is more complex than the foregoing remarks suggest. What we should like to show is that it had not escaped Aristotle and that it is possible to find within the framework of his doctrine the elements of a solution.

The key to our problem, it seems, lies in a notion which modern scholarship has generally overlooked or to which it has not given due prominence, I refer to the Aristotelian concept of *paideia*. The word *paideia* has, of course, become very familiar to us, and Professor Jaeger's classic work, *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture*,<sup>3</sup> has done much in recent years to popularize it. Mr. Jaeger's book, however, does not encompass Aristotle, and, in any case, merely takes the term *paideia* in its broadest acceptance, without making an effort to ascertain its various meanings. We may concede immediately that the expression has been put to a wide variety of uses in the course of its long history, from its humble appearance in Aeschylus<sup>4</sup> as a

1. *Nic. Ethics*, VI, chap.8, 1142 a 18 sq.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, 1142 a 12 and 17, where, as regards mathematics, the young man is called σοφός.

3. English translation by GILBERT HIGHET, 3 vols., Oxford, 1939-1945.

4. *Seven against Thebes*, 18.

synonym for *τροφή*, the older and more traditional word for child rearing, down through the Hellenistic period, at which time its meaning is extended in such a way as to include, finally, the totality of man's intellectual and moral development.<sup>1</sup> In Aristotle himself, it is applied to the training of animals<sup>2</sup> as well as to all the degrees of the physical, intellectual, and moral formation of the human being from the earliest childhood to the age of twenty-one or thereabouts.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in his works, however, the same term has clearly received new impositions, the exact significance of which is not at once apparent. Although Aristotle has never treated the question exhaustively and for its own sake, at least in the works that have come down to us, it is still possible, by gathering the various texts in which *paideia* is employed in this narrower and more specialized sense, to determine the main articulations of his thought.

We shall discover a first element of that thought if we turn to the famous discussion concerning the first principle of knowledge in Book IV, chapter 4 (1006 a 4 sq.), of the *Metaphysics*. This principle, on which all subsequent knowledge depends in a certain manner, is not demonstrable, says Aristotle, not because it is false, but for the simple reason that it is immediately evident. To try to establish its truth by way of deduction from previously known premises would be absurd. It is impossible that there should be demonstration of absolutely everything. Sooner or later, lest one be faced with an infinite regression which would preclude all demonstration and all science, one must arrive at a proposition that is a principle and in no way a conclusion, that is to say, a proposition whose truth does not depend upon that of another proposition that would be prior to it. Among these self-evident principles none is more obvious than the one which enunciates the opposition between being and non-being, or, as it is commonly called, the principle of noncontradiction. And yet there are some persons who insist that even this principle be the object of a demonstration in the strict sense. Such an attitude betrays an incapacity to discern what is evident and can only be explained, adds Aristotle, by a lack of education, *ἀπαιδευσία*.

From these remarks it is permissible to infer that the student who wishes to acquire *paideia* must first learn to recognize a principle as opposed to a conclusion or, to put it very simply, be able to distinguish between what is known and what is unknown. He will be

1. It is this idea that Cicero has rendered in Latin by the word *humanitas*. On *paideia* in this sense, see H. I. MARROU, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Paris, 1938, pp.552-555.

2. See, for instance, in the *Hist. of Animals*, IX, chap.46, 630 b 19, the story of the elephant who had been taught (*paideuein*) to kneel in the presence of the king.

