

XXI. Education and Public Problems as Seen by Themistius

GLANVILLE DOWNEY

DUMBARTON OAKS, WASHINGTON, D. C.

In the light of the particular concern of many of us, as educators, both with the history of ancient education and with the general debate which is in progress in this country on the subject matter and the purposes of education, a study of Themistius' views on education will have special points of interest. Themistius' career (he was born ca. A.D. 317 and died in A.D. 388) falls in the middle and latter part of the century during which both pagans and Christians were very much concerned with the educational bases of the cultural and political problems which confronted them as a result of the emancipation and growing success of Christianity. He was one of the great pagan figures of the day,¹ respected and honored by the Christian emperors as well as by the pagan Emperor Julian the Philosopher, and his preserved works include essays on various subjects and a series of addresses to the successive emperors from Constantius (A.D. 337-61) to Theodosius I (A.D. 379-95). A number of his works are concerned primarily with education, while most of the rest of his writings touch upon it incidentally; and as a consequence we possess more material written on this subject by Themistius than by any other figure of that time. This evidence is the more valuable because we know from the statements of his contemporaries,² from the circumstances of his career, and from the large number of copies of his writings which have been preserved that Themistius exerted a considerable influence during his lifetime and that his works continued to be read with interest long after his death, in spite of his having remained a pagan during the century that witnessed the official triumph of Christianity.

¹ On his life and writings see W. Stegemann, "Themistios," *RE* 5A 1642-80. I am preparing a new edition of his orations, utilizing the material for a new Greek text which was collected by H. Schenkl and left incomplete at his death. The translations of Themistius used in the present study are taken from my edition. References to the Greek text are to W. Dindorf's edition, *Themistii Orationes e codice Mediolanensi emendatae* (Leipzig 1832).

² Stegemann (above, note 1) 1675-77.

This contemporary evidence for the intellectual life and educational problems of the Empire in the fourth century must ultimately of course be studied in the larger context of the other testimonia of that period which have come down to us. Such a study, which would surpass the limits appropriate to the present occasion, I hope to make elsewhere; but an investigation devoted to Themistius' own ideas and concerns is a necessary preparation because this material, not having been readily accessible, is not well known.³ We must, however, bear in mind that all the while that Themistius was writing his classical essays and addresses, the Christians were very much occupied both with their doctrinal struggles, which spread into the political sphere, and with the problem of the relations between Christianity and classical culture. Themistius seldom gives any outward indication that he is aware of these matters, but he must actually have been very keenly concerned with them. Certainly he must have been constantly preoccupied with the fact that he was competing with the Christians for the favor of the emperors, and it is plain from his writings that he was fighting for the survival of Hellenism, and was attempting to show that paganism could supply everything that Christianity could offer. Themistius never directly attacked Christianity, but he was always ready to suggest, by implication, that paganism was just as good, if not better.

In the matter of education, Themistius had several concerns which were interrelated with each other and also connected with his larger program for the preservation of Hellenism. In a moment we shall review the passages in which these ideas are stated, but it will be convenient to list the main topics briefly before we begin.

First of all, Themistius is anxious to show the inherent value of true pagan philosophy and of Hellenic education, with the implication (as has been noted) that these were at least as good as the Christian religion and education. Repeatedly he seeks to show that the Hellenic training is the best for the individual, for society as a whole, and for the ruler. Above all he was concerned to prove (against some contrary opinions) that "philosophy," based upon literary training, was appropriate and beneficial for all classes of society, though it had to be put in different forms for different

³ Some of Themistius' ideas on the subject have been brought together by V. Valdenberg, "Discours politiques de Thémistius dans leur rapport avec l'antiquité," *Byzantion* 1 (1924) 557-80. See also my study, "Philanthropia in Religion and Statecraft in the Fourth Century after Christ," *Historia* 4 (1955) 199-208.

people. At the same time Themistius saw a special danger in the rival educational theories put forward by the rhetoricians, who, he considered, were ruining the true value of pagan philosophy. Politically, his views show an acute awareness of the need for a virtuous and instructed emperor, a virtuous and instructed people, and a civilized and intelligent method, based on philosophy, of controlling and assimilating the barbarians who constituted a pressing external menace to the Empire.

