My previous scholarly work has focused on Greek religion, primarily that of Athenians in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, with an underlying emphasis on the interaction of that religious system with contemporary moral, ethical, political, philosophical, and historical ideas. I turned some years ago to Isocrates because he in a very personal way involved himself in all these areas, and I hoped to learn more about Greek religion from him. I did that, but I also encountered so much more of interest that was not readily accessible even to most classicists because of the nature and volume of Isocrates’ writings and the current state of scholarship on him. I set myself to translating and, more important, dividing and organizing Isocrates’ writings by topics, by the topics indicated in the chapter titles and subsections that follow. I wanted readers to be able to find easily what Isocrates has to say on topics of interest to them. The passages of Isocrates I offer constitute only a fraction, but a representative one, of the orator’s oeuvre, which covers nearly six hundred pages in the now-definitive English translations of his complete works by Mirhady and Too; and by Papillon.

Isocrates, though not an orator himself, was writing mostly in the Greek oratorical tradition, with epideictic (showpiece), forensic (for the courtroom), and symbouleutic (for legislative bodies) orations. An excellent introduction to all this is A Companion to Greek Rhetoric, edited by I. Worthington (Oxford, 2007).

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THE ESSENTIAL ISOCRATES