

Ideal Teachers and Learners in the Athenian Late Platonic School

Text 1: Teaching is a metaphysical relation

All beings are united with one another in this manner, and for everything everywhere there is brought about a communion of goods, the perfective causes ready to communicate, and the destined participants aroused to participation, the former proffering their perfective potency and the latter having already assumed their receptive potency of suitability. **Potency is twofold, one active, and one passive: the former is the mother of activity, the latter the means of reception of perfection.** On one side the future agent must be full to overflowing and so prepared for activity that, although the destined recipient is not present, it is itself at full strength and stimulated to communication, and on the other side the subject to be acted upon must be eager for participation and apply itself to the perfective power, and if that be not present, through the most eminent suitability be aroused towards participation.¹ (transl. O'Neill)

Text 2a: The three requisites for learning philosophy

Turning now to examine the details of the text, we may say that it gives us **a picture both of what goes to make a worthy auditor of such a lesson, and what makes a competent instructor.** For the auditor must be of outstanding **natural ability**, that he may be a philosopher by nature and enthusiastic for immaterial being, always pursuing and as suming something else beyond what is visible to the senses and not resting content with what presents itself [...]. Then he should have a wide range of **experience**, and by this I don't mean of human affairs (for these are of small importance and quite irrelevant to divinised life), but rather of logical and physical and mathematical subjects. [...] Our candidate, then, as we have said, must possess such natural ability as this. Next, as has been said, he must possess experience of many and various disciplines, by means of which he may be raised to an understanding of things intelligible. And, thirdly, he must have such **intense enthusiasm** towards this study that, when his instructor gives only a hint, he may be capable of following such hints by virtue of an enthusiasm which concentrates his attention. **There are three things, then, which he says are required by anyone embarking on the study of the intelligible nature — natural ability, experience, and enthusiasm.** Natural ability will naturally endow him with faith in the divine, experience will enable him to hold fast to the truth of paradoxical doctrines, and his enthusiasm will stir up in him a love of this study [...]. And, if you like, through experience he will acquire receptivity in the cognitive part of his soul, while through enthusiasm he will gain an intensification of the vital part, directed towards the intelligibles, and through natural excellence the preexisting basis for both these, since right from birth all these qualities have been granted to him.² (transl. Morrow & Dillon)

1 Ἄπαντα γὰρ τὰ ὄντα τοῦτον ἀλλήλοις συνάπτεται τὸν τρόπον, καὶ πᾶσι κοινωνία τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιτελεῖται πανταχοῦ, τῶν μὲν τελεσιουργῶν αἰτίων πρόχειρον ἔχόντων τὴν μετάδοσιν, τῶν δὲ μεταληγομένων ἐγγεγεμμένων πρὸς τὴν μέθεξιν, καὶ τῶν μὲν τὴν τελειωτικὴν δύναμιν προτεινόντων, τῶν δὲ τὴν κατ'ἐπιτηδειότητα δύναμιν προειληφότων. διττὴ γὰρ ἡ δύναμις, ἡ μὲν τοῦ ποιούντος, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πάσχοντος· καὶ ἡ μὲν μήτηρ τῆς ἐνεργείας, ἡ δὲ ὑποδοχὴ τῆς τελειότητος. καὶ δεῖ τό τε ποιῆσον ὑπερπλήρες εἶναι καὶ περὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἔτοιμον οὕτως, ὥς, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάρεστι τὸ ὑποδεξόμενον, αὐτὸ τέλειον εἶναι καὶ περὶ τὴν μετάδοσιν κεκνημένον, τό τε πεισόμενον ὄργαν πρὸς τὴν μέθεξιν καὶ ἑαυτὸ προσάγειν τῇ τελεσιουργῷ δυνάμει, κὰν ἐκεῖνη μὴ παρῆ, διὰ τῆς ἐπιτηδειότητος τῆς ἄκρας ἐγγεργῆθαι πρὸς τὴν μετουσίαν. (*In Alc.* 122.3-17)