We have to bear in mind that in his preserved works these interests appear in different places, in somewhat different forms, and with what may look like differences in emphasis, caused by the differing purposes of the orations in which his ideas are set forth. The whole subject is one with which he is constantly preoccupied; but he is (for purposes of instruction and propaganda) concerned with so many different aspects of it that there is no one place in which he has occasion to bring together and summarize all of his thoughts on the matter. Basically, Themistius holds the traditional, conservative view of the Roman state and of the sources of its power and success, which are to be found in the historic and well-recognized virtues of its people and its rulers, and in the resulting favor of the gods. He harks back to the golden age of the state in the reigns of the "good emperors," such as Augustus, Trajan, Marcus, and exhorts the rulers of the present day to follow their examples. But he also claims to have new views — or at least views which differ from those prevailing in some quarters — on the duties and powers of the emperor, on training for public service, and on the place of philosophy in the life of the individual. As we shall see, Themistius was well aware that education lay at the bottom of all these matters.

The training of the individual to prepare him for his place in society is the primary purpose of the teaching of philosophy, in Themistius' view. He describes the basic interests of the individual as follows (*Or.* 6.76C-D): "Since nature has given man the chief position of honor, far from the other animals, and has bound us, among those who surround us, to those of the same stock, the foundations have been laid at our very hearths; and after the man who loves his brothers, there follows the man who loves his family; after the man who loves his family, there follows the man who loves his fatherland; and the man who loves his fatherland is succeeded by the one who loves mankind." In another oration, this progressive development is stated in terms of ancient doctrine, and the role of

philosophy is described in terms of its divine sanction (*Or.* 34, p. 26 Mai, p. 449 Dind.): "[Aristotle] teaches that this happiness is desirable when it exists for only one man, but it is better and more perfect when it reaches a whole city. For this reason he calls his system civic, and he maintains that action finds no part in it aside from good action, and that the God who rules all, and his companions, philosophize with a practical and civic philosophy, keeping the whole of nature unswerving and uncontaminated for all time." Education is, in fact, the basis of man's true life (*ibid.*, p. 18 Mai, p. 445 Dind.): "This is the superiority of man, that if he has enjoyed a true education he exhibits a divine life on earth; but if he has had a bad training, he becomes a beast more savage than bears or wild boars. . . . For the sake of his education, law was invented, and the art of discovering law was itself invented." From another point of view, Themistius observes that the study of virtue has been devised so as to enable men to take counsel together for the common good (*Or.* 26.323B-C); and the road to virtue is philosophy.⁴ Intellectual power, indeed, has a practical value, in that it is superior to force and can accomplish some results which force cannot achieve. This is one of Themistius' earliest themes and one to which he constantly returns.⁵ In particular, the highest success of the state depends upon having the emperor and his subjects receive the right kind of education, which will equip them with virtue and philosophy. This is the theme of Themistius' first and second orations,⁶ addressed to the Emperor Constantius, and of the oration of Constantius himself, in reply to Themistius' greetings, which is preserved among Themistius' works. A typical passage from Themistius' second oration may be cited (*Or.* 2.31D-32A):

To prove that the practice of philosophy is nothing else than the exercise of virtue, listen to another saying, which . . . belongs to the man of Stagira [Aristotle]. . . . If, then, he says that from performing just deeds a man becomes just, and from performing temperate acts a man becomes temperate, no one, from the non-performance of these things, would ever have the prospect of becoming a good man. Yet most people, not doing these things, take refuge in the word and think that they prac-

⁴ This is the subject of an entire oration, which is preserved only in a Syriac translation, the Greek original having been lost. The Syriac version is translated into German by J. Gildemeister and F. Bücheler, *Rheinisches Museum* 27 (1872) 438-62.

⁵ e.g. *Or.* 1.2B-3A. The same thought is expressed by Themistius' contemporary Himerius, *Or.* 48.32, p. 210, line 352, ed. A. Colonna (Rome 1951).

⁶ In Dindorf's numeration.

tise philosophy, acting a little like sick people who listen to the physician carefully, but carry out none of his orders; so that neither do these men, when thus caring for themselves, enjoy good health, nor do the former, when they practise philosophy in this manner, achieve health for their souls. . . .

