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Xenophon's Views on Sparta

Introduction: Interpreting Xenophon's Views on Sparta

Xenophon's affection for Sparta ran so deep that he was willing to introduce deliberate distortions into his writings in order to present Sparta and its leaders in a favorable light. Xenophon's ostensible praise for Sparta masks a deep-seated dislike for Sparta and its leaders.

Both of these opinions have been voiced in the modern scholarship on Xenophon's writings. It may seem odd that there could be such fundamental disagreement about the views of an author who wrote at length about Sparta and whose corpus of work survives in its entirety. However, as we shall see, Xenophon's writings present significant interpretive challenges.

Some facets of Xenophon's relationship with Sparta are reasonably clear. Around 400 BC Xenophon, who was born and raised in Athens, joined a group of mercenary soldiers assembled by Cyrus the Younger, a pretender to the throne of Persia. Those soldiers subsequently entered Spartan employ and fought in a series of campaigns against the Persians in Asia Minor. Xenophon occupied important positions of command during that period and seems to have seen much of Agesilaus, the Spartan king who was in control of Spartan forces in Asia Minor. When Agesilaus and his forces were recalled to Greece in 394, Xenophon accompanied him. At some point (the timing remains unclear), Xenophon was exiled from Athens, possibly because of his service in a Spartan-led army. Upon his return to Greece, Xenophon took up residence on an estate at a place called Scillus in the northwestern Peloponnese; this was almost certainly made possible by the good graces of the Spartans, who had taken control of the area from the Eleans. Xenophon remained there until 371, when the Eleans, in the wake of the Spartans' crushing defeat at the battle of Leuctra, regained control of Scillus. Xenophon thus had good reason to be grateful to Sparta, and, at least while at Scillus, may have been reluctant to criticize Sparta openly.[1]

[1] On Xenophon's biography and the sources for his life, see Lee's chapter in this volume. I am grateful to Paul Cartledge and Michael Flower, who provided invaluable comments

Sparta was certainly much on Xenophon's mind. He composed two works that focus solely on Sparta and Spartans: the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* (*Constitution of the Spartans*) and the *Agesilaus* (a posthumous encomium for the Spartan king). In addition, Sparta and Spartans figure prominently in Xenophon's other work. For example, much of the *Hellenica*, a historical account covering the years 411–362, directly involves Sparta and Spartans. Sparta is also discussed in non-historical works such as the *Memorabilia* and *Oeconomicus*, where the subject matter made examination of Sparta entirely a matter of authorial choice. There is, moreover, good reason to believe that Sparta is an unmentioned but important referent in other works of Xenophon, such as the *Cyropaedia*, a fictional account of the life of Cyrus the Great.[2]

Once we move beyond the basic statements that Xenophon had a long and close relationship with and wrote at length about Sparta, we encounter a great deal of uncertainty. One source of uncertainty is the frustrating lack of clarity about the chronology of Xenophon's writings. Xenophon offers relatively few unambiguous indications of what was written when, and it is likely that some of his works were written in sections that were produced at different points in time.[3] This, as we shall see, has significant interpretive ramifications.

Another source of difficulties is that Xenophon offers contradictory views on Sparta, even within individual works. A paradigmatic instance can be found in the *Lacedaimonion Politeia*, in which Xenophon explores the reasons why Sparta had become "the most powerful and famous city in Greece" (1.1). He discusses a number of laws and customs introduced by the semi-legendary Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus and shows every sign of approving of most if not all of them. However, just before the end of the treatise, his tone suddenly changes:

> If someone should ask me whether the laws of Lycurgus seem to me to remain still even now unchanged, by Zeus, I could not say this with confidence any more. For I know that previously the Spartans preferred to live together at home with modest possessions rather than be corrupted through being flattered while serving as harmosts in the cities.[4] I also know that formerly they

on earlier drafts, and to Edward Henderson and Chad Wilson for their editorial assistance. Responsibility for the views expressed here and for any errors or omissions is solely my own.

[2] On the complicated question of the relationship between the real-life Spartan state and the Persia described in the *Cyropaedia*, see Azoulay 2007a and the bibliography cited therein, as well as Tuplin 1994. For studies of the individual works in the Xenophontic corpus, see the essays in Part II of this volume.

[3] Humble 1997: 22–45.

[4] After the Spartans defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War, they controlled an extensive empire and placed governors (called harmosts) in many cities under their rule.

> feared appearing to be in possession of gold, whereas now there are some who even take pride in possessing it. I know also that formerly foreigners were expelled from Sparta, and it was not permitted to live abroad, so that the citizens would not be immersed in self-indulgence by foreigners. I know that now, by contrast, those who are by reputation the leading men in Sparta are eager to never cease serving as harmosts abroad. And there was a time when they took care to be worthy of serving as leaders, but now they concern themselves much more with ruling than being worthy of ruling. Therefore, whereas Greeks used to go to Sparta to ask the Spartans to lead them against those whom they thought were acting unjustly, now many call on each other to help prevent the Spartans from exercising power again. There is, to be sure, no need to be amazed that the Spartans are objects of reproach, since they manifestly obey neither the gods nor the laws of Lycurgus. (14.1–7)

Given the laudatory tone of the remainder of the treatise, it is by no means obvious what to make of this passage.

Over the course of time, three basic interpretations of Xenophon's views on Sparta have come into being. Before discussing those interpretations an important caveat is called for: what follows is a rapid and necessarily simplified description of a voluminous and complex body of scholarship; the work of each scholar is unique and rarely corresponds precisely to any of the three interpretations described below.

One interpretation of Xenophon's views on Sparta is that he was straightforwardly and consistently pro-Spartan, perhaps even to the point of introducing factual distortions and purposeful omissions in order to make certain that Sparta appeared in the best light possible.[5] From this perspective, chapter 14 of the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* is an affirmation of the praise of Lycurgus' laws found in the rest of the treatise – those laws were extremely effective so long as they were obeyed.[6] This interpretation, which has a long history that stretches back to an article published by B. G. Niebuhr in the 1820s,[7] was at one time widely held, but has become less popular in recent decades. The primary advantages of this interpretation are that it accounts easily for the praise for Sparta found in much of Xenophon's work and can be connected to details of his biography. A significant disadvantage is that Xenophon in some places, such as chapter 14 of the *Lacedaimonion Politeia*, overtly criticizes Sparta. Furthermore, it is difficult to justify the idea that authors' biographies condition their work in clear, predictable ways.

A second interpretation is that Xenophon's views on Sparta evolved over the course of time: he was in his early years strongly pro-Spartan but was

[5] See, for example, the notes in Cawkwell 1979.
[6] Dorion 2010: 288–9; Gray 2007: 217–21.
[7] Niebuhr 1828: 1.464–82.

progressively disillusioned by the Spartans' frequently questionable behavior as the hegemon of much of the Greek world in the early decades of the fourth century. Moreover, he would have been under no significant obligation to Sparta after his expulsion from Scillus in 371.[8] From this perspective chapter 14 of the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* is a postscript to a work produced at an earlier date. This interpretation has been particularly prominent among Francophone scholars, most notably François Ollier, and continues to have numerous adherents.