3. Thus in the treatise *Peri paideias* which takes up the whole last part of the *Politics* (VII, chap.13 to the end).

disciplinable, i.e. capable of receiving a discipline, to the extent that he possesses this aptitude.<sup>1</sup> An example taken from natural philosophy may serve to illustrate the point. Before attempting to demonstrate anything in that science, it is necessary to accept the existence of nature as Aristotle defines it in the *Physics*.<sup>2</sup> That there is such a thing as nature in this precise sense is immediately evident.<sup>3</sup> Anyone pretending to prove the existence of nature would be striving to establish what is manifest by what is not and would do away with the entire science of nature by destroying its very principle. A man blind from birth might just as well try to reason about colors.<sup>4</sup>

It is not difficult to see that this initial capacity already presupposes a certain training on the part of the student. There are, of course, principles that are rooted in very common notions and that, upon being enunciated, are readily understood by all men. Anyone who knows what a part and a whole are, or is familiar with the meaning of the word equal, will agree that the whole is greater than the part and that two things equal to a third are equal to each other. To deny these truths would be to stop thinking altogether. The matter is somewhat more complicated when we come to the proper principles of each science. It is not enough here that we learn what the terms signify. Albeit indemonstrable, these principles require an explanation. The teacher who manifests their truth by means of examples or in any other way is already making a valuable contribution to the intellectual advancement of his students. Thus, strictly speaking, one does not demonstrate that all mobile beings are composed of matter and form or that nature acts for an end ; yet the painstaking examination to which these principles are subjected in the *Physics*<sup>5</sup> is in itself a sufficient indication of the fact that they are not within the reach of any chance comer. An accurate grasp of these truths is all the more important since even a slight error with respect to them may have far-reaching consequences later on. Any attempt to impart a philosophical discipline should, therefore, begin with an elucidation of the proper principles of that discipline, and it is only once this preliminary work has been accomplished that the student will be ready to go on to something else.

This determination, however, important though it may be, still represents only the first component of the philosophical *paideia* set

---

1. Cf. St. THOMAS, *In Metaph. Arist.*, Book IV, lesson 6, n.607. I am indebted to Prof. Maurice Dionne, of Laval University, for much of the information contained in the pages that follow immediately, but wish to assume full responsibility for any error of interpretation that I may have committed.

2. *Physics*, II, chap.1, 192 b 22.

3. *Ibid.*, 193 a 2.

4. *Ibid.*, 193 a 7.

5. *Physics*, I, chap.7, 189 b 30 sq. ; *ibid.*, II, chap.8, 198 b 10 sq.



forth by Aristotle. We shall encounter another component of that doctrine if we revert to the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* which originally gave rise to our discussion. The issue this time is no longer that of the principles of the various sciences but of their proper modes. Working from the premise that the mode according to which the truth is manifested in a given science is contingent upon the subject of that science, Aristotle reminds his reader that he must not expect the same measure of precision in all the philosophical disciplines. It again pertains to the *pepaideumenos* to be acquainted with these different modes and, by the same token, with the degree of accuracy that may be anticipated in each one of these sciences.<sup>1</sup> Moral philosophy in particular, by reason of the extreme contingency of its matter, namely, human actions, offers little certitude. Whoever undertakes to write a treatise on this subject will hardly be able to do more than to indicate the truth "broadly and in outline."<sup>2</sup> Whereas natural phenomena present a remarkable uniformity at all times, and are for the most part the same everywhere, — the properties of fire, for instance, are identical in Greece and in Persia — the just, the noble, and the lawful may vary from one country to another.<sup>3</sup> It is on the grounds of this variability of ethical standards, observes Aristotle, that some people have been led to deny the existence of natural right and the validity of even the most common principles of morality. While carefully shunning this extreme, the moral philosopher must bear in mind that particular circumstances may cause the proper principles of this science to change when they are applied to concrete cases. Generally speaking, it is true that a deposit should be returned to its owner ; this is practically the definition of justice. Yet there are times when it would be dangerous and even unjust to return an object to its lawful proprietor. Such examples could be multiplied at will. The general principles of moral science can never dispense the man who acts from taking into account the indefinitely changeable circumstances attendant upon each one of his actions.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Nic. Ethics*, I, chap.3, 1094 b 24.

2. *Ibid.*, 1094 b 20.