The Emperor Constantius carefully reproduces the teaching of Themistius; a few of the more striking passages in his discourse may be cited. The role of philosophy in education and public life is clearly summarized (*Or. of Constantius*, 20B-C): "You must also, conscript fathers, see at the same time that no task in human life can be most fairly and best performed without virtue, either at home or in public. By training and educating youth to this, those who are fairly chosen as the leaders of philosophy could be considered the common fathers of all men. . . . And though I speak of these things briefly, the truth is that the real judge and governor of all is the philosopher. Indeed he is the proved and exact norm of the way in which one must offer something to the people, of how the senate must be honored, and, in a word, of the whole conduct of the government." The emperor tells how Constantinople has become a center of philosophy because of Themistius, and how he (the emperor) has been especially anxious to have this come to pass (*ibid.* 20D-21A): "While I have been at pains to make philosophy shine forth everywhere in the world, I wish it especially to flourish in our City. This condition . . . exists in it because of Themistius; it prides itself on its companies of young philosophers and has become a common lodging-place of education, so that all men everywhere agree by common consent that the City is a master of philosophy, and that the teachings of virtue go out from our City, as though from a pure spring, to all parts of the world. . . ." The closing words of the emperor's discourse give an impressive picture of what was at least in theory the conception of education (*ibid.* 23C-D): "It is necessary . . . to give to literature, before everything else, the dignity which befits it, to give to wisdom (*sophia*) its proper adornment, and to give fitting honor to education (*paideusis*) and to virtue its deserved prize, and to make the noblest of sciences, I mean philosophy, shine forth everywhere and among all men. In this way it will come to pass that the other arts will meet with more careful attention, when the first and best receives its own honor. . . ."

Themistius' views were not, however, universally accepted, and it is instructive, for us today, to find that there was, in fact, a warm

debate in progress over the purposes and methods of education. There were two theories with which Themistius disagreed, and a major part of his effort was devoted to refuting these.

One was the familiar view that made philosophy an aristocratic accomplishment, which only a few people were fitted to achieve. In one oration, Themistius shows how this view went back to the teaching of Aristotle (*Or.* 26.319B-D):

It was also a characteristic doctrine of Aristotle that the same writings should not be considered useful to the people in general and to philosophers, just as neither medicines nor foods are to those who are in the peak of health and to those who are in a delicate state; but for some men, some of these things are really healthful, while for others, other things are fitted for the present condition of the body. Wherefore he called some writings public and made them free, while others he locked up within and gave freely to few people. The keys by which they are opened and closed are clarity and obscurity, by means of which it is given to the hearers to open the cloud and close it up again, as if by the Horae. And then some of them are helpful to the common people and are devised for the great majority and are full of light and clear, and the useful side of them is not without pleasure. . . . Others again are mystic and the sacred rites are contained in them. And this he devised so that we should possess them but the uninitiated should not have them. . . .

Indeed the soul, in Themistius' view, must be philosophical by nature, and must be inclined toward education, in order to be able to profit from it.⁷ However, Themistius, believing (as has been mentioned already) that philosophy was the road to virtue, and that the people of his own day were wanting in education, in that they had not enough knowledge of philosophy (*Or.* 26.321A), set out to make philosophy useful to the whole population, so far as this was possible (*ibid.* 320B). In this, he pointed out, he was following the example of the philosophers of ancient times, like Socrates, who taught ordinary people from all walks of life (*Or.* 28.341D). For doing this, Themistius was criticized and attacked, but (he says) this was because his rivals were jealous.⁸

⁷ *Or.* 21.254B. This view appears also, for example, in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Panegyric of Caesarius* (*Or.* 7.9).

⁸ *Or.* 21.246C-247A; *Or.* 26.313D-314A. Themistius did, however, believe that there were certain people of servile origin whose minds were so warped by their surroundings that it was impossible for them to profit from education. He writes (*Or.* 21.248D-249A): ". . . menial and servile character of the seed is somehow completely impressed on the soul and does not allow anything pure or unmixed or superior to its origin to be seen, but drags it back to its ancient nature and causes it to return; just as you can never, by manipulating them and bending them with your hands, straighten

These rivals, representing the other educational theory, were, in fact, the rhetoricians and sophists who claimed that the best training was to be found in the study of rhetoric and that rhetoric could prepare a man for worldly success in a fashion not to be equalled by philosophy. The importance of this dispute, in Themistius' view, may be gauged from the volume and the serious tone of the attacks which he makes upon it. Two whole orations (XXVII and XXVIII) are devoted to the relative merits of rhetoric and philosophy for human improvement, and another (XXIII) exposes the real vices and shortcomings of the sophists. The shallowness and artificiality of their teaching are contrasted with the deep and lasting benefits which come from the study of philosophy, and the methods taught by the rhetoricians are condemned for their deviousness and dishonesty. The writings of poets and rhetoricians have a certain value as educational material, Themistius admits, but they are still inferior to philosophy.⁹ Philosophers, he holds, must be in command of those who teach oratory and grammar, but must not themselves teach these subjects.¹⁰

