

Chapter 7

LUXURY, LOST IN TRANSLATION: *ΤΡΥΦΗ* IN PLUTARCH'S SPARTA

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Introduction

It is probably safe to say that, when thinking about luxury, ancient Sparta is not the first place that springs to mind. Indeed, Spartans have long been understood as having completely abjured luxury of every kind. For example, Plutarch in his biography of Pelopidas (1.3) draws a contrast between the Spartans and Sybarites that, in Bernadotte Perrin's translation, reads as follows:

Συβαρίτης ἀνὴρ εἶπεῖν περὶ τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν, ὡς οὐ μέγα ποιούσι θανατῶντες ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ὑπὲρ τοῦ τοσοῦτους πόνους καὶ τοιαύτην ἀποφυγεῖν δίαιταν. ἀλλὰ Συβαρίταις μὲν, ἐκτετηκόσιν ὑπὸ τρυφῆς καὶ μαλακίας τὴν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ὄρμην καὶ φιλοτιμίαν, εἰκότως ἐφαίνοντο μισεῖν τὸν βίον οἱ μὴ φοβούμενοι τὸν θάνατον·

A man of Sybaris said it was no great thing for the Spartans to seek death in the wars in order to escape so many hardships and such a wretched life as theirs. But to the Sybarites, who were dissolved in effeminate luxury, men whom ambition and an eager quest of honour led to have no fear of death naturally seemed to hate life.

The belief that luxury was largely absent from Sparta in its heyday has persisted in no small part due to the continuing influence of the portrait of ancient Sparta painted by Plutarch.¹ In his life of Lycurgus and elsewhere Plutarch seems to state categorically that luxury had no place in Sparta.

However, Plutarch's claims about the absence of luxury in Sparta have been questioned on two different bases. First, the literary and archaeological record for much of the Archaic period points to Spartans enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. If luxury was indeed entirely banished from Sparta, it did not go into exile until the mid-sixth century at the earliest. Second, the overall reliability of Plutarch's treatments of Archaic and Classical Sparta has been questioned (Powell 2018a, 79). It is particularly noteworthy that Plutarch, like other writers before him, seems to have exaggerated the degree of austerity and economic egalitarianism among Spartans.²

In this essay I will argue that there is another, heretofore unappreciated problem: the key relevant term, *τρυφή*, has been consistently mistranslated. There is good reason to believe that *τρυφή* as used by Plutarch to describe Sparta typically meant, depending on the context, something much closer to the English terms 'decadence' or 'invidious, tasteless ostentation' than to 'luxury'.³ Plutarch should thus be read as saying that the Spartan lifestyle limited self-indulgence, in part by banishing goods and services understood as leading to moral corruption and socially disruptive display of wealth, rather than saying that everything that we would normally put under the heading of 'luxury' was absent from Sparta. Re-interpreting Plutarch along those lines removes one of the major remaining props of the belief in an austere Sparta in which luxury was entirely absent.

The Greek Terminology for ‘Luxury’

Before looking at Plutarch’s use of *τρυφή* it is necessary to examine the use of *τρυφή* and related terms in earlier writers. The two Greek words that most closely approximate the English ‘luxury’ are *ἀβροσύνη* and *τρυφή* and their respective cognates.⁴ *ἀβροσύνη* and its cognates do not appear in Homer and appear in just one doubtful instance in Hesiod, but occur with some frequency in Archaic poetry. Mario Lombardo (1983, 1086-7) has argued persuasively that *ἀβροσύνη* was seen as a refined lifestyle rather than the possession of a specific array of what might today be called luxury items. In the same vein, Robert and Vanessa Gorman (2014, 30-3) suggest that *ἀβροσύνη* can best be understood as a refined, dignified, or affected personal comportment that springs from wealth and status-generating possessions.