3. *Ibid.*, V, chap.7, 1134 b 25 ; I, chap.3, 1094 b 14. Cf. PLATO, *Laws*, X, 889 e : " In the first place, my dear friend, these people would say that the Gods exist not by nature, but by art, and by the laws of states, which are different in different places, according to the agreement of those who make them ; and that the honourable is one thing by nature and another thing by law, and that the principles of justice have no existence at all in nature, but that mankind are always disputing about them and altering them ; and that the alterations which are made by art and by law have no basis in nature, but are of authority for the moment and at the time at which they are made. These, my friends, are the sayings of wise men, poets and prose writers, which find a way into the minds of youth . . ." (JOWETT translation.) On the mutability of these moral principles, see ST. THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q.94, a.4.

4. For this reason, observes Aristotle (*ibid.*, VI, chap.11, 1143 b 11), one should always take into consideration the advice of older and more experienced persons, even if they are

A doctor cannot prescribe the same treatment to all his patients even if they are afflicted with the same illness ; it may be that, for reasons peculiar to himself, one of these patients is incapable of withstanding this treatment.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, a trainer cannot form in an absolutely identical manner all the athletes entrusted to his care, if only because they do not all have the same physical dispositions.<sup>2</sup> His art consists precisely in his ability to use to the best advantage the virtualities inherent in each subject. Thus it would be unwise, to say the least, to teach moral philosophy to a student who would have no idea of the mode of that science and, consequently, of the nature and value of the conclusions reached therein.

Each science, then, possesses its proper mode, with which one must become familiar before any effort is made to come to grips with the problems it strives to resolve. Were we to pursue this inquiry and extend it to the other philosophical disciplines, we should discover, for example, that mathematics, thanks to the rigor and precision of its mode, is the science that presents for us the highest degree of certitude and stands as the prototype of all the other sciences ; that, contrary to mathematics, which prescind from sensible matter and motion, natural philosophy demonstrates from all four principal causes, but must be satisfied in most cases with *a posteriori* demonstrations ;<sup>3</sup> that First Philosophy, whose object is entirely free from matter and therefore immutable, studies all things in the light of the most universal causes and remains the highest, most divine, and most inaccessible of the sciences.<sup>4</sup> There are manifestly some very significant divergences among these various disciplines. The fact that we refer to them indiscriminately as sciences should not delude us into thinking that they are all sciences in exactly the same fashion. The *pepaideumenos*, as Aristotle describes him, is precisely the man who has become aware of these differences and who knows to what kind of proof he may look forward in each case, who will not demand of an orator, for example, the rigorous procedure typical of the mathematician, any more than he will be content with probable arguments in geometry.<sup>5</sup>

---

unable to support this advice with rational arguments. Their experience, if nothing else, often allows them to judge soundly with regard to practical matters. The "intellectuals" about whom so much evil has been spoken in our time are precisely the armchair philosophers who pretend to solve in a purely abstract and theoretical manner, and without reference to the particular conditions of human existence, the most concrete problems of moral and political life.

1. *Nic. Ethics*, X, chap. 9, 1180 b 7.

2. *Ibid.*, 1180 b 10. Whence, concludes Aristotle, the superiority of private *paideia*, which adapts itself more easily to the particular needs of each subject.

3. For the distinction between the natural philosopher and the mathematician, see *Physics*, II, chap. 2, 193 b 22 sq. ; *Metaphysics*, II, chap. 3, 995 a 15, etc.

4. Cf. *Metaphysics*, I, chap. 2, 982 a 5 sq. ; chap. 1, 1026 a 7 sq.

5. *Nic. Ethics*, I, chap. 3, 1094 b 24. See the corresponding passage in the *Metaphysics*, II, chap. 3, 995 a 6 sq., where, as befits the context, the question is posed in the



These considerations help us to understand, among other things, the use of the word *paideia* in an important and often misconstrued passage of the treatise *On the Parts of Animals*, which reads as follows :