This debate, in Themistius' eyes, was a most serious one because it affected the qualifications both of public servants in general, and of the emperor, the supreme public servant, in particular. Thus the controversy affected the safety and prosperity of the whole state. Some people indeed considered philosophy to be so great a thing that they held that even the greatest public office was inferior to it, and Themistius heartily agreed with them (*Or.* 34, p. 14 Mai, p. 444 Dindorf). However, it was possible and fitting for a philosopher to undertake public service and so to make it possible for the state to enjoy the benefit of his wisdom; and Themistius himself did this both by serving on various occasions as a state ambassador and by accepting appointment as prefect of Constantinople.¹¹ In this way philosophy was enabled to demonstrate its practical value; he writes,

branches which have grown crooked, but they immediately grow again in the twisted shapes of their nature. And it really is true that a man who is of such a nature because of his nurture must needs look downward, towards servile occupations. The lofty and straight and free characteristics of mankind, servitude from one's early years will take away, and it forces a man, because of the similarity, to love the furtive and tricky and murky aspects. . . ."

⁹ *Or.* 10.130c; cf. also *Or.* 20.237D and *Or.* 21.243A.

¹⁰ *Or.* 21.251A. Themistius makes a joking reference to his own inability to teach geometry and arithmetic (*Or.* 23.293c).

¹¹ *Or.* 34, p. 16 Mai, p. 445 Dind.; *Or.* 8.104B-D; *Or.* 31.352B-354D.

for example, in the oration delivered on his appointment to the prefectship of Constantinople (*Or.* 17.213C–214A):

Again after a long interval the most divine emperor [Theodosius I] has brought Philosophy back to the administration of public affairs, more manifestly than those who have lately ruled. They indeed honored her only so far as eloquence was concerned, but when making a choice for the conduct of affairs, they often were not ashamed to go to a lower sphere; and Philosophy performed her civic duty and served the common fatherland only in embassies. But our emperor both gives her public office and commands her to be the active worker in affairs for which he has hitherto called upon other agents. In olden times it was possible for Philosophy, who had trained the contestants, to watch the public games as a quiet and carefree spectator. Now, however, the emperor, instead of allowing her to be an onlooker, leads her down to the arena and gives her the opportunity to persuade the greater part of mankind that philosophy did not consist merely of reason [*logos*] without deeds, but constituted the demonstration of deeds guided by reason [*logos*], and that her teaching of sovereign precepts was not irresponsible, but really involved the execution of the things that she enjoined. The present time has also brought a reign which appreciates the conclusions reached by men of former times, who understood that things would be well with the city-state when the power to conduct affairs was joined with excellence in speaking, and both political power and philosophy came together in the same man.

And of course it is not the citizen alone who needs the proper training in philosophy in order to give the highest kind of service to the state. The emperor himself, as the highest and most important public servant, must have the highest and best education and philosophical training. It was to this theme that Themistius devoted constant attention, in all his writing, and as we read through his works it seems as though he devoted more detail to this topic than to any other one subject which he treats. It is in fact for us one of the most instructive subjects in all of his teaching, being a theme on which he spoke with the greatest feeling and the greatest forcefulness.

As has been true at all periods of history, the education of the ruler, in Themistius' opinion, ought to be planned with a view to his duties and responsibilities. Here we must recall, first of all, that Themistius' concept of the duties of the ruler, and of the bases of his power, is a pagan counterpart to the Christian concept of the ruler as set forth, a few years before Themistius began his career, by the Christian scholar and court adviser Eusebius of Caesarea.¹² In his

¹² For Eusebius' theory, see the pioneer study of N. H. Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London 1955) 168–72.

first two orations, addressed to Constantius — for whose father Constantine Eusebius had produced his theory of the imperial power — Themistius declares that the ruler is divinely chosen (by the monotheistic God in whom Themistius and his peers believed), and divinely guided in his actions, and that he is a counterpart on earth of the supreme ruler in heaven. He is responsible for the welfare and happiness of his people and is looked upon by them as a benevolent father.¹³ In these respects Themistius' view of the emperor is a counterpart, *mutatis mutandis*, of Eusebius' conception; but Themistius goes beyond Eusebius in the emphasis which he lays upon the importance of *philanthropia*, or love of mankind, in the emperor — *philanthropia* being, indeed, the emperor's chief virtue.¹⁴ Here it is plain, of course, that Themistius is trying to show that the theory of the emperor's position and function which the Christians put forth was actually based upon the pagan view, and that the pagans, with their emphasis upon *philanthropia*, could provide a better imperial ideal than the Christians could.