The primary advantages of this interpretation are that it easily accounts for both the praise and the criticism of Sparta found in Xenophon's work and can be connected to details of his biography. The disadvantages are, again, that the idea that authors' biographies condition their work in clear, predictable ways is difficult to justify, and, perhaps more importantly, that the chronology of Xenophon's work is unclear. This can lead to the dangerously circular habit of dating specific works and passages on the basis of the attitude towards Sparta found in that work or passage, and thus finding specious confirmation of the idea that Xenophon's attitude towards Sparta became increasingly negative over time.[9]

A third interpretation has its roots in a series of articles and books produced by Leo Strauss starting in 1939. Strauss sought to show that what previous scholars had seen as sometimes clumsy praise for Sparta was in fact brilliantly disguised satire and that Xenophon had from the outset a consistent, highly negative view of Sparta and its leaders. From this perspective chapter 14 of the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* is an overt statement of a bitingly critical understanding of Sparta that is expressed by means of delicate irony in the remainder of the treatise.[10]

A primary advantage of the interpretive approach pioneered by Strauss is that, in its more nuanced forms, it is capable of accounting for both the praise and criticism of Sparta offered by Xenophon without resorting to untestable chronological arguments. In addition, it encourages careful attention to the details of Xenophon's work, because it assumes Xenophon to be a writer capable of considerable subtlety. The primary disadvantage is that the portrayal of Xenophon as someone prone to dissimulation can lead to wild flights of interpretive fancy; any given passage can be taken to mean almost anything since the only meaning that can be easily excluded is the one that is most readily apparent.[11]

[8] See, for example, Delebecque 1957: 501; Ollier 1933: 372–440; Richer 2007; Riedinger 1991: 123–72; Schepens 2005: 43–62; Tigerstedt 1965–78: 1.159–79.
[9] See, for example, Riedinger 1991: 152–3 and Tigerstedt 1965–78: 1.160–77.
[10] Strauss 1939; see also Higgins 1977: 60–75; Humble 2004a; Proietti 1987: 44–79.
[11] See Dorion 2010 and Gray 2011: 56–7, 171–7, 268–9, 364–8 for acute critiques of Strauss's interpretive approach; cf. Johnson 2012a.

Strauss's reading of Xenophon has become increasingly influential in recent decades, particularly among Anglophone scholars, but the scholarship inspired directly or indirectly by Strauss has become quite heterogeneous because there is considerable, unresolved disagreement about how Xenophon went about articulating his views. Strauss believed that critical thinkers such as Xenophon were compelled to write in a cryptic fashion to avoid persecution, with the result that the true meaning of Xenophon's words is frequently, perhaps typically, the reverse of what it seems to be. Other scholars take the position that Xenophon says as much between the lines as in them, but are not prepared to accept that Xenophon says the opposite of what he means or means the opposite of what he says.

There are, in addition, disagreements about the extent of Xenophon's distaste for Sparta. Strauss believed that Xenophon saw little in the way of redeeming qualities in Sparta. Other scholars take the position that, throughout his life, Xenophon had a relatively balanced view of Sparta and that he found much to criticize, but also much that was laudable.

The reading of Xenophon's views on Sparta presented here might be described as neo-Straussian or perhaps Straussian-lite. It assumes that Xenophon was a subtle writer who crafted the wording, content, and structure of his narratives to suggest conclusions that he does not explicitly proclaim. Xenophon is not, however, understood as an author who engaged in elaborate games of literary subterfuge in which clever readers are expected to decipher an intended meaning that is the reverse of what it appears to be. Xenophon's writings as interpreted in this essay contain both praise and blame for Sparta and its leaders.

In the discussion that follows no attempt is made to link Xenophon's views on Sparta to specific aspects of his biography. Xenophon's long-running involvement with Sparta was an undeniably important part of his life, and that involvement made him an unusually well-informed observer of Spartan life. It is, however, difficult to demonstrate in a convincing fashion strong causal connections between specific facets of his biography and specific facets of his portrayal of Sparta. We can speak with considerable confidence about at least some aspects of Xenophon's views of Sparta, but we step onto much trickier ground when we seek to explain why Xenophon held the views that he did.

In a similar vein, Xenophon's attitude towards Sparta likely did evolve over time, but it is impossible to trace that evolution in a reliable fashion because we lack precise chronological information about what Xenophon wrote when. This is a particular problem since it seems likely that at least some of Xenophon's individual works were written in stages over the course of years if not decades. Moreover, scholars have found it impossible

to achieve consensus on whether there are clear differences in Xenophon's portrayal of Sparta in different works within his corpus of writings (with the possible exception of the *Agesilaus*, on which see below). There is, therefore, no straightforward way of assigning absolute or relative dates to comments about Sparta found in any given passage written by Xenophon. As a result, establishing exactly what Xenophon thought about Sparta at any given point of his life presents major, perhaps insuperable, challenges. In the discussion that follows Xenophon's work is interpreted synchronically, which is to say that his attitude towards Sparta is understood as not evolving significantly over the course of time. This approach is not without its problems, but it is preferable to making untestable assumptions about the trajectory of Xenophon's views on Sparta and then reading his work in line with those assumptions.

Two key interpretive principles are employed in an attempt to reach an understanding of Xenophon's views of Sparta that is firmly grounded in his own words. The first such principle is that the recurrence of attitudes, themes, and motifs in different works within Xenophon's corpus is a strong sign that those attitudes, themes, and motifs reflect ideas that were important to Xenophon.[12] This is a significant issue because certain facets of Spartan life had been emphasized by Xenophon's predecessors such as Herodotus, and it is, as a result, always possible that Xenophon was in any given passage simply repeating established characterizations of Sparta and Spartans rather than expressing his own views. A second interpretive principle is that Xenophon tends to praise and blame specific traits regardless of whether they are displayed by individuals or collectivities such as armies or states.[13] It is, as a result, possible to assess his views on Sparta by comparing Sparta as depicted by Xenophon with his portrayal of individuals whom he clearly admired, Socrates most of all, but also Agesilaus, and the fictionalized Cyrus the Great and Persia described in the *Cyropaedia*.[14]

We will begin by exploring four traits of Sparta and Spartans that Xenophon seems to have found particularly praiseworthy: military competence, dedication to physical fitness, respect (*aidôs*), and self-restraint

[12] Gray 2011: 44–51.

[13] In part this was because, according to Xenophon, "whatever the character of the rulers is, such also that of the people under them for the most part becomes" (*Cyr.* 8.8.5). On the alignment of individuals and states in Xenophon's work, see Dillery 1995: 236–7; Gray 2007: 3–4; Higgins 1977: 30–1.

[14] Due 1989: 147–84 and *passim*; Gray 2011: 7–32, 51–3, 246–90, and *passim*; cf. Higgins 1977: 21–59; Tamiolaki 2012. Due and Gray argue that the *Cyropaedia* presents a relatively positive view of Cyrus and how he goes about governing, particularly in his early years. For a contrary view, that the *Cyropaedia* presents a thoroughly flawed ruler and state, see Carlier 1978/2010, Nadon 2001, and Tatum 1989.

(*enkrateia*). We will then consider what Xenophon saw as three crucial flaws in Sparta and Spartans: a predilection for coerced rather than willing obedience, a lack of prudence (*sôphrosynê*), and a tendency to privilege their own interests at the expense of their allies (*pleonexia*). In Xenophon's opinion, those flaws proved disastrous when Sparta found itself in the position of hegemon of much of the Greek world after the end of the Peloponnesian War.

