

Political theory thrived in fourth-century BCE Greece. While the political writings of Plato and Aristotle are more often read and studied today, Isocrates was also an influential and respected intellectual on political thought at the time. Among Isocrates' writings is an open letter to Nicocles, then the ruler of the island of Cyprus. The letter offers general principles for training a king. In this section, he focuses on preparing a king mentally.

... οὐδενὶ τῶν ἀσκητῶν οὕτω προσήκει τὸ σῶμα γυμνάζειν ὡς τοῖς βασιλεῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν αὐτῶν· ἅπασαι γὰρ αἱ πανηγύρεις οὐδὲν μέρος τιθέασι τούτων τῶν ἄθλων, περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς καθ' ἐκάστην ἀγωνίζεσθε τὴν ἡμέραν. ὧν ἐνθυμούμενον χρὴ προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν, ὅπως ὅσονπερ ταῖς τιμαῖς τῶν ἄλλων προέχεις, τοσοῦτον καὶ ταῖς ἀρεταῖς αὐτῶν διοίσεις. καὶ μὴ νόμιζε τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις πράγμασι χρησίμην εἶναι, πρὸς δὲ τὸ βελτίους ἡμᾶς καὶ φρονιμωτέρους γίνεσθαι μηδεμίαν δύναμιν ἔχειν· μηδὲ καταγνώσῃς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοσαύτην δυστυχίαν, ὡς περὶ μὲν τὰ θηρία τέχνας εὐρήκαμεν αἷς αὐτῶν τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμεροῦμεν καὶ πλείονος ἀξίας ποιοῦμεν, ἡμᾶς δ' αὐτοὺς οὐδὲν ἂν πρὸς ἀρετὴν ὠφελήσαιμεν, ἀλλ' ὡς καὶ τῆς παιδείσεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιμελείας μάλιστα δυναμένης τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν εὐεργετεῖν, οὕτω διάκεισο τὴν γνώμην, καὶ τῶν τε παρόντων τοῖς φρονιμωτάτοις πλησίαζε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὓς ἂν δύνη μεταπέμπου, καὶ μήτε τῶν ποιητῶν εὐδοκιμούντων μήτε τῶν σοφιστῶν μηδενὸς οἴου δεῖν ἀπείρως ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν ἀκροατῆς γίγνου, τῶν δὲ μαθητῆς, καὶ παρασκεύαζε σεαυτὸν τῶν μὲν ἐλαττόνων κριτὴν, τῶν δὲ μειζόνων ἀγωνιστήν· διὰ γὰρ τούτων τῶν γυμνασίων τάχιστ' ἂν γένοιο τοιοῦτος οἷον ὑπεθέμεθα δεῖν εἶναι τὸν ὀρθῶς βασιλεύσοντα καὶ τὴν πόλιν ὡς χρὴ διοικήσοντα. μάλιστα δ' ἂν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ σαυτοῦ παρακληθείης, εἰ δεινὸν ἡγήσαιο τοὺς χείρους τῶν βελτιόνων ἄρχειν καὶ τοὺς ἀνοητοτέρους τοῖς φρονιμωτέροις προστάττειν· ὅσῳ γὰρ ἂν ἐρρωμενεστέρωσ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν ἀτιμάσης, τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον τὴν αὐτοῦ διάνοιαν ἀσκήσεις.

ἄγνοια –ας ἡ stupidity
ἀγωνίζομαι compete, struggle
ἀγωνιστής –οῦ ὁ competitor, rival
ἄθλον –ου τό labor
ἄκροατής –οῦ ὁ listener
ἄν marks a hypothetical situation
ἀνόητος –ον ignorant
ἄπειρος –ον inexperienced, unacquainted
with
ἀσκέω train
ἀσκητής –οῦ ὁ athlete
ἀτιμάσης “you should dishonor”
βασιλεύσοντα (acc sg) one who will be king
γένοιο “you can become”
γίγνου command “become”
γυμνάζω exercise
γυμνάσιον –ου τό exercise
διάκεισο command “fixate”
διάνοια –ας ἡ intellect
διοικήσοντα (acc sg) one who will manage
δυνάμενος –η –ον powerful, having power
δύνη ~ δύνασαι
δυστυχία –ας ἡ bad luck
ἐνθυμούμενος –η –ον internalizing
ἐπιμέλεια –ας ἡ diligence
ἐρρώμενος –η –ον earnest, vigorous
εὐδοκιμῶν –οῦσα –όν famous
εὐεργετεῖν benefit
εὐρήκαμεν (1st pl perfect) “we have found”
ἠγήσαιο “you would believe”

ἡμερώω tame
θηρίον –ου τό beast, animal
καταγνώσκει (2nd sg aorist) render judgment
κριτής –οῦ ὁ judge, critic
μάλιστα especially
μᾶλλον more
μεταπέμπου command “send for”
νόμιζε command “believe”
οἶον as
οἶον command “think”
ὅπως so that, in order that
ὅσος –α –ον (as much) as
ὅσονπερ as much as
παίδευσις –εως ἡ education
πανήγυρις –εως ἡ assembly
παρακληθείης “you could be comforted”
παρασκεύαζε command “prepare”
παρών –όντος ὁ someone present
πλησίαζε command “stay near”
προέχω surpass, exceed
προσέχω turn to
προσῆκει it belongs to, concerns
προστάτω command
σοφιστής –οῦ ὁ intellectual
τοιοῦτος –αὐτή –οὔτο of the same kind (as)
τοσοῦτος –αὐτή –οὔτο as much (as); so
great (...ὡς = that)
ὑποτίθημι advise
φρόνιμος –η –ον smart
ὠφελήσασιν “we can help”