This, then, was the ideal emperor whose education Themistius discussed in such great detail. In a number of orations there appears the basic view that the emperor must be educated differently from ordinary men. In *Or. XVIII*, addressed to Theodosius I when the emperor entrusted Themistius with the education of his young son, Themistius declares (224c–d) that the emperor “did not consider that the same education was suitable for an emperor and for a private citizen, or that the same lessons fitted the future ruler of the earth and sea and the commander of a company of soldiers.” This view is developed in greater detail in *Or. IX*, addressed to the young Valentinian, son of Valens (126A–C):

There are among the parts of learning, . . . dear child, some which are imperial and divinely nourished, and others which are suitable for subjects and for private citizens. Those which raise the soul to grandeur, fill it with holiness, and first cause to rule himself the man who is destined to rule others are lessons and teachings fit for an emperor, while those which train the tongue only but leave the soul unadorned, are all lowly and petty and necessary to an emperor for only a little while. Just as, indeed, you will not bear the same weapons as your subjects, nor will you wear similar clothing or live in like dwellings, but everything connected with you will

¹³ On the traditional elements in this view, see the study of Valdenberg (above, note 3).

¹⁴ On *philanthropia*, see *Orations I and II, passim*, and my study cited above, note 3.

be more noble than in the case of your subjects — your horses, your dogs, your servants, and your conveyances — in the same way you must acquire the best and most divine studies, through which we shall confer upon you the name of divinity. The circumstance that he did not employ Attic speech did not prevent your father from being considered milder than any emperor who had ever lived; but the fact that he considered himself a philosopher in his acts rather than in his words — this is what made all the difference. Just so the king of all heaven is not adored by men because he speaks most majestically but because he is most benevolent — being the most powerful — and because he is the giver of life and the ruler of happiness and the custodian of good things, and because we look to him in confidence when we are in trouble.

Other aspects of this ideal education appear in another oration, addressed to Valens (*Or.* 11.142B–143B):

If all the arts connected with eloquence were coarse, prone to lying, and common, the imperial soul would have no ornament of its own, but all its adornments would be inferior and inharmonious. If, however, there is one of the arts of eloquence which is born to rule and is free, so that the others swarm after it as after a queen, some escorting it closely, others at a distance, that is the work of this art, namely the adornment and care of the imperial soul. For this art alone is it possible to see this soul and to track it, and not merely to stand by the entrance door and the curtains, but to penetrate the interior and reach the resting-place in which the true ruler dwells. . . . The race which dwells in this knowledge does not come from any part of the earth, but from heaven above, from the realm of the father of all men and of the ruler, Zeus, whose sacred creation and image the kingdom on earth is. And since this art is always intent upon the archetype it has no difficulty in recognizing and studying the image. . . . Such a man [i.e. the ruler], through his courage and through his knowledge that the truth is a sufficient adornment to him, while he loves the other arts of eloquence, calls to his aid only the one which he knows dwells as far as possible from falsehood. . . .” (Themistius goes on to show that the art in question is philosophy.)

At the same time, Themistius speaks of the emperor's need for practical education in the affairs of the government. Writing to Valentinian and Valens in A.D. 364, he says (*Or.* 6.81B): “In what concerns their subjects, rulers should first perform the same labors themselves, being reared in an unflattering and laborious regimen, tilling the soil, performing public tasks, living in the open air, serving as soldiers, growing greater through the adversity of human life, like Cyrus, like Numa, like Darius, like the most famous of the Romans. . . .” In another discourse, addressed to Theodosius I, he says (*Or.* 8.113D–114B): “There is no need for you to seek men to

teach you with how much sweat the farmers earn the twelfth of a medimnus and . . . one bronze and one silver and one gold coin, which is a welcome sight to most men. You know what great evils are the shameless extortion of the tax-collector and the falsification of the clerk, and the native soldier's love of gain. . . . It was after having been educated in this school that you ascended this rostrum, the school in which were educated Cyrus in Persia, Philip in Macedonia, Numa in the Rome of old. . . . It is on account of this that you are able to survey from afar this great empire, as though it were one household, and see what will come in each year and what will be spent, what is lacking, and what is surplus, and where conditions are easy and where they are laborious." To Julian, Themistius speaks specifically of the ruler's need of knowledge of the countries adjacent to the Roman Empire.¹⁵

