

Sparta

Xenophon
Constitution of the Lacedaemonians

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The Greek Tradition of constitutional planning

- ◆ The unplanned state is no state at all:
 - Laws and institutions should be rationally planned to achieve social benefit;
 - Lawgivers: Solon, Cleisthenes (Athens) enacted legal reforms with wide-reaching social and political consequences (see *Const. Ath.*).
- ◆ Philosophers provided constitutional proposals:
 - Plato (*Republic*, *Laws*),
 - Aristotle, *Pol.*, *Const. Ath.*
 - Phaleas of Chalcedon.
- ◆ Greek cities established colonies all over the Mediterranean;
 - Phaleas considered equalization of property ‘in a new colony’ (43).



Ancient Sparta (Lacedaemonia)

Myth and Model

Aristotle on Sparta

- ◆ ‘...the true politician seems to have spent more effort on virtue than on anything elseWe find an example of this in the Spartan and Cretan legislators...’ (*NE*, 1102a5-10).
- ◆ ‘...only in Sparta, or in a few other cities as well, does the legislator seem to have attended to upbringing and practices. In most other cities...each individual citizen lives as he wishes, “laying down the rules for his children and wife”, like a Cyclops [e.g. tyrant]’ (*NE*, 1180a25-30).

Myth of Sparta

- ◆ ‘Lycurgus, mixing larceny with the spirit of justice, the harshest slavery with extreme liberty, the most heinous feelings with the greatest moderation, gave stability to his town.’ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Book 4, ch. 6.
- ◆ Myth lives on into 18th c.
 - Sparta vs Athens in French Enlightenment.

What was Sparta?

- ◆ Sparta (aka Lacedaemonia) was the capital of Laconia;
- ◆ Great rival of Athens;
- ◆ Located on the southern Peloponnesus, a peninsula southwest of Athens.



Who was Xenophon?

(431-ca. 350 BCE)

- ◆ Aristocratic Athenian, lived through Peloponnesian war, served in elite cavalry;
- ◆ Student of Socrates; agreed with Socratic critique of democracy and dislike of the Sophists;
- ◆ Military hero, author of *Expedition of Cyrus*, an account of his troops' 1,000-mile retreat from Persia, where they had served as mercenaries for a contender to the throne;
- ◆ Served the Spartan king, Agesilaus II, in Persia and in a battle against Athens; banished from Athens as a traitor;
- ◆ Lived in Sparta, ca. 394-371;
- ◆ Returned to Athens, ca. 365; resumed old life.

Other Writings

- ◆ *Memorabilia, Symposium* and *Apology* justifying Socrates; not philosophic, but anecdotal
- ◆ *On Horsemanship*
- ◆ *Cavalry officer*
- ◆ *Oeconomicus*, on estate management
- ◆ *Cyropaedia*, novel about Cyrus, founder of Persian empire, expounding ideas on education of statesman;
- ◆ *On Hunting* (possibly spurious);
- ◆ *Ways and Means*, advocating peace for Greek states;
- ◆ Very influential on Latin literature; held in high regard up to the sixteenth century.

Who was Lycurgus?

9th century BCE

- ◆ Legendary law-giver of Sparta, allegedly of divine descent;
- ◆ Gave Sparta *oral* laws called the *Rhetra* (Athens had written laws);
- ◆ Prohibited gold and silver money,
- ◆ Required military training,
- ◆ Equalized property;
- ◆ Mediated during civil strife; gave Sparta her institutions;
- ◆ Studied laws of Egypt and Crete as models;
- ◆ Departed from Sparta once the task of law-giving was complete, i.e. did not exploit his position.

Lycurgus



Merry-Joseph Blondel 1781-1853. Lycurgue. Photo © Maître Fodé - GML

Lycurgus's predecessors

- ◆ Sources for Lycurgus' institutions:
 - Crete: Cosmoi (like Spartan Ephors)
 - Egypt: common meals
 - Libya: community of women.