The reader should remain aware throughout that the relative brevity of this chapter, the considerable extent of Xenophon's writings about Sparta, and the endless scholarly disputes about the meaning of virtually every passage make it impossible to produce anything resembling an exhaustive analysis of Xenophon's views on Sparta in the present context. For instance, there are other traits of Sparta and Spartans of which Xenophon seems to have approved (e.g. respect for elders, see *Memorabilia* 3.5.15) that are not treated here because they were, in the judgment of this author, less significant in the larger context of Xenophon's overall understanding of Sparta. Another subject that is not treated is the omission in the *Hellenica* of events of obvious significance (e.g. the foundation of the second Athenian naval confederacy, the liberation of Messenia, and the creation of the Arcadian League). These omissions were in the past habitually ascribed to a strong pro-Spartan, anti-Theban bias on the part of Xenophon, but they are now more commonly seen as a product of the nature of the *Hellenica* and the narrative strategies pursued in that work.[15] They are, therefore, not immediately relevant to the subject of this chapter.

Military Competence

For Xenophon one of Sparta's distinguishing and laudable traits was military competence. That competence, according to Xenophon, sprang from practices that fostered courage and discouraged cowardice as well as from careful attention to the technical aspects of warfare ranging from training in marching in formation to encampment procedures.[16] In the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* Xenophon writes that:

> Another measure of Lycurgus worthy of admiration is this: he brought it about in Sparta that an honorable death was preferable to a life of disgrace ... To speak truly, safety on the battlefield generally follows upon bravery rather than cowardice ... He clearly arranged happiness for the brave, misery for cowards. (9.1–3; cf. 3.3)

[15] For a list of omissions, see Underhill 1900: xxi–xxxv. On the omissions pertaining to Sparta, see Riedinger 1991: 41–60. On the omissions pertaining to Boeotian history, see Jehne 2004 and Sterling 2004.

[16] Tuplin forthcoming a.

Xenophon goes on to catalog a series of punishments that were inflicted on men who had proved themselves to be cowards. Shortly thereafter he proclaims that "if someone wishes, it is also possible to learn how military practices are arranged better here than in the rest of the other cities" (11.1) and launches into a lengthy, detailed discussion of those practices (11.2–13.11).

The *Agesilaus* praises the king for his courage (6.1–2), his tactical and strategic capacities (1.9–22, 28–35; 2.1–8, 18–19), and his skill in recruiting and training soldiers (1.23–8, 2.7–8). In the *Symposium* Socrates counsels an ambitious acquaintance in Athens that "it is necessary to discover what sort of things the Spartans practice that give them the reputation of being the most capable military commanders" (8.39).

An enduring interest in practices that fostered courage and discouraged cowardice and in technical aspects of warfare is evident throughout Xenophon's corpus of work. Courage and cowardice are identified in the *Memorabilia* as subjects that received regular attention from Socrates (1.1.16), and that work includes an exchange in which Socrates lays out a definition of courage (4.6.10–11). In the *Hellenica* Xenophon at various points singles out for praise military units that displayed valor on the battlefield (e.g. 7.4.32, 7.5.16; cf. *Cyr.* 4.4.3). Xenophon's interest in the technical aspects of warfare is immediately evident from the fact that his writings include a treatise offering detailed suggestions to Athenian cavalry commanders (the *Hipparchikos*), and from frequent comments on military organization in his other works (e.g. *Por.* 4.42). In addition, it has been suggested that the *Cyropaedia* was intended in part as an outline of a military reform program that would revitalize the Spartan army.[17]

All of this material is important because it indicates that Xenophon's discussion of military competence with respect to Sparta is grounded in his own views and is not simply a reflection of characterizations of Sparta found in the writings of his predecessors or beliefs about Sparta held by his contemporaries. Furthermore, it also leaves little doubt that Xenophon saw military competence as a defining and laudable trait of Sparta and Spartans.

Dedication to Physical Fitness

The Spartans as portrayed by Xenophon are dedicated to maintaining a high degree of physical fitness.[18] After a brief preface, the first topic covered in the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* is the behavior expected of women in Sparta; Xenophon states that, in hopes of engendering stronger children,

[17] Christesen 2006.

[18] Humble 2006: 224–5; Ollier 1933: 404–5; Tuplin forthcoming a.

Lycurgus "ordered that women should train their bodies no less than men ... and established contests against each other in running and strength for women just as also for men" (1.4). This set Sparta apart from the rest of the Greek world, in which the athletic activities of females were sharply circumscribed. Rigorous physical training of various kinds was a fundamental part of the educational program imposed on Spartan boys (2.3, 3.2, 4.6), and adult men were required to stay fit through hunting (4.7) and exercising in the gymnasium (5.8–9; cf. 9.4–5). The requirement to train regularly extended to military campaigns, during which Spartans exercised twice a day (12.5–6). An athletic physique was a source of status among the Spartans who, according to Xenophon, "adorn themselves not with expensive clothes but with the excellent condition of their bodies" (7.3). All of this had the results one might expect: "not easily would someone find men healthier and with more capable bodies than the Spartans" (5.9; cf. 1.9).[19]

Xenophon leaves little doubt about his own enthusiasm for physical fitness. In both the *Hellenica* (3.4.16–18) and *Agesilaus* (1.25–7) he recounts in glowing terms the measures Agesilaus took to encourage physical training among his (mostly non-Spartan) army at Ephesus in Asia Minor in the winter of 395.[20] In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon writes that Socrates "approved of getting as much exercise as the soul sweetly welcomed, for he said that the habit contributed to good health and did not impede care of the soul" (1.2.4; cf. *Smp.* 2.3–4, 2.15–21). That same work includes a lengthy passage in which Socrates admonishes a young man for being in poor physical condition and urges him to take regular exercise so he will be prepared to do his part on the battlefield and will have a sounder body and mind (3.12.1–8; cf. 1.2.19, 2.1.28; *Oeconomicus* 11.12–18). In the *Cyropaedia* Cyrus the Great is raised in an educational system that privileges hunting as a form of exercise (1.2.10; cf. 1.4.5–15). His father advises him that he must ensure that his soldiers get regular physical training (1.6.17, 2.1.20, 2.1.29, 2.3.8, 2.3.23, 3.3.9), and as king he regularly takes his subordinates hunting in order to keep them fit and ready for battle (8.1.34–6). It thus seems safe to conclude that Xenophon emphasized the physical fitness of Spartans because he saw it as characteristic and praiseworthy.

[19] On sport in Sparta, see Christesen 2012 and 2013.

[20] On these passages, see Dillery 1995: 30. For other passages in the *Hellenica* in which Xenophon expresses enthusiasm, implicit or explicit, for physical fitness, see 5.3.17, 6.2.27, 6.4.11.

Respect

Respect is another trait that features prominently in Xenophon's description of Sparta. The relevant term in ancient Greek, *aidôs*, presents some difficulties because it can have a range of meanings and has no precise equivalent in English. For Xenophon *aidôs* seems typically to connote an appropriate degree of respect displayed by the young in dealing with their elders, and by subordinates in dealing with their superiors.[21]

In the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* Xenophon identifies instilling *aidôs* as one of the primary goals of the Spartan educational system. He writes that, "I have spoken about the educational systems of both the Spartans and of the rest of the Greeks. Whoever wishes to do so, let him judge for himself which one of these systems produces men who are more obedient, more respectful (*aidêmonesteroi*), and more self-controlled (*enkratesteroi*) with respect to their needs" (2.14). He notes that a high-ranking Spartan magistrate, the *paidonomos*, had the power to punish any boy he felt was negligent, with the result that "great respect (*aidôs*) there stands beside great obedience" (2.2). According to Xenophon, Lycurgus wanted adolescents "to be imbued with a strong sense of respect (*to aidesthai*)" and to that end he prescribed that they walk silently, with their hands under their cloaks and their eyes on the ground (3.4). He describes the regulations for dining clubs (see below) as intended to avoid situations in which *aidôs* is absent (5.5). In Xenophon's *Symposium* Socrates discusses the chaste behavior expected between the partners in homoerotic relationships in Sparta and states that, "the goddess they worship is not Shamelessness but Respect (*Aidôs*)" (8.35).