Basically, then, the education needed for the ruler is the same as that needed for the private citizen, in that the training of the ruler should be founded upon philosophy. As in the case of ordinary education, the writings of poets and rhetoricians are admitted to have some value here, but it is held that they are still inferior to philosophy for the formation of the king and lawgiver (*Or.* 10.129D-130C, to Valens). To have philosophy share the throne is a return to the happiness of old times as exemplified in the reigns of Trajan, Marcus, and Antoninus (*Or.* 13.166B, to Gratianus). The emperor should if possible be a philosopher himself, but if circumstances make it impossible for him to be one, he ought to surround himself with philosophers and rule by their advice (*Or.* II *passim*, also *Or.* I).

The foundation of this type of imperial training, Themistius declares, is literary study, from which one gains wisdom and so achieves philosophy. Writing to Valens, he says (*Or.* 11.144D-145A): "I have often reflected that there is no other cause for that love of mankind (*philanthropia*) of yours, which is so widely celebrated, than love of literature (*philologia*) and the desire to listen to it. That man, indeed, who loves learning must perforce love men as well, just as, if a man admires swiftness, he must also admire horses. . . . And it is clear that the man who sets great store by wisdom,

¹⁵ Themistius' oration to Julian survives only in an Arabic translation made from a Syriac translation (now lost) of the Greek original, which presumably was removed from Themistius' works by Christian editors because it had been addressed to the hated Apostate. A French paraphrase of the Arabic version has been published by M. Bouyges, "Épître de Thémistius à Julien sur la politique," *Archives de Philosophie*, tome 2, cahier 3 (1924), where the passage cited appears at p. 22.

and ever exalts it and makes it sit beside him, will naturally love and make much of this creature in which alone God has planted the seeds of wisdom." There is nothing esoteric about this training, for there are many teachers available in the eastern part of the Empire who are qualified to impart it (*Or.* 9.125D).

The importance to the state of this type of education, as the basis of the emperor's success and of the safety and welfare of the state, is eloquently argued in a large number of passages, whose number and variety is impressive testimony to the seriousness with which Themistius regarded the matter. Space will allow only a few of the texts to be quoted. Writing to Constantius in A.D. 357, Themistius puts the rhetorical question, Which is the most admirable characteristic of Constantius? The answer is (*Or.* 3.45B): "That you conquer by gentleness, that you live more temperately than private persons of the most moderate kind, that you hold education in the highest regard, that you follow closely after philosophy. This is your power and your army and your guards and your spearbearers, by which you alone of your brothers were preserved uncontaminated, with which you visited justice on madmen. Using this equipment you stood prepared against the old man [the rebel Vetrano], and using this you won the bloodless victory." Themistius goes on in the same passage (46A) to quote Plato (*Laws* 709E, 710C), "Life achieves its best and its happiest when there is a ruler who is young, temperate, with a good memory, brave, of a noble manner, quick to learn."

Themistius wrote this near the beginning of his career. Toward the end of it he wrote, in an address to Theodosius I (*Or.* 34, pp. 64-66 Mai, p. 467 Dind.), that the Scythians have been overcome by the virtues of the emperor rather than by force, and that

we hold them worthy of mercy as human beings. . . . He who is forever pursuing the contumacious barbarians, makes himself merely the ruler of the Romans; but he who conquers them, and spares them, understands that he is the ruler of all mankind. One might rightly give him the title of the true lover of mankind. Of the others, one might call Cyrus a lover of Persians, but not a lover of mankind, Alexander a lover of Macedonians, but not a lover of mankind, Agesilaus a lover of Hellenes, but not a lover of mankind, and Augustus a lover of Romans, and any other personage a lover of the race or nation of which he was counted as ruler. But as for being simply a lover of mankind, and simply a ruler, the man who seeks this inquires only whether it is a human being who is in need of clemency, and not whether he is a Scythian or a Massagete, or whether he did wrong in this way or that.

Similarly he had spoken in an address to Valens of the spread of this influence through the Empire (*Or.* 11.146A–B):

Or can anyone say in whose reign philosophical studies were more flourishing or more famous, studies which accompany the Emperor on his journeys like fellow-soldiers, and through him are honored and revered not only by the Romans and the Hellenes but even by the barbarians? That Scythian or Getic ruler, whom you struck down when he was causing trouble, and then raised up again when he was defeated, . . . [has seen] the philosophy which accompanied you in the attack and joined in dictating the terms of his truce and his peace. . . . These [victories of philosophy] are the bronze statues on the great monument; they occupy the seats of honor everywhere; they serve as colonists sent out to the cities which need them, and as providential guidance for the cities which are deficient in such teaching.