Stages of Spartan Life

- ◆ Conception
- ◆ Childhood Education, starting at 7 up to about 14
- ◆ Puberty, 14-21
- ◆ Prime of life
- ◆ Old age

I. Procreation (eugenics)

- ◆ Sparta great, yet sparsely populated—why?
- ◆ Strict laws about procreation, not left to chance;
 - Future mothers to be strong from exercise, sufficient food and freedom from housework;
 - unlimited intercourse a bad idea (why?);
 - Men should marry in their prime (but this is not specified);
 - Old husbands should find a younger man to beget robust children with their wives;
 - Men who did not like their wives could choose someone else's wife to bear their children.

Comment

- ◆ Emphasis on quality rather than quantity
 - ‘Husband not to have unlimited intercourse with his wife’ (P.139).
- ◆ This means that the purpose of sex is not to maximise one’s pleasures, but for procreation (good ends).

Athenian vs Spartan Women

Athens:

- ◆ Confined to home, weaving and child care;
- ◆ Allowed out for important religious festivals;
- ◆ No sports!
- ◆ Forbidden to marry or have relations with foreign males (metics);
 - Law against epigamia (pdf)
- ◆ Metic women had greater freedom.

Sparta:

- ◆ Young women exercised in public;
- ◆ Participated in sports;
- ◆ One won an Olympic victory;
- ◆ Citizen women did not perform household labour;
- ◆ Responsible for childcare;
- ◆ Old husbands introduced young men to their wives for procreation.

II. Childhood Education

- ◆ Austere, harsh, and larcenous:
 - No sandals, or winter clothes; limited food;
 - No personal tutor (slave) for each boy;
 - All adult males authorized to punish severely;
 - Boys supposed to steal food, but severely punished if caught (why?).
- ◆ Wardens were men of highest magisterial rank;
- ◆ Intimacy with boys prohibited:
 - only 'parental and brotherly love' (147);
- ◆ Result: modesty, obedience and hardiness.

III. Puberty

- ◆ Established hierarchy based on competition and striving for honor, not wealth!
- ◆ Concern to curb self-will, insolence and desire for pleasure;
- ◆ Training kept boys constantly occupied (and exhausted!);
- ◆ Penalty for shirking: “exclusion from all future honours” (149);
- ◆ Modesty: hands beneath cloaks, walking in silence, eyes fixed on ground.

IV. Prime of Life: Competition and Honours

- ◆ “...where the spirit of rivalry is strongest among the people, there the choruses are most worth hearing and the athletic contests afford the finest spectacle” (151);
- ◆ Ephors select 3 best men who then select 100 hundred others, stating their reasons for rejecting some;
- ◆ The rejects are then at war with the commanders and they are watched carefully for any lapse from honor;
- ◆ This strife “dearest to the gods, and in the highest sense political—the strife that sets the standard of a brave man’s conduct...” (151-3);
- ◆ Maintain themselves physically by hunting.

Comment

- ◆ Spartans encourage bravery and promote the model of a noble/honourable man.
- ◆ In this way, people do not aim for material gain; instead they pursue spiritual and physical strength.
- ◆ By setting up the social norms, they facilitate self-discipline due to positive reinforcement, which is more effective than ordering people to obey the law.
- ◆ Spartans feel they are ashamed if they were lazy or cowardly; thus the norms discourage anti-social behaviour.

V. Common messes

- ◆ “Lycurgus found the Spartans boarding at home...and came to the conclusion that the custom was responsible for a great deal of misconduct” (153).
- ◆ Public messes outdoors “to reduce disregard for orders to a minimum” (155);
- ◆ Just enough food, not too much or too little;
- ◆ Extras added from the hunt and by rich men;
- ◆ Abolition of compulsory drinking, “which is the undoing of alike of body [and] mind” (155);
- ◆ Mixed the generations (Greeks often socialized in generational brotherhoods)—stories of great deeds of past;
- ◆ Workouts should use up the calories consumed!

VI. Common *use* of property

- ◆ Property privately held, equal shares;
- ◆ Public use (as in *Pol.* II, VII); “Friends will have all things in common”;
- ◆ Privately-owned slaves, horses, dogs all available for those who need them;
- ◆ Food provided from messes for those out hunting;
- ◆ Children punished in common, but still know who their fathers are (cf. Plato, *Rep.*); indeed their own father punishes them again if another has already done so!