In every speculative inquiry, the humblest as well as the most noble, there are, it seems, two distinct habits of mind (ἔξις) : one that may be called science (ἐπιστήμη) of the object, and the other a certain *paideia*. For it pertains to the πεπαιδευμένος to be able to form, with accuracy, a judgment concerning the mode (τρόπος), whether good or bad, employed by the speaker in his treatment of a question. To be well-trained (πεπαιδεῦσθαι) is precisely to have this capacity ; such is, indeed, the man of whom we say that he possesses a general formation (τὸν ὄλως πεπαιδευμένον).<sup>1</sup>

The *paideia* that the present context distinguishes clearly from science (ἐπιστήμη) is here again a habitus or determination<sup>2</sup> having as its proper object the method or mode of procedure proper to a particular discipline. Since the young student presumably has not had the opportunity to investigate the subject thoroughly himself, he cannot boast of a perfect knowledge of it and is not prepared, in consequence, to formulate a judgment bearing specifically on the truth or falseness of the conclusions proposed by the speaker.<sup>3</sup> In this respect his position remains inferior to that of the master. But he is not in a state of complete ignorance either. His knowledge of the principles and of the proper mode of that science already enables him to assess or judge (κρίνειν),<sup>4</sup> from this more restricted standpoint, the views put forward by another person. This capacity may be limited to a single discipline or it may extend to a number of other

---

most general terms : " Some people do not listen to a speaker unless he speaks mathematically, others unless he gives instances, while others expect him to cite a poet as witness. And some want to have everything done accurately, while others are annoyed by accuracy, either because they cannot follow the connexion of thought or because they regard it as pettifoggery. For accuracy has something of this character, so that as in trade so in argument some people think it mean. Hence one must be already trained (πεπαιδεῦσθαι) to know how to take each sort of argument, since it is absurd to seek at the same time knowledge and the way of attaining knowledge ; and it is not easy to get even one of the two. The minute accuracy of mathematics is not to be demanded in all cases, but only in the things which have no matter. Hence its method is not that of natural science ; for presumably the whole of nature has matter. Hence we must inquire first what nature is : for thus we shall also see what natural science treats of . . . "

1. ARISTOTLE, *On the Parts of Animals*, I, chap.1, 639 a 1 sq.

2. The word ἔξις is taken here in the second of the two senses indicated in the *Metaphysics* (V, chap. 20, 1022 b 10), and designates the quality by which a subject is well or ill disposed in itself or with regard to something else. Cf. *Categories*, 8 b 27 - 9 a 12.

3. *On the Parts of Animals*, I, chap.1, 639 a 13. It is one thing to criticize a conclusion, and another to criticize the method by which an author pretends to arrive at that conclusion.

4. The *pepaideuemenos* is always presented as having this power to " judge." See, in addition, *Nic. Ethics*, I, chap.3, 1094 b 29 ; *Politics*, III, chap.6, 1282 a 7.

branches. The true *pepaideumenos*, as Aristotle remarks, is obviously the one who is thus competent in all or nearly all fields of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

One is hardly justified, therefore, in equating purely and simply *paideia* with dialectic, defined as the "method or art or reasoning about any given problem,"<sup>2</sup> or in looking upon it as being roughly synonymous with our own conveniently vague "general culture," as other more recent scholars have done.<sup>3</sup> Aristotle had something far more definite in mind. His older translators showed greater penetration when they either resorted to a paraphrase to suggest its meaning<sup>4</sup> or, as in the case of William of Moerbeke, simply transliterated the word,<sup>5</sup> thereby intimating that they were dealing with a properly philosophical term for which no exact equivalent could be found in their own idiom.

Thanks to this preparation, the young man will be able to penetrate more deeply into the study of the different sciences and gradually become more proficient in them as time goes on. It is scarcely possible from this moment forward to determine down to the last iota the contents of a program that may comprise many degrees. The sum of knowledge that a student who is hardly more than a beginner in philosophy can assimilate will depend on numerous factors, such as his native ability, his previous education, the quality of his teachers, and his own personal efforts.<sup>6</sup> What matters here is that we

1. *On the Parts of Animals*, I, chap.1, 639 a 9 ; *Nic. Ethics*, I, chap.3, 1095 a 1.

2. ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, I, chap.1, 100 a 18 ; cf. J.-M. LE BLOND, *Aristote, philosophe de la vie*, Paris, 1945, p.129, with whom we are presently taking issue. According to our interpretation, Aristotle's *paideia* obviously includes dialectic or, better still, logic, which it presupposes and which has as its object the mode *common* to all the sciences ; but it also embraces, as we have seen, the mode *proper* to each science.

3. E.g., P. LOUIS, *Aristote, Les parties des animaux, texte et traduction*, Paris, 1956, p.XXI. There is no reason whatever to suppose that Aristotle is writing here for the benefit of the general public, as opposed to students and specialists (see also, in the same vein, LE BLOND, *op cit.*, p.128, n.3). An interpretation such as this one mistakes completely the meaning of *pepaideumenos*. Aristotle simply begins, as he usually does, by exposing the *paideia* of the science with which he proposes to deal, before delving into the science itself. LOUIS' suggestion, according to which one should henceforth distinguish three types of Aristotelian writings instead of two, namely, the esoteric or acroamatic treatises, the exoteric books, and the works intended for the general public, harks back to the same basic misconception and scarcely deserves a better fate.

4. Cf. W. OGLE, *Aristotle On the Parts of Animals, translated, with an Introduction and Notes*, London, 1882 (reprinted in R. McKEON, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, N.Y., 1941, p.643 sq.), who renders *paideia* by "educational acquaintance." Despite minor shortcomings, Ogle's text appears to be far more satisfactory than any of the other modern translations of this treatise. The author is fully aware of the problem posed by the use of *paideia* in the passage under scrutiny, even if he does not dwell upon it ; cf. *ibid.*, p.141, n.1.

5. WILLIAM OF MOERBEKE, *De Partibus Animalium, ad locum*.

6. On the three principles of education : nature (*φύσις*), habit (*ἔθος*), and reason (*λόγος*), cf. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, VII, chap.12, 1332 a 40 ; PLUTARCH, *On the Education of Children*, 2 A.

realize that between *ἀπαιδευσία*, or the total lack of education, and wisdom, which remains the preserve of a small number of exceptionally gifted natures and which is attained only after many years of study, there exists a preliminary stage designed to supply the budding philosopher with the tools indispensable to the attainment of his goal.

Since this initiation is normally acquired during the adolescent years, the term *paideia* adopted by Aristotle is fully justified and offers an example, among many others, of the philosophical promotion from which current language has frequently benefited. On this score, the ancients manifested greater restraint than many of our more sophisticated contemporaries. Instead of having recourse to strange or unknown expressions to convey new thoughts, they simply borrowed the "words of the tribe," on which they made further impositions. This procedure has the undeniable advantage of allowing the beginner to use notions firmly grounded in everyday reality as steppingstones towards more abstract, and therefore less familiar, ideas. The term *ἔλη*, raised in the *Physics* to the level of "prime matter," originally meant "timber," as every student of classical philosophy knows. Similarly, the verb *λογίζεσθαι*, which reappears in a slightly modified form in the formidable "syllogism" proper to the third operation of the mind, had first of all designated the very simple act by which the young Greek counted his pebbles. A philosopher could just as easily appropriate a word like *paideia* and make use of it to express a new phase of the multiple education to which the young man was subjected throughout the entire first part of his life.<sup>1</sup>

Taken as a whole, the program just outlined is far more diversified than these willfully brief remarks suggest. We have limited ourselves to the strictly philosophical part of the *paideia* envisaged by Aristotle. A more exhaustive investigation would have to take into account other elements that pertain to it directly, and more

