

**“VIGOR COMBINED WITH PRUDENCE” ACCORDING TO ISOCRATES:  
SPORT, PEDAGOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING**

Ioanna Mastora

BA, M.Ed., Ph. Dphil, Postdoctoral researcher  
[joannamastoraa@gmail.com](mailto:joannamastoraa@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

In this paper, the validity of Isocrates' saying: “Vigor combined with prudence” is examined to establish the validity or disprove the claim of one of the ten authoritative Attic rhetoricians. For this purpose, a conceptual clarification of the concept of the body and the mind and the interaction between them is made in principle through the ancient Greek literature. It follows sports pedagogy and philosophical interpretation of the saying of Isocrates based on the findings of modern science and modern trends in education.

**Keywords:** Isocrates, vigor, prudence

**«ΡΩΜΗ ΜΕΤΑ ΦΡΟΝΗΣΕΩΣ» ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΝ ΙΣΟΚΡΑΤΗ: ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΗ, ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ  
ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗ ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ**

**Ιωάννα Μάστορα**

**Περίληψη**

Στην παρούσα εργασία εξετάζεται η ισχύς της ρήσης του Ισοκράτη «ρώμη μετά φρονήσεως». Για να τεκμηριωθεί η εγκυρότητα ή να αναιρεθεί ο ισχυρισμός ενός από τους δέκα έγκριτους αττικούς ρήτορες. Για το σκοπό αυτό, γίνεται καταρχήν εννοιολογική αποσαφήνιση της ρώμης του σώματος και της φρόνησης και της μεταξύ τους αλληλεπίδρασης μέσα από την αρχαία ελληνική γραμματεία. Ακολουθεί αθλητική παιδαγωγική και φιλοσοφική ερμηνεία της ρήσης του Ισοκράτη με βάση τα πορίσματα της σύγχρονης επιστήμης και τις σύγχρονες τάσεις της αγωγής.

**Keywords:** Ισοκράτης, Ρώμη, φρόνηση

**Introduction**

In classical antiquity, Greeks admired the beauty of the body. For this purpose, they persistently and systematically exercised. Still, the body's strength was not the ultimate goal itself. The ancient philosopher Isocrates (436 - 338 BC) addressing Demonikos, probably the son of his friend Hipponikos, tyrant of the Citians of Rhodes around 394 BC, mentions that: “Physical strength usually benefits when it is accompanied by prudence, but without it rather harms those who have it; and while it beautifies the bodies of those who exercise it, it hinders the cares for the cultivation of the soul .

**Ethical interpretations**

In the Nicomachean Ethics (1140 b 6-8) , Aristotle defined prudence (phronesis) as a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are

good or bad for a human being. Basically, a prudent person knows the right thing to do in each situation and acts upon that knowledge. For Aristotle, prudence or practical wisdom is a virtue of thought that is practical rather than theoretical and deliberative rather than intuitive. It is the intellectual virtue that perfects reasoning in regard to decision making in the realm of human action. According to Aristotle, there is a fundamental connection between prudence and moral virtue. Prudence is a virtue of the practical intellect that is related in a particularly close way to the moral virtues. In order to be morally good, a person needs the moral virtues, and these in turn need the judgment of prudence .

Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* distinguishes theory from practice, assigning a more decisive role in terms of human's eudemonia. However, wisdom is the whole of human virtue, as prudence seems to claim a share as well. Prudence is not a science, since it does not result from evidential reasoning and has as its objects what the prudent person must do in order to achieve mediocrity and, by extension, the highest good, bliss. In other words, prudence cannot be understood as an abstract theoretical construction except from its embodiment in wisdom.

Prudence means being careful about personal choices, stopping and thinking before acting. It is a strength of restraint. Prudence involves far-sighted planning as well as short-term, goal-directed planning. In a modern popular interpretation is often referred as cautious wisdom, practical wisdom, and practical reason .

However, in contradiction to Isocrates, Aristotle did not relate prudence with the act of physical exercise. “According to the common understanding, the characteristic of a prudent person is to be able to think correctly about what is good and beneficial for him, not, however, having in mind individual special cases, e.g. what things are good and beneficial for health or physical strength, but what things are good and beneficial for a good and happy life in general<sup>1</sup>. A proof of this is that we call wise in relation to such and such a particular thing and those who think correctly in relation to some important purpose, as long as it is among those who are not the object of some art. So we can say in general that a prudent person is one who has the ability to think correctly .

Aristotle believed that will is related to reason and defined as a person's true desires. They are not related to needs, but arise only as a result of reflection. It is remarkable that the activity caused by the impulse of the will makes it possible to rise above the situation. Action can be carefully thought out in advance and go beyond what is happening the certain minute. It should be noted that the motivation function often causes a person to be active. No one will condemn someone for failure to perform any action. But, despite this, the action plan is being built and implemented. The motivation function helps to mobilize all forces even when the need for activity does not exist at the moment. For example, it may be difficult for a school graduate to

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<sup>1</sup> See also KALACHANIS, (2019) and KALACHANIS & MICHAILEDIS (2015) where there is a wide discussion on the Hippocratic notion about impacts from the environment on human health

study hard every day throughout the year, but the thought of the final exam and admission to the coveted university makes him motivated and starts studying.