ἀβροσύνη and its cognates continued to be used regularly through the fifth century, but they were employed infrequently thereafter as *ἀβροσύνη* as an elegant lifestyle came into increasingly bad odour as the result of the Persian Wars and ongoing sociopolitical democratization (Kurke 1992, 101–14). The infrequent use of *ἀβροσύνη* and its cognates after the fifth century was also due in part to the appearance of *τρυφή* and its cognates. The first attested usage of *τρυφή* is in Euripides’ *Suppliants* from c. 423, and it rapidly became the dominant word for describing something that roughly approximates the English term ‘luxury’ (Gorman and Gorman 2014, 34–41). *τρυφή* occurs regularly in Greek texts written over the better part of a millennium (there are something like 10,000 known usages), and it rapidly took on a broad array of meanings. A comprehensive treatment of *τρυφή* is impossible in the present context, but a rapid survey is sufficient to provide the requisite background for an examination of how Plutarch employs that term.

The Gormans argue that *τρυφή* originally referred to a sense of privilege that sprang from the possession of various enviable traits. So, for example, in Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (1303-7), Iphigeneia describes the attitude of the three goddesses involved in the Judgment of Paris as follows:

ἄ μὲν ἐπὶ πόθῳ τρυφῶσα Κύπρις, ἄ δὲ δορὶ Παλλᾶς, Ἥρα τε Διὸς ἄνακτος εὐναῖσι βασιλίειν...

Cypris, exulting in sexual desire, and Pallas, exulting in the spear, and Hera, exulting in the kingly bed of lord Zeus...

Wealth was an important source of privilege, and a strong connection between wealth and *τρυφή* is already evident in sources from the fifth century. Hence, for example, in Aristophanes’ *Wasps* (1168–9) Bdelykleon advises his father to ‘step out as the wealthy do, with a certain *trypheron* swagger’ (*πλουσίως ὡδὶ προβὰς τρυφερόν τι διασαλακῶνισον*).

There was from an early period an additional cluster of neutral or positive meanings attached to *τρυφή*, in which it designated luxury items or the quality of being soft. In Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* (1491) Antigone mentions ‘the saffron-coloured *tryphê* of my robe’ (*στολίδος κροκόεσσαν ... τρυφάν*; cf. Plato, *Symposium* 197d). The positive senses of *τρυφή* could take on a more abstract meaning and designate a lifestyle characterised by ease and enjoyment. In Euripides’ *Ion* (1375–6), the eponymous character laments his abandonment by his mother shortly after his birth and talks about ‘the time when I ought to have lived a life of ease and enjoyment [*τρυφῆσαι καὶ τι τερφῆθῆναι βίου*] in my mother’s arms’ (cf. *Bacchae* 967–70). Although the relevant usages of *τρυφή* are often translated as something like ‘leading a luxurious lifestyle’, it would be more accurate to say that they refer to a situation in which good things come to someone with little effort on their part. This is most evident from passages in

which the ease associated with τρυφή is cast in a negative light and likened to indolence. So, for instance, in Plato's *Laws* (901e) the Athenian stranger, in discussing the gods, says: 'is it not impossible to agree that they do anything at all out of softness of spirit or *tryphê*? ... For among mortals at any rate idleness is an offspring of cowardice, and softness of spirit of idleness and *tryphê*' (ἄρ' οὖν οὐ ῥαθυμία μὲν καὶ τρυφή ἀδύνατον αὐτοὺς ὁμολογεῖν πράττειν ὅτι οὖν τὸ παράπαν ... δειλιάς γὰρ ἕκγονος ἔν γε ἡμῖν ἀργία, ῥαθυμία δὲ ἀργίας καὶ τρυφῆς).

Overall, especially as time went on, τρυφή tended to take on more negative meanings. In an obvious extension of what the Gormans see as its original meaning, τρυφή came to have a further meaning that hovered somewhere between 'sense of entitlement' and 'arrogance'. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* (21), Dionysus responds to his slave's complaints about carrying heavy baggage by saying 'Well, isn't that *hybris* and prodigious *tryphê*'. The close association between ὕβρις and τρυφή is noteworthy here,

Two further clusters of meanings assigned to τρυφή revolved around the general idea of pernicious uses of wealth. One of those clusters gave τρυφή a meaning of something like 'decadence' in that it was associated with being soft, pampered, and in constant need of care and attention from others. For instance, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1150a36–b5) Aristotle writes that,

the person deficient in resisting what most people resist, and are able to resist, is soft and *tryphôn* (for *tryphê* is a kind of softness). [οὗτος μαλακὸς καὶ τρυφῶν (καὶ γὰρ ἡ τρυφή μαλακία τίς ἐστίν).] Such a person lets his cloak trail to avoid the pain and burden of lifting it...