Positive statements about *aidôs* are found throughout Xenophon's corpus. In the *Symposium* Socrates states that if the older male in a pederastic relationship conducts himself properly, he will help make his younger partner restrained and modest (*enkratês kai aidoumenos*, 8.27). Cyrus the Great displays *aidôs* as a young man (*Cyr.* 1.4.4, 1.5.1) and as king shows himself capable of inspiring respect from his subordinates (8.1.28, 33). Conversely, one of the commanders of the mercenary force assembled by Cyrus the Younger is criticized because he was incapable of inspiring either fear or respect (*aidôs*) in the men under his command (*Anab.* 2.6.19).

Self-Restraint

Xenophon portrays the Spartans as notable for their ability to practice self-restraint (*enkrateia*) and for the concomitant capacity to endure under

[21] On *aidôs* in Sparta, see Humble 1997: 187–240; Humble 1999; Richer 1999. On *aidôs* in general, see Cairns 1993.

difficult conditions (*karteria*).[22] For Xenophon this self-restraint revolved around desires for physical comfort, food and drink, and sex.

The *Lacedaimonion Politeia* includes a considerable amount of discussion about how the system of laws and customs constructed by Lycurgus taught Spartans self-restraint. Xenophon claims that children were required to go barefoot (2.3), wear the same cloak in winter and spring (2.4), and consume limited quantities of food (2.5). The amount of time that newly married couples could spend together was restricted (1.5), thus limiting their sexual contact, and any sort of sexual activity between males in pederastic relationships was considered shameful (2.13–14). Adult male citizens were required to belong to and eat supper daily at a dining club where their intake of food and wine was regulated (5.1–4). Xenophon claims that the Spartan educational system produced men who were "more … self-controlled (*enkratesteroi*) with respect to their needs" (2.14).

The same sort of self-restraint figures prominently in the *Agesilaus*. The Spartan king is praised for his "self-control with respect to possessions" (*enkrateia chrêmatôn*, 4.3) and his abstemiousness in all forms of physical pleasure including drinking, eating, and sleeping (5.1–2). His immunity to the temptations of sexual pleasures (*aphrodisiôn enkrateia*) is discussed at length (5.4–7). According to Xenophon Agesilaus thought that "it beseems a ruler to surpass private citizens not in weakness but in endurance (*karteria*)" (5.2).

Elsewhere in his corpus of writings Xenophon strongly signals his approval of self-restraint and the ability to endure difficult conditions. In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon states that Socrates was "the most self-restrained (*enkratestatos*) of men with respect to desires for sex and food; further he was the most hardened (*karterikôtatos*) in enduring heat and cold and toil of every kind" (1.2.1; cf. 1.2.14, 1.3.5–8, 1.3.14–15, 1.5.6). Elsewhere in the same work Xenophon's Socrates describes *enkrateia* as the "foundation of all virtue" (1.5.4), identifies self-restraint and endurance as highly desirable traits in generals and people occupying any position of responsibility (1.5.1–5, 2.1.3, 2.1.6–7, 2.6.5, 4.5.1–12), and strives to instill *enkrateia* in others (2.1.1, 4.5.1). In the *Cyropaedia* one of the virtues that Cyrus pursues as king is self-restraint (*enkrateia*, 8.1.32; cf. 1.6.25, 2.3.13).

[22] Xenophon's use of these terms is not entirely consistent and in some places he seems to subsume *karteria* under the heading of *enkrateia*. On Xenophon's views about *enkrateia*, see Dillery 1995: 134–8; Due 1989: 170–81; Lipka 2002: 18–19.

Coerced Obedience

Despite the fact that he found much in Sparta to admire, Xenophon by no means saw Sparta as an ideal state. From Xenophon's perspective, one of the major flaws in the Spartan system was that it instilled obedience through coercion.[23] This was problematic for Xenophon, who placed a high value on what he terms, in many places in his corpus of writings, "willing obedience."[24] In order to understand what Xenophon has to say on that subject, it is important to bear in mind that Xenophon typically touches on willing obedience when discussing the behavior of individual leaders, but in various places he makes it clear that willing obedience was something that could be generated by societal systems in general and educational systems in particular.

> "It seems to me that in all things the chief incentive to obedience is to both praise and honor those who obey, and to both dishonor and punish those who disobey." "This at any rate, my son, is the road to compulsory obedience. But there is another road, a shortcut, that leads to something much mightier, namely to willing obedience. For people very gladly obey someone whom they believe takes wiser thought for their interests than they themselves do." (*Cyr.* 1.6.20–1)

This exchange, which takes place between Cyrus the Great and his father, nicely expresses a sentiment that Xenophon repeats in numerous places in various works (see, for example, *Cyr.* 1.1.3, 3.1.28, 4.2.11; *Mem.* 1.2.10, 3.4.8; *Oec.* 21.4–5, 21.12).

For Xenophon willing obedience came into being when people were properly motivated and trained. As Cyrus' father indicates, a key factor in motivation was that people needed to believe that their leaders were genuinely concerned about the well-being of their followers. (See, for example, *Ages.* 6.4; *Anab.* 1.9.11–12; *Cyr.* 1.6.24, 1.6.42, 2.4.10, 8.7.13; *Hipp.* 6.2–3; *Oec.* 7.37.) Proper training entailed teaching through example. (See, for instance, *Cyr.* 1.2.8, 8.1.21–33; *Mem.* 1.2.3, 1.2.20.)

Willing obedience had many advantages. In a negative sense it did not require constant vigilance and punishment, which provoked resentment and, ultimately, disobedience. That cycle led to a downward spiral of further punishment, more resentment, and further disobedience. In an environment in which obedience was coerced through punishment, individuals who were confident that their actions would escape observation would consistently misbehave. (See, for example, *Hell.* 6.1.7.) Moreover, as soon as the

[23] Higgins 1977: 60–75; Humble 1997: 46–107; Millender forthcoming.

[24] Gray 2007: 4–9; Gray 2011: 15–18; Wood 1964: 52–4. On Xenophon's views on leadership, see Buxton in this volume.

individual or state imposing coerced obedience showed signs of vulnerability, subordinates would seize the opportunity to desert them.

In a positive sense, people who obeyed willingly were energetically cooperative, rather than sullenly acquiescent. As Ischomachus says in the *Oeconomicus*, "They are ashamed to do anything disgraceful, think it better to obey, and take pride in obedience, working with spirit, every man and all together, when it is necessary to work" (21.5; cf. *Cyr.* 3.3.59, *Mem.* 2.6.27).

Furthermore, willing obedience translated into loyalty even when the individual or state in command was vulnerable. In the *Oeconomicus* Socrates praises Cyrus the Younger for his ability to command such loyalty: "I think that this is a great piece of evidence of the excellence of a ruler, when men obey him willingly and wish to stand by him in moments of danger" (4.18–19; cf. *Anabasis* 1.9.29–31).[25]

Xenophon strongly emphasizes that obedience, to the laws and to magistrates, was one of the defining characteristics of Sparta (*Hell.* 7.1.8; *Lac. Pol.* 2.2, 2.14, 8.1–2; *Mem.* 3.5.16, 4.4.15).[26] Moreover, he identifies obedience as one of the praiseworthy traits possessed by Agesilaus (*Ages.* 1.36). Xenophon repeatedly signals his belief that obedience is a good and necessary thing (e.g. *Cyr.* 8.1.2; *Mem.* 4.4.1; *Hell.* 3.4.18), but he also saw something deeply problematic in the way obedience was secured in Sparta.