VII. Economy

- ◆ “...Lycurgus forbade freeborn citizens to have anything to do with business affairs...their own concern [being] only those activities that make for civic freedom [meaning?]” (159-61).
- ◆ Equal property and contributions to meals, same living standard for all;
- ◆ Keeping gold and silver subject to a fine
- ◆ Iron coinage made accumulation impractical;
- ◆ “...there is not even any need of money to spend on cloaks; for their adornment is due not to the price of their clothes, but to the excellent condition of their bodies” (161);
- ◆ Hence no foreign trade, for who would go to Sparta to make money? This kept foreign influence out as well.

VIII. Obedience to laws and magistrates and Ephors

- ◆ Even most important men show greatest deference to magistrates; they run, don't walk, to answer any command;
- ◆ "...obedience is a very great blessing whether in a state or an army or a household" (163);
- ◆ Ephors (a superior office over the rest) may punish any offence by anyone at any time;
- ◆ If a magistrate commits a crime, Ephors punish it immediately (cf. Athens, where accounts were examined at end of office-holder's term; how is this handled in HK?);
- ◆ Lycurgus secured blessing of Apollo's priestess at Delphi prior to enacting his laws (J.J. Rousseau considered this a stroke of genius in *On the Social Contract*, II.7).

IX. Valour

- ◆ War of paramount importance to Sparta, and all Greek cities, frequently at war;
 - ‘...you would think all other men mere improvisers in soldiering and the Lacdaemonians the only artists in warfare.’
- ◆ Lycurgus ‘caused his people to choose an honourable death in preference to a disgraceful life’ (165);
- ◆ Due to their valor, they lose a smaller percentage of their men than do other cities;
- ◆ Punishment of cowards AND their kin: could not marry, had to give way to others; even *relatives* find no suitors;
 - ‘...death seems preferable to a life so dishonoured, so ignominious’ (167).

X. Council of Elders (Gerousia)

- ◆ Oldest members of society, judged by their *goodness*, not their physique;
- ◆ Judges in capital cases (carrying sentence of death)
- ◆ Thus honored old age over prime of manhood;
- ◆ “...where cult of virtue is left to voluntary effort, the virtuous are not strong enough to increase the fame of their fatherland” (169);
- ◆ Men forced to practice virtue in public; rewarded by citizenship without regard to infirmity or wealth.

XI.& XII. Superiority of army

- ◆ Soldier's garb: red cloaks, long hair, brass shields;
- ◆ 6 regiments of cavalry and infantry ("hoplites");
- ◆ Officers in front line of hoplite phalanx;
- ◆ Execute difficult manoeuvres with ease—why?
- ◆ Circular, not square, encampments;
- ◆ Gymnastic practice while on campaign;
- ◆ Emphasis on appearance and fitness of soldiers.

XIII. The King

- ◆ Two roles: general and high priest of the state;
- ◆ Leads the charge in battle;
- ◆ Carries out all sacrifices and reads the *auspices* (signs revealed in entrails of sacrificed animals, or ‘victims’);
- ◆ Has own mess and food rations in moderation;
 - ‘without excessive riches’ (187).
- ◆ Monthly exchange of oaths b/w Ephors and King—a kind of contract
 - King swears to rule ‘according to the established laws of the state’ (187).
 - Cf. ‘divine right of kings’ (medieval/early-modern Europe).

Summation

- ◆ ‘...in spite of their antiquity, [these laws] are wholly strange to others at this day. Indeed, it is most astonishing that all men praise such institutions, but no state chooses to imitate them’ (171).
- ◆ Laws eroded by Xenophon’s time:
 - ‘some now boast of their possessions’, possess gold,
 - reside overseas, and
 - ‘strive to exercise rule rather than be worthy of it’ (185).