---

1. Needless to say, the manner in which this investigation is being conducted and its presuppositions, as exemplified in the above remarks, stand in sharp contrast with the views shared by many Aristotelian scholars today and expressed, for instance, with enviable assurance, by INGEMAR DÜHRING, *Aristotle's De Partibus Animalium, Critical, and Literary Commentaries*, Göteborg, 1943, p.7: "... Every account of Aristotle's opinion or doctrine on this or that question, based on citations indiscriminately chosen from the whole *Corpus Aristotelicum*, starts — this may be openly confessed or not — from the erroneous presumption that there is an unchangeable Aristotelian system. To those who are firmly convinced that Aristotle's views non only on biological but also on metaphysical and ethical problems and questions concerning the theory of cognition, nay, even his conceptions of the methods of science have undergone a gradual change, every such account must seem hopelessly obsolete. Nowadays nobody dreams of dealing with Plato's writings as a manifestation of one unchanged and fixed philosophical system. And similarly must he who wants to take up a position towards one of the preserved writings of Aristotle meditate the problem of designing its approximate place in Aristotle's philosophical development."

particularly the liberal arts, the traditional gateways to philosophy, as the words *trivium* and *quadrivium* by which they were commonly referred to in the Middle Ages indicate. Such an inquiry might give us a better insight into the true nature of the *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* devised by the ancients: not just a grab bag or an accumulation of superficial and poorly assimilated bits of information, but a clearly defined and well-organized whole, endowed with its proper finality and possessing its own relative perfection. There can be no doubt that the student who has received this type of education, although he is still only in the early stages of his intellectual development, is better equipped for life and for the more advanced studies that lie ahead than the one who has amassed huge stores of material knowledge in a haphazard and chaotic manner.<sup>1</sup> Having been duly instructed with regard to the general principles that govern the various sciences as well as to the respective modes of these sciences, and having been trained to a greater or less degree in the use of these modes, he will derive greater benefit from the experience that time will bring and will find the progressive acquisition of these disciplines considerably easier in the long run.

It is precisely to the fact that it favors the development of the intellectual virtues and strives to generate in the mind of the young man a genuine *ἔξις* that this form of education owes its superiority to that of the Sophists, the great initiators of the pedagogical revolution that marked the fifth century B.C. The avowed aim of these Sophists, as we know from Protagoras himself, was to educate men, *παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους*.<sup>2</sup> Instead of inculcating principles and relating their ideas to these principles, however, they adopted for the most part a form of teaching based solely on practice and experience.<sup>3</sup> This method may be valid as far as it goes, and it no doubt represents an advance over what existed before; but it also has its disadvantages. Aristotle compares it to that of the shoemaker who presents to his client a variety of shoes from which he may choose the one that fits him best.<sup>4</sup> By so doing, he is certainly being helpful, but if the buyer should happen to suffer from sore feet later on, he will again be compelled to seek the services of the shoemaker. There is another course, the one which consists in imparting the art of shoemaking, thereby enabling the person to whom this instruction is given to meet his own needs as they arise. It is to this second alternative

1. One is reminded, by contrast, of the character of SARTRE's *La nausée* who longed for the education that he had not received as a boy, and who decided to make up for lost time by reading all the books in the municipal library in alphabetical order . . .

2. PLATO, *Protagoras*, 317 b; cf. ARISTOTLE, *Soph. Refut.*, chap.34, 183 b 36 sq.

3. ARISTOTLE, *ibid.* On the methods used by the Sophists and their contribution to higher learning, cf. H. I. MARROU, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, second edition, Paris, 1950, pp.81 sq.

4. *Ibid.*, chap.34, 184 a 2 sq.

that the *paideia* advocated by Aristotle corresponds in the intellectual sphere.<sup>1</sup> The young student who has received his education in this more universal form already has the power to move forward in his quest for new knowledge and to solve his own difficulties without having to be constantly assisted by the master.