The content of the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* strongly suggests that Xenophon saw Sparta as a place where obedience was coerced. There was, as in the Persia described in the *Cyropaedia*, some element of teaching obedience through exemplary behavior (8.1–2). However, that was a minor part of a system in which Spartans, both young and old, were under constant observation and incessant threat of punishment. Xenophon notes that:

> In order that the boys might never be without a leader, even when the *paidonomos* [the magistrate in charge of the educational system] was absent, Lycurgus ordained that any one of the citizens who happened to be present would always be in charge and could order the boys to do whatever seemed proper and could punish them if they did anything wrong ... In order that the boys might never be without a leader, even if no adult citizen should be present, he decreed that the sharpest of the prefects [older boys in a position of authority over younger boys] in each group of boys would be in charge. The result is that the boys are never left without a leader. (*Lac. Pol.* 2.10–11; cf. 6.1–2)

[25] The diametric opposite of a benevolent leader such as Cyrus was a despotic ruler who looked solely to his own interests and who maintained control on the basis of force. Such a ruler, whom Xenophon describes at length in the *Hiero*, not only fails to inspire willing obedience and loyalty, but also inspires an inveterate hatred such that he lives at constant risk of assassination (see, for example, *Hier.* 2.7–11). The same is true of the Thirty, a junta that ruled Athens briefly after the Peloponnesian War. Xenophon provides a detailed and vituperative account of the Thirty in the *Hellenica* (2.3.1–4.43). For the Thirty as a negative paradigm of rulership, see Dillery 1995: 138–63.

[26] Humble 2006: 223–5; Tuplin forthcoming a.

Adult men were compelled to eat in public, in their dining clubs, rather than in private, in order to ensure that "the laws would be least infringed" (5.2). Those same men were expected to spend a good deal of time at the gymnasium, where Lycurgus arranged that "the oldest man present would always supervise each one in attendance" (5.8). Hanging over all of this surveillance was the threat of punishment. The *paidonomos* was accompanied by young men carrying whips "so that they could mete out punishment whenever it was necessary. As a result, great respect (*aidôs*) there stands beside great obedience" (2.2; cf. 6.2). In addition to corporal punishment, there was a heavier penalty that could be imposed on both young and old: disenfranchisement (3.3, 10.7; cf. 8.3–4).

The predominance of coerced obedience in Sparta brings us back to the interpretively challenging passage from the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* (14.1–7) discussed in the introduction to this chapter. In that passage Xenophon accuses the Spartans of disobedience to Lycurgus' laws. Given his views on the difference between coerced and willing obedience, Xenophon's critique is not particularly surprising.[27] The Spartan system had flaws and as a result produced individuals with a tendency and capacity for disobedience in the absence of strict supervision and coercion. As we shall see shortly, in Xenophon's opinion the Spartans' penchant for coerced obedience also had a poisonous influence on their relationships with their allies.

An Absence of Prudence

Another major flaw in the Spartan system as described by Xenophon was that it inculcated respect (*aidôs*) and self-restraint (*enkrateia*), but not prudence (*sôphrosynê*).[28] As we have seen, for Xenophon *aidôs* was associated with the young and people in a subordinate relationship of some kind, and *enkrateia* was the "foundation of all virtue" (*Mem.* 1.5.4). *Aidôs* and *enkrateia* were valuable traits in and of themselves, and helped foster *sôphrosynê*, but were by no means adequate substitutes for *sôphrosynê*, which was the hallmark of the truly virtuous individual. Someone who possessed *sôphrosynê* was restrained in indulging in physical pleasures, but also

[27] Its placement within the work, however, remains difficult to explain.

[28] This section of text builds directly on the argumentation presented in Humble 1999 (cf. Humble 2002a). Skepticism about Humble's argumentation is expressed in Azoulay 2007a.

and more importantly he or she showed good sense and wisdom in dealing with intellectual, moral, and spiritual matters. Hence Xenophon writes that Socrates did not distinguish between wisdom (*sophia*) and prudence (*sôphrosynê*) because "if a man knew what is good and noble, and what is shameful, and practiced the former and avoided the latter, that man he judged to be both wise and prudent (*sophon te kai sôphrona*)" (*Mem.* 3.9.4).

The importance of *sôphrosynê* to Xenophon is evident from its close association with Socrates, who both embodies this trait and strives to engender it in others. In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon states that Socrates' "conduct was always prudent (*sôphronôn*)" (1.2.28), and in the *Apology* Socrates says at his trial that the Delphic oracle had proclaimed that, "no man was more free than I, or more just, or more prudent (*sôphronesteron*)" (14). Socrates' eagerness to nurture *sôphrosynê* in the people with whom he interacts is a repeated motif of the *Memorabilia* (1.1.16, 1.2.17–18, 4.3.1–2, 4.3.17–18).

Xenophon was certain that *sôphrosynê* could be taught; he states in the *Memorabilia* that "all good and honorable conduct is the result of training; this is especially true of prudence (*sôphrosynê*)" (1.2.23; cf. *Cyr.* 7.5.75). In the *Cyropaedia* Xenophon sketches an educational system that has the capacity to instill not just *aidôs* and *enkrateia*, but also *sôphrosynê* (1.2.2–16). Cyrus the Great goes through this educational system and, like Socrates, both embodies and teaches *sôphrosynê* (6.1.47, 8.1.30). In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon explicitly aligns Cyrus the Great and Cyrus the Younger and states that the latter was educated at the Persian court, "where one may learn *sôphrosynê* in full measure" (1.9.3).

Xenophon's discussion of the values instilled by Lycurgus' laws and customs in the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* is a study in delicacy in that, while he has much to say about how Spartans are notable for *aidôs* and *enkrateia*, he never mentions *sôphrosynê* and uses cognate words only twice. After discussing regulations about posture and silence intended to instill *aidôs* in boys, Xenophon adds that, "In this way it was manifest that the male sex was stronger with respect to *sôphrosynê* (*eis to sôphronein ischyroteron*) than the female sex" (3.4). In describing religious sacrifices made while on campaign, Xenophon notes that magistrates are present to ensure that the people in attendance behave prudently (*sôphronizô*) (13.5). The first passage makes the minimal claim that Spartan males were more prudent than Spartan females, and the second passage applies to behavior in a very specific context.

In the rest of his corpus of writings, Xenophon, with one notable exception, does not associate *sôphrosynê* with Spartans, either individually or collectively. The exception is Agesilaus, who, according to Xenophon, gave ample evidence of his *sôphrosynê* (*Ages.* 5.4, 5.7, 11.10). This anomaly has

been explained in various ways. One explanation is that it is a matter of genre: the *Agesilaus* is an encomium, and contemporary sources show that *sôphrosynê* was regularly attributed to the subjects of encomia.[29] A second explanation is that Xenophon is not so much writing an encomium as a description of an ideal leader that is loosely based upon the Spartan king.[30] A final alternative is that Xenophon's feelings about Agesilaus on one hand and all other Spartans on the other diverged in significant ways. Regardless of how one assesses these various possibilities, it is clear that Xenophon is virtually silent on the subject of *sôphrosynê* in his extensive discussions of Sparta and Spartans. This is a significant silence, given the importance of *sôphrosynê* in the *Memorabilia*, which shows Socrates as an ideal role model and teacher, and in the *Cyropaedia*, which shows Cyrus the Great as an ideal leader.