Comment: *Republic*

- ◆ Plato suggested that [Guardians'] children should not be brought up by their parents and men and women should not become permanent couples. The view is quite opposite to our common understanding that family is the basic unit to consolidate a society.
- ◆ Without families as basis, wouldn't it be harder for children to handle the concept of love and commitment? As family usually teaches children to love and teaches them moral values, usually by imitating their parents.
- ◆ Does Plato not care about those values--love, commitment, morality?

Comment: *Republic*

- ◆ In book 5 of *Republic*, Plato suggested that children should be separated from parents in order to train as Guardians. This may be good for the community as a whole, as suggested in the book, but I wonder whether this would have negative psychological effects on the class of Guardians as love between parents and children is needed for everyone.
- ◆ Would this be a disaster to the society as a whole?

Republic & Sparta

- ◆ It seems to me that the practice in Sparta is a perfect realization of Plato's proposals save one minor point of disagreement.
- ◆ While Plato indicates 'our laws in fact will mean that the Guardians will live at complete peace with each other' (465b) for the well-being of the community of Guardians, the education in Sparta promotes 'the spirit of rivalry' and the Ruler believes 'if he could match the young men together in the strife of valour, they too would reach a high level of many excellences' (p.151-52).
- ◆ Plato might also not agree with the Spartan lawgiver in encouraging boys to commit theft in want of food, although he seems to address the issue nowhere in his book. Would you agree?

Is Plato deterministic?

- ◆ Plato thinks that the promotion and demotion of the citizens in the Republic should be on the following basis:
 - "if any child of a Guardian is a poor specimen, it must be degraded to the other classes, while any child in the other classes who is worth it must be promoted to the rank of Guardian" (190).
- ◆ This implies that Plato could not have had a deterministic view of human nature and one's achievements depend on personal efforts..
- ◆ ...Plato on the other hand has a eugenic tendency, which is reflected in his approval of infanticide of defective infants and children from illegitimate mating.
- ◆ These children would not be useful to the society, and therefore deserve death. But if uselessness can be used to justify killing, would it be enough to also justify the killing of elderly or other handicapped people in the society? And if the life of one should not be determined by the class of his parents, why his/her life can be determined by the way he is produced?

Infanticide

- ◆ I tend to think Plato does not take it as an issue at all - his focus here is the well-being of the class of Guardians and the state as a whole, and 'what benefits us is fair, what harms us is shameful' (457b).
- ◆ Therefore, for the benefit and on the scale of a state, what matters is one's inferiority or defectiveness, not the way how he becomes so and why. Just like Plato always says "a state most nearly resembles an individual' (462d), if you find a tumour in your body the utmost concern is to remove it, whether you were born with it or not.

Aristotle: Is Plato wrong?

- ◆ Yes, his state is a *unity*, one individual, in effect;
- ◆ Institutes community of women, property and children for guardians;
- ◆ State is and should be a *plurality*;
- ◆ Should be a unity ‘in some respects only’;
- ◆ Plato should have instead used
 - ‘philosophy ...customs and laws, like those that prevail at Sparta and Crete respecting common meals, whereby the legislator has made property common’ (37).

What about the rest in *Rep.*?

- ◆ “The population is divided into two classes—one of husbandmen [farmers], and the other of warriors” (39); philosopher-kings selected from warriors;
- ◆ Plato ignores the rest of the population;
 - He “has not determined whether the husbandmen and artisans are to have a share in the government...carry arms and share in the military service, or not” (39).
- ◆ These are the “real citizens” (38);
- ◆ “...nor is their character of small importance if common life of the guardians is to be maintained” (38-9);
- ◆ Plato in effect creates “two states in one,” that the city in speech was to overcome.

Further Objections

- ◆ Concentration of power in hands of one or few;
 - ‘And if this is often a cause of disturbance among the meaner [the poor] sort, how much more among high-spirited warriors?’ (39).
- ◆ Happiness deprivation: ‘
 - ...he deprived the guardians even of happiness, and says that the legislator ought to make the whole state happy’;
 - ‘But the whole cannot be happy unless most, or all, or some of its parts enjoy happiness’ (39);
 - ‘And if the guardians are not happy, who are? Surely not the artisans or the common people’ (39).