If, with these ideas in mind, we now return to the problem raised at the outset, we shall find that it is perhaps not as insoluble as it may have appeared at first glance. That a young man should still be a far cry from what we should label a philosopher in the full sense of the word will surprise no one. His knowledge necessarily remains very scanty by comparison with the vastly superior acquirements of the wise man. It does not follow, however, nor does Aristotle imply that he should not be exposed to philosophy at a relatively early age. Nothing is to prevent him from acquiring the rudiments of that science or, to use Aristotle's own term, its *paideia*, even if he cannot hope to gain a complete mastery of it until much later. What is more, there is every reason to suspect that the student who has not received the proper formation at this privileged moment will be hard pressed to attain wisdom at a more advanced age. The great educators of the past had sensed, long before our modern psychologists, the importance of these decisive and irreplaceable years. The love of Socrates for the elite of the Athenian youth, whatever suspicions it may have awakened in the minds of the multitude, cannot be explained otherwise. That he should have persistently sought the company of young men in the gymnasium and on the market place is no mere coincidence. Any hope that he may have had of recruiting prospective philosophers rested almost exclusively with them. It is less than likely that a man whose mind has already been warped by erroneous opinions and unscientific thinking habits which the years have only intensified will ever undergo the branch-and-root change that an authentically philosophical life would require.

Of this truth there is no finer illustration perhaps than Plato's *Parmenides*, in which, for the first and last time in the *Dialogues*, the resourceful Socrates, presented here as a young man, does not have the upper hand. Pitted against the now aging and white-maned Parmenides, "awe-inspiring and venerable, like Homer's hero,"<sup>2</sup>

1. The three levels of knowledge : experience, *paideia*, and science, are again listed with all the desirable clarity in the *Politics*, III, chap.6, 1282 a 1 sq.

2. PLATO, *Theaetetus*, 183 e 6. The praise contained in these words is more apparent than real, as may be seen by turning to the passage in HOMER'S *Iliad* (III, 172) from which they are taken. Helen is speaking, and the "awe-inspiring and venerable" hero is none other than Priam, who is already an old man at the time of the Trojan War, who plays only an insignificant part in it, and who will soon be humiliated and forced to pay an exorbitant price for the body of his son, Hector. Priam's reign has reached its end, and, by implication, so has Parmenides'. Such is the meaning of the encounter, invented by



he grows increasingly silent and merely stands by as what had begun as a friendly conversation evolves into a monologue that will come to an abrupt end, leaving both parties further than ever away from each other. The upshot of the whole abortive discussion, one finally gathers, is that the old Eleatic philosopher, who is already reluctant to defend his own position, will never be induced to cross the "vast ocean of discourses"<sup>1</sup> by which he might eventually be able to give to his thought an entirely new orientation.<sup>2</sup>

Wisdom, in so far as it is accessible to man, may be the prerogative of old age, but even so, it remains the ultimate flowering of seeds planted in youth.<sup>3</sup> This could very well be the reason why true philosophers, like the devil in *Faust*, have always felt for the young men of the city a profound and mysterious attraction.

ERNEST-L. FORTIN, A.A.




---

Plato, between Socrates and his illustrious predecessor. The quotations of Plato are never chosen at random!

1. *Parmenides*, 137 a 7.

2. On the necessity of unlearning before being able to learn properly, cf. St. AUGUSTINE, *Contra Academicos*, III, chap. 17, 38: "Now, when Zeno, the founder of the Stoic School, had heard and accepted some of the teachings, he came to the school which had been founded by Plato and which Polemon was then conducting. It is my opinion that he was held suspect there. I believe he did not seem to be the kind of man to whom those Platonic and sacrosanct teachings ought to be disclosed and entrusted — at least, before he had unlearned what he had received from other schools and had brought with him to this school."

3. The same thought occurs in St. JEROME, *Epist.* 52, 2-3, p. 414, 16 sq. Hilberg (*C.S.E.L.*, 54), who finds an illustration of it in the episode of the Sunamite narrated in *III Kings*, I, 1 sq. This mysterious woman, at once virgin and spouse, turns out to be wisdom, which the young man must cultivate early in life, but which is fully possessed only in the serene and passion free atmosphere of later years.