Sparta's (Inevitable) Failure as Hegemon

In 404 Sparta emerged as the victor in the Peloponnesian War, and the undisputed leading power in the Greek world. In 371 the Spartans suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Thebans at the battle of Leuctra, a defeat that permanently shattered their hegemony. The reasons for the Spartans' spectacular rise and fall were, as one might expect, a subject of great interest to the people, including Xenophon, who watched these events unfold.

Xenophon highlights a number of factors that contributed to Sparta's collapse. Divine vengeance, set in motion by the Spartans' violation of oaths they swore to ratify treaties, looms large in his account of events (*Hell.* 5.4.1).[31] He also emphasizes flaws in the Lycurgan system of laws and customs that instilled a penchant for coerced obedience and that failed to inculcate *sôphrosynê*. He suggests that the Spartans in their dealings with their allies were incapable of securing willing obedience and, because they lacked prudence, were unable to resist selfishly pursuing their own interests at the

[29] Humble forthcoming; cf. Cartledge 1987: 55–66 and Schepens 2005: 43–62.

[30] Tigerstedt 1965–78: 1.175.

[31] Spartan impiety is not discussed at length here, despite the fact that piety was clearly an issue of crucial importance to Xenophon (see, for example, Due 1989: 156–8). This is because, although there is good reason to believe that there were a number of unusual features of religious life in Sparta (Parker 1989), Xenophon does not consistently portray the Spartans as markedly different from other Greeks in the details of their religious practice or in the depth of their religious beliefs. A discussion of Spartan (im)piety is thus not appropriate in the context of this particular chapter. Moreover, Xenophon does not offer a clear and consistent explanatory framework for the course of events in the early decades of the fourth century either in the *Hellenica* or elsewhere, with the result that discussions of his views on causation are necessarily complex and lengthy.

expense of their allies. They behaved with an increasing lack of restraint, turning friends into enemies in the process, and in the end this brought about their downfall.[32]

The Spartans as portrayed by Xenophon instinctively turn to coercion when dealing with subordinates and allies, and their inability to secure willing obedience produces resistance that in some cases has serious consequences. A particularly clear example of this can be found in Xenophon's description of Clearchus in the *Anabasis*. Clearchus was a Spartan commander who was a key leader in the mercenary army assembled by Cyrus the Younger. After recounting Clearchus' death, Xenophon adds:

> He used to punish severely, sometimes in anger ... He also punished on principle, for he believed that there was no good in an army that went without punishment ... In times of danger ... the men under his command were ready to obey him implicitly ...
>
> But when the danger was past, and they could go off to serve under another commander, many would desert him ... He never, therefore, had men following him out of friendliness and goodwill ... (2.6.9–13; cf. 1.3.1, 1.5.11–12)[33]

Other Spartan leaders described by Xenophon have the same problematic tendency. For example, in the *Hellenica* when the Spartan commander Mnasippus capriciously refuses to pay the mercenaries under his command, their officers complain, and Mnasippus responds by beating them. A battle is fought soon thereafter, and Xenophon dryly remarks that, "when his men marched out of the city with him, they were all dispirited and hating him, something that is least suited to fighting a battle" (6.2.19). The fashion in which Xenophon portrays Spartan commanders treating the non-Spartan soldiers under their command can easily be read as an implicit and critical comment on the ways Spartans in general interacted with non-Spartans, both at home and abroad.[34]

Xenophon goes out of his way to show that there was a great deal of resistance to the Spartan sociopolitical system within Sparta itself, thereby suggesting that the coerced obedience characteristic of Sparta caused major internal problems. He does this by relating in considerable detail a conspiracy to overthrow the Spartan government that was launched early in the fourth century by someone named Cinadon (*Hell.* 3.3.4–11).[35] There were in Sparta a restricted number of full male citizens (Spartiates or *homoioi*),

[32] The best single discussion of the relevant issues can be found in Tuplin 1993: 125–46 and *passim*.

[33] On obituaries in the *Anabasis* in general and of Clearchus in particular, see Gray 2011: 71–9; cf. Humble 1997: 78–80.

[34] See, for instance, Millender 2012 and forthcoming.

[35] On this part of the *Hellenica*, see Tuplin 1993: 52.

a substantial number of males with limited political rights who lived within the Spartan state but not in Sparta itself (*perioikoi*), and a large number of slaves (helots). There were in addition free men (other than the *perioikoi*) whose status was inferior to that of the Spartiates, but whose origins, numbers, and rights are poorly understood; Cinadon belonged to this group. According to Xenophon, Cinadon said that when the Spartiates were mentioned to any of the socially disadvantaged members of the Spartan state, "no one was able to conceal the fact that he would gladly eat them, even raw" (3.3.6). The Spartan authorities learned of Cinadon's conspiracy before it could be put into motion and successfully suppressed it, but its very existence points to a dangerously high level of disaffection within the Spartan state. Moreover, Xenophon's decision to recount Cinadon's conspiracy in the *Hellenica* is noteworthy in and of itself since in the remainder of that work he says little about the internal workings of the Spartan government. Xenophon draws no overt conclusions about the significance of the conspiracy, but the narrative suggests that there was something fundamentally wrong with the Spartan sociopolitical system. It seems likely that Xenophon intended his readers to draw the conclusions that the Spartan sociopolitical system inherently required coerced obedience in order to maintain a steep social hierarchy with a small number of elites at the top and that this coerced obedience created a situation in which the stability of the state was at constant risk.

The same dynamic is played out at the level of interstate relations. In the *Hellenica* Xenophon sketches a Sparta that claims to champion the idea that all Greek city states should be independent while simultaneously coercing friends and enemies alike into adhering to its wishes.

Xenophon presents with particular clarity the sentiments of Sparta's allies in a series of speeches delivered at a peace conference between Sparta and Athens just before the battle of Leuctra. As is generally the case with direct speeches reproduced by ancient Greek historians, it is nearly certain that the text is as much or more a product of Xenophon than an accurate transcription of the original speeches.[36] One of the speakers is an Athenian named Autokles who boldly admonishes the Spartans:

> You always say that the cities must be autonomous, but you yourselves are the greatest impediment standing in the way of their autonomy. For the first stipulation in your treaties with allied cities is that they follow where you might lead them. And yet how is this consistent with autonomy? You make enemies without taking counsel with your allies, and lead the allies against

[36] On the speeches in the *Hellenica*, see Gray 1989: 79–140 and Baragwanath in this volume.

> those enemies, with the result that frequently so-called autonomous cities are compelled to take the field against men very friendly to them. Furthermore – and this is of everything the most contrary to autonomy – you establish governments ruled by groups of ten men here, groups of thirty men there, and your concern when it comes to these rulers is not that they rule in accordance with the law, but that they be able to hold the cities by force. (6.3.7–8)

The negative effects of the Spartans' tendency to secure obedience through coercion were, according to Xenophon, compounded by their tendency to pursue their own interests without much regard for the well-being of others. As we have seen, concern for the well-being of followers was a key component in obtaining willing obedience. For Xenophon, the failure to see to the well-being of followers had, in the long run, serious effects because it made them disobedient and disloyal. Intelligent leaders were, therefore, capable of understanding that while unapologetic pursuit of self-interest might in the short term redound to their benefit, it was in the long run likely to bring them to ruin (see, for instance, *Cyr.* 1.6.45). Indeed, Cyrus is praised by one of his allies in the *Cyropaedia* because he seemed "to take more pleasure in doing us kindnesses than in enriching himself" (5.1.28; cf. 8.4.7–8).