### **Sport & pedagogical applications**

Physical exercises aim to achieve excellent physical condition and harmonious unity of body mind and spirit. Fitness exercises influences mental wellbeing. Research shows that while physical activity improves physical abilities, it also helps individuals to develop positive body image and self-esteem. Research studies show that physical exercise helps individuals to improve positive body image and self-esteem. It significantly increases the ability to stress management, to reduce depression and anxiety, as well as boost the mood and improve overall cognitive function. All this further shows the importance behind using fitness for mental stability.

If vigor is the physical strength, prudence is the strength of the soul. An athlete, therefore, must possess fortitude, a virtue that is also cultivated through team sports and can lead to the formation of a dynamic and fighting character. Despite the fact that winning should not always be the ultimate goal, putting in a lot of effort, but also the labor of preparation are elements requiring justification. Even a defeat can become a lesson in dignity. In team sports, for example, there can be moments of injustice. In particular, an athlete or a team may be wronged by a referee. Also, a parent may offend a young athlete.

In this case, the circumstance of the match requires the athlete to "leave behind" the event and focus on the match. It is a process that will help him in his life as well, so that after difficult circumstances he can return to athletics in time, without being overwhelmed by failure or giving up trying every time he is wronged. In addition, training children to join a sports team or to engage in an individual sport game is based on the pedagogical principles of motivation, rewards, punishments and intrinsic motivation and equity. Each of the specific pedagogical principles, as well as their application as a whole, achieves the enhancement of the mental, but also the social virtues, of children and adolescents. A strong-willed person is decisive, persistent, and independent. Such a person has good self-control and discipline. These qualities are very important for a strong-willed person. So, for example, it will be very difficult for an indecisive person to decide and set a goal for himself. Persistence will help him stick to the plan at all costs and not deviate from the goal. Independence will be manifested in the fact that he will carry out his plans without outside help. It is quite different from spontaneous desire, appetite, drive or urge, whether it is 'internal' or 'external'.

### **The will manifestation**

The willpower is defined as the individual's ability to set goals and decide to achieve them. The will, that is, the ability to make decisions about actions, is also a kind of act or action. It is a mental act that precedes the physical act that we decided to carry out. According to one view there is a large identification of the will with motives, which

are internal impulses. However, this description of the will as an internal impulse is in a sense different with the view of some philosophers, who consider the will as the ability of the individual to convince himself by reason of necessity. The concept of will is core to moral philosophy and presents problems considered as unsolved. One of these is the disagreement among philosophers about the nature of the will or volition and whether it can be free, the notorious problem of free will. This problem is important, mainly because one can claim that only if there is free will can the individual be considered responsible for his actions, and therefore ultimately only then does the very concept of morality make sense.

The will manifestation is expressed in qualities such as will power, perseverance, the ability to suspend actions, emotions, thoughts that interfere with the implementation of the decision. These are the primary basic volitional personal qualities that determine the majority of human behavioral acts. There are also secondary ones, which develop in ontogenesis later than the primary, volitional qualities: determination, courage, composure, self-confidence. Voluntary qualities are also included in the third level. These are closely related to ethics: responsibility, discipline, adherence to principles, commitment. This group also includes the qualities of will related to a person's attitude to work: efficiency, initiative, organization, diligence.

Here we have also to mention the importance of the concept of the harmonious development of the body and the soul. Education in ancient Athens meant the symbiotic growth of the body and the spirit. Parents gave music and gymnastics, two subjects taught in didaskaleia (private) schools, a lot of weight, with the state's active assistance. Aristotle said that the well-rounded education of the Athenian state included gymnastics, music, painting, and letters (Politics 1337). By putting their life philosophy into action, the Greeks educated their youth and, in the end, solidified the idea of, "competing fairly," stressing the extreme significance of physical activity and the fair contest agon (αγών). A unique legislative order enjoined Athenians to actively pursue the peaceful upbringing of their children, placing specific emphasis on music and gymnastics.

Each of us has a special set of qualities. Some of these are acquired, others are congenital. They are associated with the thought activity and desires of each person. So, for example, a strong-willed person clearly knows what he wants and confidently follows his goal. On the contrary, if this ability is poorly developed, it is difficult to make decisions and achieve goals. The first and most important function is motivation. It provides the beginning of certain actions to overcome certain obstacles. The second function is stabilization. It is associated with voluntary efforts that help maintain a certain level of activity despite interference. The third function is called braking. Its purpose is to slow down desires and goals that are incompatible with the master.

## **Conclusion**

Isocrates claim remains diachronic since a combination of Foundational movements with mind-body awareness and a physiological baseline for why and how the body

works is underlined in a holistic approach. Physical strength and proper strategic training is required for a healthy and balanced outcome. The role of strategic and quality physical education is needed to build strong will and volitional qualities for sport life success.

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