τρυφή could also mean something like 'invidious ostentation'. In the *Rhetoric* (2.16.1–2) Aristotle writes that the wealthy become *trypheroi* when they make a display of their affluence, supposing that others care as much about wealth as they do.

Thus the range of meanings assigned to τρυφή and its cognates in the Classical sources includes: (1) a sense of privilege, (2) the quality of softness or luxury items, (3) an easy and enjoyable lifestyle, (4) a sense of entitlement bordering on arrogance, (5) decadence, (6) invidious ostentation.

'Luxury' Ancient and Modern

Before moving on to the relevant sections of Plutarch's work, we need to consider certain terminological challenges neatly summarized by the Gormans:

'Luxury' is a tricky term. It has no exact equivalent in Greek, nor does it have precise implications in English. Because of this vagueness, slippery arguments have developed, equating words that are not synonyms, or resting too much weight on something whose precise meaning is assumed rather than established from the surviving texts. (Gorman and Gorman 2014, 25)

'Luxury' as currently used in English (*Oxford English Dictionary s.v.*) can refer to a lifestyle ('habitual use of, or indulgence in what is choice or costly, whether food, dress, furniture, or appliances of any kind'), objects ('means of luxurious enjoyment, sumptuous and exquisite food or surroundings'; 'something which conduces to enjoyment or comfort in addition to what are accounted the necessaries of life'), or 'refined and intense enjoyment'. In many instances, 'luxury' takes on an abstract sense that potentially embraces both lifestyle and objects without specifying whether lifestyle or objects or both are meant ('His taste for luxury outran his means'.)

‘Luxury’ is at best an inexact translation of ἀβροσύνη and its cognates, which are better rendered as ‘elegance’, ‘an elegant lifestyle’, ‘elegant’, or ‘elegantly’ in most of their occurrences. While hard and fast conclusions about the meaning of τρυφή are rendered difficult by the sheer number of its occurrences and the variety of ways in which it is employed, the preceding discussion suggests that there is an even lower degree of correspondence between ‘luxury’ and τρυφή. Two problems in equating τρυφή and ‘luxury’ merit specific discussion.

First, a certain degree of confusion is created by how the meaning of ‘luxury’ has changed over time. In its early usages the English term ‘luxury’ had the same sort of overtones of moral disapproval as those associated with the Latin *luxuria*; but, starting in the seventeenth century CE, the term ‘luxury’ was gradually ‘de-moralised’ and became increasingly morally neutral or even positive (Berry 1994, 101–98; Scott 2015, 1–24). Although τρυφή can have a neutral or even positive valence, it was regularly used in a pejorative sense that had strong overtones of moral disapproval. In that respect ‘luxury’ was at one time a better match for τρυφή than it is in the present day. To some extent, mistranslation of τρυφή is a product of the fact that the lexicographical resources for translating ancient Greek into modern languages have roots that reach back into the eighteenth century, when the ‘moralised’ sense of ‘luxury’ was current and rendering τρυφή as ‘luxury’ was less problematic.

Second, there was not in Greek a single word that organized under a single conceptual heading the full range of meanings embedded in ‘luxury’. That may initially produce a certain degree of consternation, but it is, upon further reflection, not particularly surprising. Consider, in the way of comparanda, the English term ‘economy’. As Finley (1999, 21) observed, the Greeks

farmed, traded, manufactured, mined, taxed, coined, deposited and loaned money, made profits or failed in their enterprises. And they discussed these activities in their talk and their writing. What they did not do, however, was to combine these particular activities conceptually into a unit...

In a similar fashion, Greeks clearly had much to say about what we could call ‘luxury’, but their conceptual framework for discussing that subject matter does not correspond to our own.

The absence of anything resembling an exact equivalent for ‘luxury’ in Greek produces potential pitfalls in translation. As soon as either ἀβροσύνη or τρυφή is translated as ‘luxury’, there is an almost inevitable tendency to transfer the full range of meanings associated with ‘luxury’ into the passage in question, and that in turn easily slips into misinterpretations.