2 Αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν λέξιν ἐπισκοπούμενοί φαμεν ὅτι δι' αὐτῆς ἐνδείκνυται, τίς μὲν ἔστιν ἀκροατῆς ἀξιοχρεῶς τῆς τούτων ἀκροάσεως, τίς δὲ ὁ περὶ τούτων διδάσκειν ἐπιτήδειος· δεῖ γὰρ διὴ τὸν μὲν ἀκροατὴν εὐφυῖα διαφέρειν, ἵνα φύσει φιλόσοφος ᾖ, καὶ περὶ τὴν ἀσώματον οὐσίαν ἐποτημένος, καὶ πρὸ τῶν ὁρωμένων αἰεὶ τι ἄλλο μεταθέων καὶ ἀναλογιζόμενος, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος τοῖς παροῦσι [...] ἔπειτα πολλῶν αὐτὸν ἔμπειρον εἶναι, καὶ οὐ δήπου πραγμάτων ἀνθρωπικῶν (σμικρὰ γὰρ ταῦτα καὶ οὐδὲν προσήκοντα πρὸς τὴν ἔνθεον ζῶην), ἀλλὰ λογικῶν καὶ φυσικῶν καὶ μαθηματικῶν θεωρημάτων. [...] Τοῦτο δ' οὐκ παρεῖναι χρὴ τὴν τοιαύτην, ὥς εἶπομεν, εὐφυῖαν· ἔπειτα ἔμπειρίαν πολλῶν, ὥς εἴρηται, καὶ παντοδαπῶν θεωρημάτων, δι' ὧν ἀναχθήσεται πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνων κατανόησιν· καὶ τρίτον, προθυμίαν καὶ τάσιν περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν οὕτως ὥστε, καὶ ἐνδεικνυμένου μόνον τοῦ

Text 2b : Love and experience required to attend Proclus' theology course

But the auditor of the proposed doctrines is supposed to be adorned with **the moral virtues**, and to be one who has bound by the reason of virtue all the illiberal and inharmonious motions of the soul, and harmonized them to the one form of intellectual prudence [...] He must likewise have been exercised in all **the logical methods**, and have contemplated many irreprehensible conceptions about analyses, and many about divisions, the contraries to these [...] But in the third place, he must not be ignorant of **physics and its various doctrines** [...] But all these must be bound together in the leader intellect. Being likewise a partaker of the **dialectic of Plato**, meditating those immaterial energies which are separate from corporeal powers, and desiring to contemplate by intelligence in conjunction with reason [true] beings, our auditor must genuinely apply himself to the interpretation of divine and blessed dogmas, and fill his soul, according to the Oracle, **with profound love**; since, as Plato somewhere observes, for the apprehension of this theory a better assistant than love cannot be obtained.³ (transl. Taylor, modified and adapted following Saffrey & Westerink 1968 edition)

Text 3a: Some qualities of the teacher – taciturnity, systematicity and allusiveness

As for the teacher, having journeyed long before along the same path, he will not want to expound the divine truth with elaborate verbosity, but rather to **reveal much through few words**, uttering words of like nature to the concepts they express; nor will he proceed from widely acknowledged and obvious concepts, but will contemplate reality beginning from above, from the most unitary principles, **taking a remote point of departure for his systematic treatment**, inasmuch as he has separated himself from his immediate surroundings and drawn close to the divine; nor will he take thought so that he may seem to speak clearly, but he will **content himself with indications**; for one should convey mystical truths mystically, and not publicise secret doctrines about the gods.

Such should be the nature of both the auditor and the purveyor of such discourses.⁴

(transl. Morrow & Dillon)

Text 3b : Other qualities of the teacher – fertility and inventiveness

And following on this he reminds us again who should be the instructor in knowledge on this subject, that he should be **productive and inventive** in respect of his teaching; for some people make sufficient progress so as to be sufficient for themselves, but others are **able to stimulate others** also to a memory of the truth of things.⁵ (transl. Morrow & Dillon)

ήγουμένου, δύνασθαι παρέπεσθαι ταῖς ἐνδείξεισι διὰ τὴν προθυμίαν ἐπιτείνουσιν τὴν προσοχὴν. Τρία δ' οὖν ἔστιν ἃ δὴ φησι χρῆναι τῷ θεωρήσαντι ταύτην τὴν φύσιν, εὐφυΐα, ἐμπειρία, προθυμία. Καὶ διὰ μὲν τὴν εὐφυΐαν ἔσται τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον πίστιν αὐτοφυῶς προβλημένος, διὰ δὲ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν ἔξει τῶν παραδόξων θεωρημάτων ἀσφαλῆ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, διὰ δὲ τὴν προθυμίαν ἀνακινήσει τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ἑαυτοῦ τὸ περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν [...]. Εἰ δὲ βούλει, διὰ μὲν τὴν ἐμπειρίαν ἔξει τοῦ γνωστικοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιτηδειότητα, διὰ δὲ τὴν προθυμίαν τὴν τοῦ ζωτικοῦ τάσιν εἰς ἐκεῖνα φέρουσιν, διὰ δὲ τὴν εὐφυΐαν τὴν ἀμφοτέρων προϋπάρχουσιν προκατασκευὴν ἐκ τῆς πρώτης γενέσεως καὶ τῶν ὄλων εἰς αὐτὸν ἐνδεδομένων. (*In Parm.* IV.926.4-927.35)