The Spartans as portrayed by Xenophon have a pernicious habit of behaving in a recklessly self-serving fashion.[37] In the *Hellenica* Xenophon characterizes the Spartans as prone to taking more than their fair share, something for which he employs the noun *pleonexia* and the verb *pleonektein*.[38] Towards the end of his speech attacking Spartan behavior, Autokles levels just that charge at them:

> It is necessary that those who are going to be friends do not expect to meet with justice from everyone else while showing themselves disposed to lay claim, as much as they are able, to more than their fair share (*pleista dunôntai pleonektountas phainesthai*). (6.3.9)

In an earlier section of the *Hellenica* that covers events in 395, Xenophon supplies a speech delivered by a Theban ambassador sent to Athens to seek an alliance against Sparta. The Theban says:

> The greedy rule (*pleonexia*) of the Spartans is much easier to overthrow than was your own empire ... The Spartans are greedily taking advantage

[37] On this aspect of the *Hellenica*, see Dillery 1995: 195–237, 251; Higgins 1977: 28–30, 99–127; Sterling 2004; Tuplin 1993: 43–146, 165.

[38] The exception, as was the case with *sôphrosynê*, is Agesilaus, whom Xenophon describes as being unwilling to take more than his fair share (*pleonektein*) of anything except hardships and hard work (*Ages.* 5.3). Xenophon's treatment of *pleonexia* includes a significant nuance: he recognizes that *pleonexia* can be a positive trait in a military commander seeking to get the better of an enemy (*Cyr.* 1.6.27–41, *Mem.* 3.1.6).

> (*pleonektousi*) of men who are much more numerous than they are and in no way inferior to them in arms. (3.5.15)

The wording of this passage is remarkable: Xenophon substitutes *pleonexia* in place of a term for hegemony such as *archê*; this is a highly unusual usage of *pleonexia* and is implicitly damning of Spartan rule.[39]

A particularly egregious episode occurred in 382, when a dissident party within Thebes volunteered to turn over the Theban acropolis, the Cadmea, to Spartan troops that happened to be in the vicinity of Thebes en route to northern Greece (*Hell.* 5.2.25–31, though cf. the somewhat divergent accounts given in Diodorus 15.20.2 and Plutarch *Ages.* 23–4). The Spartan commander, Phoebidas, proceeded to seize the Cadmea, even though Sparta and Thebes were at that time at peace and the Thebans had done nothing to provoke an attack on their territory. This blatant violation of Theban sovereignty was subsequently confirmed by the Spartan government, which made the decision to retain control of the Cadmea. Agesilaus played a leading role in this decision; he deployed the argument that the sole standard of judgment of Phoebidas' actions should be whether they were advantageous or disadvantageous to Sparta (*Hell.* 5.2.32).[40]

The Spartans' actions with respect to the Cadmea are portrayed by Xenophon as the most spectacular and ill-judged example of a general pattern of behavior that led to their downfall (see in particular *Hell.* 5.4.1). In part this was because in constantly and selfishly seeking their own aggrandizement the Spartans created enemies and engaged in hostilities that could easily have been avoided. This is most evident in their relations with the Thebans, who ultimately became the authors of Sparta's downfall. At the peace conference before the battle of Leuctra, an Athenian named Callistratus delivers a speech immediately after Autokles. Callistratus says that he hopes that the Spartans will change their behavior now that they have learned the dangers of *pleonexia*: "I hope now that, having been taught that seeking selfish gain (*pleonektein*) is unprofitable, we will again be reasonable in our friendship with each other" (6.3.11). In the event, the Spartans do not learn

[39] The strongly negative connotations that Xenophon attaches to *pleonexia* are apparent from the fact that he associates this impulse with Critias, an Athenian political figure whom Xenophon abhorred. In the *Hellenica* Critias claims that "men who wanted to take more than their fair share (*pleonektein*) could not avoid doing away with those who were most able to prevent them" (2.3.16). In the *Memorabilia,* Critias is described as *pleonektistatos* (1.2.12).

[40] For a similar, particularly poignant example of the Spartans under Agesilaus' leadership acting in a fashion that was, in the short term at least expedient, but nevertheless far from just, see Xenophon's account of the meeting between Agesilaus and the Persian satrap Pharnabazus (*Hell.* 4.1.29–36).

their lesson, and aggressively push the Thebans into a battle that ends in catastrophic defeat.

In addition, Xenophon suggests that the Spartans' *pleonexia* proved harmful because it sowed deep discontent among their allies. Xenophon makes it clear that long before Leuctra, the Spartans' allies were restive. A Theban ambassador to Athens, seeking to form an alliance with Athens against Sparta in 395, predicts that Sparta's allies will revolt as soon as they find a powerful state to support them (*Hell.* 3.5.10–13). After the Spartans suffer a major military defeat in 390, Agesilaus leads his forces back to Sparta in such a way as to pass through cities as late in the day as possible in order to avoid the sight of people from communities such as Mantinea, which was allied with Sparta, rejoicing in Sparta's misfortune (4.5.18). When the Spartans find themselves in a position of near unchallenged supremacy in 386, they immediately set about brutally imposing their will on their allies, many of whom had showed themselves to be less than enthusiastic in their support of Sparta (5.2.1). On the battlefield at Leuctra, the Spartans consider renewing the fight after their initial defeat, but decide not to do so, in part because the allied troops present to support the Spartan forces "had no heart for more fighting, and some were not even displeased at what had happened" (6.4.15).

As might be expected, their allies, who had numerous grievances, desert the Spartans in droves as soon as they learn of their defeat at Leuctra (*Hell.* 6.5.3–9, 6.5.32). Indeed, in the *Hellenica* Xenophon inserts a digression in order to praise the city of Phlius for remaining loyal to Sparta after Leuctra (7.2.1).[41] The Spartans, weakened by the loss of their allies, are unable to resist the growing power of the Thebans (strongly reinforced by the Spartans' former allies), lose much of their territory, and are rendered largely impotent.

Xenophon in various places in his corpus of writings connects the capacity to occupy a position of leadership successfully to the possession of *sôphrosynê*. It is only through *sôphrosynê* that individuals and states that achieve power can steer clear of the temptation to take advantage of their position to take more than their fair share, which in turn creates dangerous disaffection. Hence Ischomachus declares in the closing lines of the *Oeconomicus* that:

> It seems to me that this gift, the ability to elicit willing obedience, is not altogether human but divine. It is clearly given to those who truly achieve the highest degree of prudence (*sôphrosynê*). The gods give, it seems to me, tyrannical rule over unwilling subjects to those whom they consider worthy of

[41] On Phlius as a model community in the *Hellenica*, see Dillery 1995: 130–8.