The practical effect, Themistius goes on to point out, is that the Scythians have been tamed and settled in Thrace and are restoring it to prosperity.¹⁶

This then is the happy result, for the Roman state and people, of the willingness of emperors to listen to their teachers (*Or.* 13.174A, of Gratianus; *Or.* 8.106D, of Theodosius). Valens is praised because he understood the importance of education for the state and encouraged learning, rousing young men's minds and offering prizes for their efforts. Literary skill was placed on equal terms with the sword (*Or.* 9.123B). In this matter, one of Valens' great virtues, according to Themistius, was that he recognized the correctness of Themistius' educational ideas, and paid greater honor to the philosophical training than to rhetorical education, which Themistius thought was so dangerous (*Or.* 10.129D). Constantius had made a special contribution by founding the imperial library at Constantinople (*Or.* 4.61B): "And there will come to this market of yours [the library], not merchants and sailors and the crowd of common people, but the elect and those who most love wisdom and the very flower of the Hellenes, and their purchases will be eloquence and learning. Now does it seem unnatural to you that the Muses accompany the Emperor on his campaigns and give him distinguished victories, in which Ares has no part?"

¹⁶ *Or.* 16.210D–211B (to Theodosius). Similar passages on the superiority of the emperor's wisdom over force are to be found, for example, in *Or.* 13.176C (to Gratianus); *Or.* 15.190D–191A (to Theodosius); *Or.* 16.207B–209A (to Theodosius); *Or.* 18.219A–D (to Theodosius); *Or.* 34, p. 62 Mai, pp. 466–67 Dind. (to Theodosius). See also *Or.* 10.129D (to Valens).

Such was the way in which Themistius thought the state could best be served, both in terms of ideal government and of the diffusion of *philanthropia*, all on the basis of proper education. Human nature being what it is, Themistius' ideas may not invariably have been realized; but officially there was at least some recognition of the views he represented. A decree of the Emperor Constantius and the Caesar Julian of A.D. 357 shows the position which literary training occupied in the preparation of candidates for the civil service:¹⁷

In the distinguished order of the decuries that bears the name of either copyists or fiscal clerks or tax assessment clerks, by no means shall any person obtain a place of the first order, unless it is established that he excels in the practice and training of the liberal studies and that he is so polished in the use of letters that words proceed from him without the offense of imperfections, and it is Our will that all men shall be so informed. Moreover, in order that its rewards may not be denied to literature, which is the greatest of all the virtues,¹⁸ if any man should appear to be worthy of the first place on account of his studies and his skill in the use of words, Our provision shall make him of more honorable rank . . . or Your Sublimity shall report his name to Us, so that We may deliberate as to the kind of rank that should be conferred upon him.

Julian a few years later when he became emperor gave an even greater place of importance to literary studies (*Cod. Theod.* 6.26.1, transl. Pharr):

Military service is of primary importance to the state. The second adornment of peace lies in the protection of letters. Therefore, We carefully consider the merits of Our bureaus, and We grant them the second place in the matter of privileges, so that if any persons have labored fifteen years in the bureau of memorials, of arrangements, of correspondence, or of petitions, even though they are descended and trace their lineage to decurion fathers, grandfathers and other decurion ancestors, they shall be considered exempt from all such obligation, and they shall not be called to service in municipal councils.

There were what would appear, to us at least, to be deficiencies in the system. Themistius himself does not speak of the importance of travel as an essential part of education (or at least of a better than average education), though his contemporary Himerius says that travel is the necessary completion of an education, coming after one has learned what is in the books (*Or.* 48.25, p. 207 Colonna).

¹⁷ *Code of Theodosius*, 14.1.1, transl. of Clyde Pharr (Princeton 1952), p. 405.

¹⁸ As Pharr notes, Gothofredus emends to: "The teacher of all the virtues."