ἀβροσύνη and τρυφή in Plutarch’s work on Sparta

Plutarch sees four stages in the history of τρυφή in Sparta: (1) before Lycurgus’ time τρυφή ran rampant, (2) after the Lycurgan reforms τρυφή was extirpated, (3) at the end of the Peloponnesian War the influx of wealth that came with Sparta’s victory over Athens led to the re-appearance of τρυφή, and (4) during the reigns of Agis IV and Cleomenes III (ultimately futile) attempts were made to pursue reforms that would have once again eliminated τρυφή from Sparta.

This pattern reflects explanations offered by Greek writers before Plutarch’s time to account for the decline in Spartan power after Leuktra. Although the fragmentary nature of many of the relevant sources makes it difficult to be certain, it seems likely that Ephorus was responsible for articulating a long-lived argument, summarized by Strabo as follows: ‘*Homonoia* appears when dissension, which is the result of greed (*pleonexia*) and *tryphê*, is removed. All those who live in a self-restrained and simple manner encounter neither envy nor arrogance nor hatred towards those who are like them [*homoioi*]’ (*Geography* 10.4.16 = *FGrH/BNJ* 70 F 149).⁵

This statement appears in a description of Ephorus' views on the Cretan *politeia*, but the basic principles seem to have been applied broadly in Ephorus' work, including the sections on Sparta. That and other fragments (FF 42, 148) of Ephorus' *Histories* suggest that he offered a narrative in which Lycurgus constructed a *politeia* characterised by a simple lifestyle that instilled *andria* (manliness). Ephorus attributed the collapse of Spartan power after Leuktra to an influx of gold and silver coinage (which he claimed did not circulate among Spartans before the end of the Peloponnesian War: F 205) and the appearance of greed (*πλεονεξία*) and *τρυφή* in what had been an austere community (FGrH/BNJ 70 FF 118, 149, 173).

Plutarch thus trod a well-worn path in his account of *τρυφή* in Sparta. That does not, however, provide any immediate insight into precisely what Plutarch understood *τρυφή* to be, because *τρυφή* had a wide range of meanings that evolved markedly over time. One cannot simply presume that *τρυφή* meant the same thing, for example, to Ephorus and to Plutarch. Given that much of his extensive corpus of writings survives, by far the best approach to exploring what the absence of *τρυφή* in Sparta meant to Plutarch is to look carefully at passages in which Plutarch uses *τρυφή*, especially with respect to Sparta. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that for Plutarch biography and history overlapped, in part because he believed that leaders imbued communities with their own traits. In the *Lycurgus*, for example, he writes that 'a good leader makes good followers' (30.4; cf. Liebert 2016, 77–96). Hence the traits of leaders such as Lycurgus can be read as characteristic of Sparta as a whole.

In the extant corpus of Plutarch's work, *ἀβροσύνη* and its cognates appear nine times, *τρυφή* and its cognates 160 times. One of the nine appearances of *ἀβροσύνη* comes in a quotation of Solon's poetry, and in four instances *ἀβροσύνη* is paired with *τρυφή*, so it is the latter that is clearly Plutarch's term of choice for something approximating the English 'luxury'. Of the nine appearances of *ἀβροσύνη*, one applies to Sparta; of the 160 instances of *τρυφή*, 25 apply to Sparta or Spartans.

Certain passages merit close attention because their content offers insight into what the term *τρυφή* meant to Plutarch. As will become apparent, the primary meanings of *τρυφή* when applied by Plutarch to Sparta are 'decadence' and 'invidious, tasteless ostentation'. This is evident, for example, in a passage from the *Comparison of Aristides and Cato* (3.1), in which Plutarch states that by introducing an iron coinage Lycurgus 'stripped away *ta tryphōnta* and festering sores (*ὑπουλα*) and inflammations of wealth (*φλεγμαίνοντα*)'. A proper translation of *ta tryphōnta* is not easily arrived at, but whatever phrasing one chooses, the close connection between *τρυφῶντα*, *ὑπουλα*, and *φλεγμαίνοντα* leave no doubt that *τρυφή* is for Plutarch very far from being a morally neutral term.