> living a life like that of Tantalus, who is said to spend eternity in Hades fearing lest he die a second death. (21.12)

In the *Cynegeticus* Xenophon writes:

> Those who wish to take more than their fair share (*pleonektein*) in the city train themselves to win victories over their friends, whereas hunters train themselves to win victories over common enemies. This training makes the latter more effective, the former much worse, against all other enemies. The latter undertake the chase with prudence (*sôphrosynê*) as a companion, the former have shameful insolence as their companion. (13.15)

And in the *Cyropaedia*, Cyrus, after having acquired a vast empire, gathers together the leading men among the Persians to consider how they might hold onto their new-won gains. He muses that:

> To gain [an empire] often falls to the lot of one who has shown only daring, but to gain and hold, that is no longer possible without prudence (*sôphrosynê*), restraint (*enkrateia*), and great care. (7.5.76; cf. 4.2.44 and *Mem.* 4.3.1)

From this perspective, there was little surprising about the collapse of Spartan power. Spartans were trained in coerced obedience, and the Spartan system instilled *aidôs* and *enkrateia*, which were both laudable traits, but neither of which was sufficient for a person or state occupying a position of leadership. *Aidôs* was suitable for the young or subordinates, and *enkrateia* restrained physical appetites; *sôphrosynê* was required if those in power were to behave in ways that did not provoke resistance from allies and subjects.[42] The Spartans' inability to inspire willing obedience and their lack of *sôphrosynê* made them particularly ill suited to be the hegemon of much of the Greek world.

Conclusion

If Xenophon was critical of the Spartans' failure as hegemons, and ascribed that failure to flaws in the Spartan sociopolitical system, he also saw their rise and fall as part of a larger pattern.[43] There was a long tradition in the Greek world of believing that success led to arrogance, arrogance led to

[42] Cyrus observes that those possessed of *aidôs* avoid offensive acts when they are under observation, whereas those possessed of *sôphrosynê* avoid offensive acts even when they are not under observation (*Cyr.* 8.1.31). In other words, *aidôs* only curbs misbehavior when the threat of detection and punishment is present. Insofar as those in power are, in the short term at least, immune to the threat of punishment from their subordinates it is only *sôphrosynê* that can constrain their behavior.

[43] There has been considerable scholarly discussion of this point. A key referent is Tuplin 1993: 163–8 and *passim*; see now also Hau 2012.

rash behavior, and rash behavior led to disaster; and Xenophon seems to have subscribed to this view. In the *Hellenica* an ambassador, who has come to seek Spartan help to fend off the attacks by an aggressively expansionist neighboring city, remarks that, "God, perhaps, made it such that as a people's power grows, so too does their pride" (5.2.18).

Xenophon suggests that Thebes and Athens were as susceptible to fall into this pattern of behavior as Sparta.[44] He is thus fundamentally pessimistic about the capacity of individuals and states that become powerful to maintain their position for extended periods of time. He nevertheless also displays a certain degree of optimism in that he intimates that people can learn from their mistakes and that, perhaps, those who have had power and then lost it are capable of behaving more prudently thereafter. As one of the characters in the *Cyropaedia* remarks:

> It seems to me, Cyrus, to be more difficult to find a man who can bear good fortune well than one who can bear misfortune well. For good fortune engenders arrogance (*hybris*) in most men, whereas misfortune engenders prudence (*sôphrosynê*) in all men. (8.4.14)

In a similar vein, Socrates in the *Memorabilia* sees Athens's weakened state after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War as an advantage:

> The city seems to me now to have a disposition more acceptable to a good ruler. For confidence breeds carelessness and slackness and disobedience, whereas fear makes men more attentive and more obedient and more amenable to discipline. (3.5.5)

A state that had suffered and learned the proper lessons from that suffering, most notably the importance of prudence in all things and all times, would not seek to take more than its fair share.

As the rule of the Thirty in Athens comes to an end, one of its opponents advises the member of the junta and its supporters to "know yourselves" (*Hell.* 2.4.40), to become better men as a result of their experience in gaining and losing power. It is possible that Xenophon had similar hopes that the Spartans, chastened by their fall from power and possibly even enlightened by Xenophon's musings, might re-emerge from the disaster at Leuctra wiser and capable of building the sort of stable, lasting alliances that would enable them to once again become hegemons of the Greek world.[45]

[44] See, for example, *Memorabilia* 3.5.2 on the Boeotians, and 3.5.13 on the Athenians.

[45] Daverio Rocchi 2007, Dillery 1995: 241–9, Gray 1989: 178–82, Higgins 1977: 99–127. It has been argued by some scholars that Xenophon envisaged an alliance between Athens and Sparta, both of which could draw on the lessons of the past as guide to future, more prudent conduct. See, for example, Dillery 1995: 16, Ollier 1933: 429, Riedinger 1991: 191–206.

Further Reading

The best place to begin a deeper exploration of Xenophon's views on Sparta is by reading those works produced by Xenophon that focus entirely or largely on Sparta and Spartans: the *Lacedaimonion Politeia*, the *Agesilaus*, and the *Hellenica*. A good translation of and commentary upon the *Lacedaimonion Politeia* can be found in Lipka 2002. (A translation without commentary can be found in the Penguin Classics volume with the title *Plutarch on Sparta*. Gray 2007 provides a commentary but no translation.) A good recent translation of the *Agesilaus* by Robin Waterfield, with useful notes by Paul Cartledge, can be found in a Penguin Classics volume with the title *Hiero the Tyrant and Other Treatises*. The *Hellenica* is now available in the Landmark series, in which translated texts are accompanied by an array of helpful maps and notes.

The best single starting place in terms of the relevant secondary literature is Powell and Richer (forthcoming), an edited volume replete with up-to-date articles focusing on Xenophon's writings about Sparta. Another collection of important essays can be found in Gray 2010a. The interpretation of Xenophon's views on Sparta presented in this chapter follows upon ideas and insights drawn from a number of sources, most notably Dillery 1995 and Tuplin 1993. Tuplin's extensive writings about Xenophon remain fundamental, and he has edited or co-edited two volumes of valuable articles (Hobden and Tuplin 2012a, Tuplin 2004a). On the subject of *sôphrosynê* and Spartans in Xenophon's work, Humble's work (1999, 2002a) is essential.

Those interested in methodologies for reading and interpreting Xenophon would be well served by consulting the scholarship of Vivienne Gray (1989, 2011). On the specific issue of Straussian readings of Xenophon, one should, in addition to Gray's work, look to Dorion 2010.

A relatively brief overview of the history of ancient Sparta can be found in Kennell 2010. For a more thorough exploration of the same subject, see Cartledge 2002 and Cartledge and Spawforth 2002. Cartledge 1987 remains the fundamental study of Sparta in the era of Xenophon and Agesilaus.

(*cont.*)

All dates are BC	
396–395	Xenophon campaigns with King Agesilaus in Asia Minor
395	Outbreak of Corinthian War; Athens, Corinth, and Thebes ally against Sparta
Spring 394	Xenophon returns to Greece with Agesilaus
August 394	Xenophon present at the battle of Coronea in Boeotia; decree of exile passed against Xenophon at Athens (now or earlier)
ca. 390	Spartans grant Xenophon an estate at Scillus
386	The King's Peace; Sparta secures hegemony in Greece
382	Sparta seizes the Acropolis of Thebes
Winter 379/8	Liberation of Thebes from Spartan contol
378	Second Athenian League formed
376	Athenians defeat a Spartan fleet off Naxos
371	Thebans defeat a Spartan army at Leuctra; Xenophon is expelled from Scillus and moves to Corinth
370–369	Thebans invade the Peloponnese and liberate Messenia from Sparta
362	Battle of Mantinea; Xenophon's son Gryllus killed in a cavalry skirmish; Athenians pardon Xenophon (now or earlier)
360	Death of King Agesilaus
359/8	Death of Artaxerxes II
ca. 350	Death of Xenophon

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