By the late fifth century in Athens, many of the elite had withdrawn from politics and turned to words instead of action. As Deborah Tarn Steiner puts it, “if speech is the hallmark of the democratic city, then writing is associated with those out of sympathy with its radical politics.” Writing made a logical tool for the dissemination of the political ideas of those opposed to radical democracy for, as recent scholarship has shown, the ability to read a text with comprehension was confined to their fellow elites. Kevin Robb has recently argued that literacy and paideia fully cohere only around the middle of the fourth century, when Plato and the Academy replace the mimēsis of the poets with text-dependent education. While Robb is convincing in his argument that the coherence of literacy and paideia is a fourth-century phenomenon, I would like to propose a modification to it. I shall argue that text-dependent education originated not with Plato and the Academy, whose appeal, in the later dialogues, at least, as we heard at this conference, was directed mainly to the limited number of intellectuals who were interested in philosophy, but rather with a group of fourth-century prose writers. The target audience of these prose writers was rather wider, the literate, educated elite in general, and their works therefore represent an intellectual level in between moral philosophy and popular morality. As I shall argue, it is these prose writers who begin to take the place of Homer and the poets in the moral education of the elite, particularly those who aim at political power, and do so in a private, rather than a public, forum.
In general, the surviving literature prior to the last quarter of the fifth century tends to reflect the traditional, that is, aristocratic, values of the early poets, although there do of course exist differences in emphasis between authors.\footnote{While overly rigid in its distinction between “competitive” and “co-operative” virtues, Adkins (1960) remains magisterial. See also, e.g., North 1966; Donlan 1980; Lloyd-Jones 1983; Blundell 1989; Cairns 1993; Williams 1993; Rademaker 2005.} By the end of the fifth century, however, these traditional moral values suffered a sustained attack on the intellectual level, when they were called into question by both the sophists and Socrates.\footnote{On the intellectual context, see Pownall 2004: Chapter One.} Simultaneously, in a process continuing throughout the fourth century, the Athenian democracy began to appropriate many of the traditional (that is, aristocratic) moral virtues of the early poets, giving them a more explicitly civic (that is, democratic) connotation.\footnote{Thomas 1989: esp. Chapter Four; Whitehead 1993; cf. Ober 1989: esp. 251–260.} What these democratic virtues were, we can glean from comedy, oratory, and dedicatory inscriptions, all designed to play up to the masses and which are, not surprisingly, the main sources for K.J. Dover’s influential \textit{Greek Popular Morality}.\footnote{Dover 1974.} Naturally, however, the moral virtues that would be persuasive to large audiences are not those that would appeal to the elite. While performed poetry continued its paideutic function for the Athenian collective,\footnote{Hesk 2000: 176 n. 105 and the references contained there. On the failure of the Athenian democratic state to create a formal education system, see Ober 2001.} the literate, educated elite needed a new source as a guide to aristocratic moral virtue. While there also appear the first attempts at moral philosophy by Plato and (later) Aristotle, who offer systematic reasons why humans should adhere to their conceptions of moral virtue, these most likely appeared too idealized to be of practical use to those in the elite who aspired to political power or, perhaps more properly, those who wished to influence their fellow aristocrats in political virtue. I suggest that a group of prose writers, including Isocrates and Xenophon, who use the written text as an instrument of \textit{paideia} and have generally been overlooked in this connection, attempted to fill the gap between popular morality and moral philosophy.\footnote{Cf. Morgan 2004: 125: “… I suggest a more nuanced approach wherein Isocrates occupies a middle ground between Athenian populist education and the rigors and exclusions of Plato.”}

It is notable that in a number of fourth-century prose works there is a trend towards the listing and definition of moral virtues, culminating eventually in Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}. I submit that this trend