HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Isocrates (446-338 B.C.)

With the rise of democracy in the fifth century the Athenians moved into a phase of citizen participation—a great distance from the Heroic or even the Archaic stages of social shaping among the Hellenes. Even in the archaic age, that of Solon and Archilochos or Sappho, for instance, Greek society was deeply stratified, and the gap between citizens and helots/women/slaves was huge. The new politically aware citizenry begin to involve itself in the legalities of private rights and wrongs, the social values that underlay the structure of the laws, and property issues such as emerge in a settled civic community. With these developments the importance of the law was by the end of the fifth century to make Athens into a synonym for litigiousness. It was into such a setting that the oratorical tradition found its way to the center of society, providing, as it did, an artistic form of legal self-defence.

Isocrates was a central figure in the growth of Athenian oratory, and made his first strong mark with his speech 'Against the Sophists,' despite the fact that he himself had been inspired by such Sophists as Gorgias and Prodicus. He was, however, not a great speaker, lacked confidence in his courtroom presence, and found his true métier as a *logographer*, a greatly in demand writer of speeches for those who needed to represent themselves in court. Twenty one orations of his many passed down to us from the Romans. The finest of his speeches are addressed not only to clients in court but to his fellow citizens, before whom he spoke with an eloquence designed to call them to a sense of their national unity:

Emulate, not those who have most widely extended their dominion, but those who have made best use of the power they already possess; and believe that you will enjoy the utmost happiness, not if you rule over the whole world at the price of fears and dangers and baseness, but rather if, being the man you should be, and continuing to act as at the present moment, you set your heart on moderate achievements and fail in none of them.