This omission is not a point of the first importance; Themistius, who himself had travelled, may simply have taken the matter for granted, and so neglected to mention it. What seems to us to be a real deficiency is the lack of systematic study of foreign languages. While Themistius points out in the address to Julian cited above that the emperor needs a knowledge of foreign peoples for the sake of his own empire's safety, he nowhere says anything about the value of the study of foreign languages in this connection, and it seems practically certain, from the absence of any reference to the subject, that the Roman educational system did not provide for the regular study of foreign tongues.¹⁹

Here of course we have an interesting point of comparison with our modern situation. Today people realize — or at least they ought to — the political as well as the cultural importance of knowledge of the culture and languages of foreign nations, and at least some provision for this is made in our educational system. Whether the people of the Late Roman Empire could or indeed should have made such provision is an interesting question, which, in fact, highlights the essential character of the classical culture. This culture, as we know, had by Themistius' time come to be built up entirely on its own traditional foundations, and its success and durability, as Themistius and his peers understood very well, depended upon the maintenance of the ancient literary and philosophical (and for Themistius and the other pagans, religious) tradition. To open this tradition to barbarian culture, in the form of a study of foreign languages, might have entailed a complete change in the tradition. Whether this ought to have been done is a question too large to be taken up here. In the fourth century, it was unthinkable, and yet Themistius — and no doubt many others in his day, both pagan and Christian — saw the need for a drawing together of the Roman and the barbarian worlds and for a policy of humane and practical dealing with the barbarian tribes, as a matter of political expediency if not of religious responsibility; for both pagans and Christians, as we have seen, were preaching a doctrine of universal brotherhood — upon different bases, naturally. Themistius at least was able to argue that conciliation with absorption was superior to conquest by force.

How far Themistius and other intelligent men of his day realized

¹⁹ On this subject, see, for example, S. Runciman, "Byzantine Linguists," *Prosopora S.P. Kyriakidis* (Thessalonica 1953) 596–602.

the dilemma in education that was thus created, is a question which it is not easy to answer. The brotherhood, at least, would have to remain within the limits of the existing order. In this sense the traditional view of education maintained the status quo, allowing new developments to take place only on certain terms. It is a little startling to us to see that there was little interest in scientific and technological education — until we realize that they were probably not prepared, in terms of matériel, for the advances which such studies, if successful, would have brought. Universal education, which no one seems to have thought of — and it would have been considered physically impossible in any case — would have brought about a complete change in the economic and social (and so, inevitably, in the political) system, and this was not wanted.²⁰ But many people were really aware that the kind of education to be provided was a matter of crucial importance. St. John Chrysostom, in his very able treatise on the education of children, written in the latter part of the fourth century, puts the matter very plainly. He breaks out, in the midst of a detailed discussion on the subject of not giving in to children, with the vehement words:²¹ “I am not speaking of trifles, we are discussing the governance of the world.” Here it is truly enlightening to see how Themistius, the pagan orator, was able to speak and write as plainly as he did at the courts of the Christian emperors. It seems certain that his continued activity and the honors which were given him show that there was a real appreciation in high circles of the value of the classical tradition that he represented — though not necessarily, of course, in precisely the terms in which Themistius presented it.

It is enlightening for us today to see this appreciation of a traditional classical curriculum which was maintaining itself among the new conditions of Christianity, which at first had threatened to overthrow the classical education completely, but eventually had adopted its best features. In his age, Themistius was truly “modern” in two ways. First, he tried to develop his new program of presenting “philosophy” (as he called it; it was really an eclectic synthesis of the classical tradition) in a form that could be understood by and could be useful to all classes of people. Here he had to over-

²⁰ These are topics to which I hope to return in another study.

²¹ Chrysostom, *Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children*, transl. by M. L. W. Laistner in his valuable book *Christianity and Classical Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca 1951) 117.

come the distrust which (as he says in his *Or.* XXVIII) people had come to have for philosophy and philosophers; and of course he was also trying to preserve the values of classical thought as against the rival claims of Christianity. Second, he was "modern" in trying to keep education from becoming dominated by the sophists and rhetors who put all their emphasis on technique and outward form and neglected the content. A rather depressing example of this latter kind of training is available in the work of Himerius, which shows how far the classical education could degenerate.

Themistius, like many intelligent and educated people of his day, could not understand Christianity; but to his perception of the classical values we owe an instructive insight into the intellectual climate of the times. His success and his immunity from the penalties and persecution which pagans often suffered at this time suggest that he represented a considerable body of opinion, and that the way in which he proposed to utilize human experience in his teaching system appealed to many people. As we know, the traditional system, combined with the new Christian doctrine, was successful for many centuries in maintaining the Byzantine Empire (and within it the old Hellenic culture) against the assaults of its enemies.