The most informative relevant passage is *Lycurgus* 9.3–5, in which Plutarch discusses the consequences of the introduction of a coinage made from iron rather than precious metal.

After this he [Lycurgus] banished useless and superfluous *technai* from outside Sparta. ... [M]ost would probably have been eliminated by the common currency ... The iron money, after all, could not be exported elsewhere in Greece, and ... did not have value elsewhere. As a result, it was not possible to buy any shoddy foreign goods, and commercial cargo did not enter the harbours; no sophist teaching rhetoric trod Lakonian soil; no begging seer; no pimp; no maker of gold or silver ornaments [*χρυσῶν ... ἀργυρῶν καλλωπισμάτων*], since there was no coined money. Thus gradually isolated from the things that inflame and feed it, *tryphê* was extinguished. And those who had great possessions were not better off, because there was no public outlet for their wealth [*ὄδον οὐκ ἔχούσης εἰς μέσον τῆς εὐπορίας*]; rather it was immured in their homes, idle. As a result craftsmanship of everyday, essential items of furniture such as beds and chairs

and tables was first-rate ... The lawgiver was responsible for this too, since craftsmen, having been freed from making useless things, displayed the beauty of their workmanship in essential ones.

In this passage Plutarch lists those things that ‘inflare’ τρυφή: shoddy goods, sophists teaching rhetoric, begging seers, pimps, and makers of gold and silver ornaments. That list virtually certainly indicates that Plutarch has in mind here something much closer to ‘decadence’ than morally neutral ‘luxury’.⁶ A similar usage can be found in the *Against Colotes* 33 (= *Moralia* 1127b–c), where Plutarch, after praising Athens for its freedom and Sparta for its obedience, contrasts procreating with prostitutes, wealth, τρυφή, and wanton violence on one hand with law and justice on the other.

The sense of decadence embedded in τρυφή is reinforced by another passage from the *Lycurgus* (10.1–2), in which Plutarch describes the creation of the *syssitia*. He begins by saying that Lycurgus wished ‘to attack *tryphê* still more’ and so instituted *syssitia* in which Spartans ate specified foods in each other’s company and did not pass their time at home,

reclining on couches with extravagant coverings and extravagant tables [nearby], in the hands of craftsmen and cooks, being fattened in the dark, like gluttonous animals, and destroying their bodies together with their character, surrendered to every appetite and surfeit that demands lengthy slumbers, hot baths, much rest, and, as it were, daily nursing.

Insofar as Plutarch explicitly states that the *syssitia* were intended to attack τρυφή and given that the *syssitia* prevent the surfeited lassitude described in the latter part of the passage, here too τρυφή seems to refer to something much closer to ‘decadence’ than ‘luxury’. The expectation of daily nursing recalls the original meaning of τρυφή, a sense of privilege.

The preceding discussion does not exhaust the interpretive value of *Lycurgus* 9.3–5, which gives τρυφή a second valence perhaps best summarized as ‘invidious ostentation’. This is apparent from Plutarch’s mention of χρυσῶν ... ἀργυρῶν καλλωπισμάτων and the phrase ὁδὸν οὐκ ἔχούσης εἰς μέσον τῆς εὐπορίας. καλλωπισμός – which means something like ‘adorning oneself for the purpose of display’ – and its cognates appear 37 times in Plutarch’s works. The fact that Plutarch puts gold and silver items made specifically for the purpose of display on the list of things that nourish τρυφή, and his statement that wealth was, literally, given ‘no road into the middle’, leaves little doubt that he saw ostentatious display of wealth as a component of τρυφή.