3 ὁ δὲ αὐτῶν προκειμένων δογμάτων ἀκροατῆς ταῖς μὲν ἠθικαῖς ἀρεταῖς κεκοσμημένος ὑποκείσθω καὶ πάντα τὰ ἀγενῆ καὶ ἀνάρμοστα τῆς ψυχῆς κινήματα τῷ τῆς ἀρετῆς λόγῳ καταδησάμενος καὶ πρὸς ἓν τὸ τῆς φρονήσεως εἶδος ἀρμόσας. [...] Ταῖς δὲ λογικαῖς μεθόδοις ἀπάσαις γεγυμνάσθω καὶ πολλὰ μὲν περὶ ἀναλύσεων πολλὰ δὲ περὶ τῶν ἐναντίων πρὸς ταύτας διαιρέσεων ἀνέλεγκτα νοήματα τεθεαμένος παρέστω [...]. Τὸ δὲ δὴ τρίτον ἐπὶ τούτοις μηδὲ τῆς φυσικῆς ἀνήκοος ἔστω καὶ τῶν ἐν ταύτῃ πολυειδῶν δοξασμάτων [...]. Πάντα δὲ ταῦτα συνδησάμενος εἰς τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν καὶ τῆς Πλάτωνος διαλεκτικῆς μεταλαβὼν καὶ μελετήσας τὰς ἀύλους καὶ χωριστὰς τῶν σωματικῶν δυνάμεων ἐνεργείας καὶ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου τὰ ὄντα θεωρεῖν ἐφιέμενος, ἀπτέσθω λιπαρῶς τῆς τῶν θεῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων δογμάτων ἐξηγήσεως, ἔρωτι μὲν τὰ βάθη κατὰ τὸ Λόγιον ἀναπλώσας τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐπει καὶ συνεργὸν ἔρωτος ἀμείνω λαβεῖν εἰς τὴν τῆς θεωρίας ταύτης ἀντίληψιν οὐκ ἔστιν. (*Theol. Plat.* I.2, p. 10.11-11.16)

4 Ὁ δὲ καθηγεμὼν πολλῶν πρότερον διὰ τούτων ὀδεύσας οὐκ ἐθελήσει διὰ πολυλογίας ἐκφραίνειν τὴν θεῖαν ἀλήθειαν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ δι' ὀλίγων ἐνδείκνυσθαι, νοήσεων ὅμοια φθεγγόμενος· οὐδὲ ἀπὸ τῶν συνεγνωσμένων καὶ προχείρων, ἀλλ' ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχῶν τῶν ἐνικωτάτων τὰ πράγματα θεωρεῖν πόρρωθεν πραγματευόμενος, ἅτε ἐξιστάμενος τῶν παρόντων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θεῖω γιγνόμενος· οὐδὲ ποιήσεται λόγον ὅπως ἂν λέγειν δόξη σαφῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρκεσθήσεται ταῖς ἐνδείξεισι· δεῖ γὰρ τὰ μυστικὰ μυστικῶς παραδίδόναι, καὶ μὴ δημοσιεῖν τὰς ἀπορρήτους περὶ τῶν θεῶν ἐννοίας. Τοιοῦτος μὲν οὖν καὶ ὁ ἀκροατῆς καὶ ὁ καθηγεμὼν ἔστι τῶν τοιούτων λόγων. (*In Parm.* IV.927.36-928.11)

5 Ἐπὶ δὲ τούτῳ καὶ τίς ὁ καθηγεμὼν τῆς περὶ τούτων ἐπιστήμης, ὑπομνήσκει πάλιν, ὅτι γόνιμος καὶ εὐρετικός ἔστι περὶ τὴν διδασκαλίαν· ἐνιοὶ γὰρ τοσοῦτον προκόπτουσιν, ὅσον αὐτοῖς ἀπόχρη πρὸς ἑαυτούς· ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ ἐτέρους ἀναμνήσκειν δύνανται τῆς τῶν πραγμάτων ἀληθείας· (*In Parm.* IV.976.14-20)