For Plutarch τρυφή thus seems to have had a strong element of ostentation, which was problematic because it created a considerable degree of resentment. This is evident from his description of the lifestyle of the Spartan king Cleomenes,

His [Cleomenes’] lifestyle was simple and plain [εὐτελῆ καὶ ἀφελῆ] and in no way more pretentious than that of the common man, and it served as a public example of self-restraint. This gave him a certain weight in his dealings with the rest of the Greeks. For when men encountered the other kings, they were not so much astounded by their wealth and extravagance [πολυτελεία] as they were filled with loathing for their haughtiness and pretension, as the other kings presented themselves in an offensive and harsh fashion to those they encountered; but when men approached Cleomenes, who was an actual king as well as bearing that title, and then saw no purple clothing wrapped around him, and no array of couches and litters... (*Cleomenes* 13.1–2)

Here Cleomenes avoids giving offense to other people because of his lifestyle, which is simple and contrasts sharply with the extravagance (*polyteleia*) of other kings. For Plutarch, the consequences of the resentment generated by τρυφή could be quite severe. In *Advice about Keeping Well* 7 (= *Moralia* 125f) he describes the philosopher Krates as ‘thinking that *tryphê* and *polyteleia* were as much to blame as anything for the growth of *stasis* and tyrannies in *poleis*...’

The constellation of words with which τρυφή is associated offers reason to believe that the preceding discussion does not cover the full range of meanings of τρυφή in Plutarch’s treatments of Sparta. In the relevant passages, Plutarch repeatedly links τρυφή to:

- (a) πολυτέλεια (extravagance, which occurs 11 times in the 25 passages that include τρυφή);
- (b) μαλακία (softness);
- (c) words indicating ostentation, including ἀλαζονεία (boastfulness) and καλλωπισμός;
- (d) various words indicating sickness, such as νοσήματα;
- (e) πλεονεξία and related words and phrases such as πλούτου ζήλος (zeal for wealth) and φιλοπλουτία (passion for wealth).

(a), (b), (c) are all related to either decadence or ostentation and (d) reflects Plutarch’s disapproval of τρυφή. While the repeated association that Plutarch makes between τρυφή and πλεονεξία may be a simple matter of processual logic – τρυφή presumes wealth, which is acquired by those afflicted by πλεονεξία – it is possible that τρυφή for Plutarch had connotations of unrestrained desire for acquisition (and display) of wealth.

Reading τρυφή in Plutarch’s treatments of Sparta

With a more nuanced understanding of what τρυφή meant to Plutarch, we are in a position to reconsider his descriptions of the presence and absence of τρυφή in Sparta. In approaching that undertaking, it is important to keep Plutarch’s philosophical commitments in mind.⁷ Although Plutarch had at his disposal an ample supply of pre-existing, philosophically tinted portrayals of Sparta on which he could draw, he was neither a simple copyist nor an uninspired compiler, but rather articulated his own unique vision of Sparta (Beck 1999). In doing so, Plutarch’s passionate attachments to specific philosophical views had a powerful effect on what material he drew from pre-existing work on Sparta and how he creatively combined and reshaped that material. Plutarch’s philosophical views were themselves complex, in no small part because he was free to draw inspiration from a number of different traditions. The general consensus among scholars in the present day is Plutarch subscribed to a Platonism that incorporated, among other things, elements of Aristotelianism, Cynicism, and Stoicism insofar as those elements harmonized with his overall Platonic framework (de Blois and Bons 1995, 99).

A key issue in understanding Plutarch’s presentation of τρυφή in Sparta is that he subscribed to an Aristotelian-inspired ideal of virtue as a mean between excess and deficit (Becchi 2014, 73; though cf. Babut 1996, 16–28). Aristotle explores virtues and vices in depth in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. In doing so he connects the concept of virtue as a mean between excess and deficit to the maintenance of health in the body on both a practical and analogical level (Gericke 1999).

Among the virtues and vices that Aristotle considers, one group has to do with pleasure and pain. The virtues and vices pertaining to resistance to pleasure (ἡδονή) are σωφροσύνη (‘self-control’ → mean), ἀκολασία (‘intemperance’ → excess), and ἀναισθησία (‘lack of sensation’ → deficit). Those pertaining to resistance to pain (λύπη) are καρτερία (‘endurance’ → mean), κακοπάθεια (‘misery’ → excess), τρυφερότης (deficit).⁸ In Book 7 of the *Nicomachean*

Ethics Aristotle outlines a related pair of binaries that are similar to but not strictly speaking virtues and vices (because they do not involve choice): ἀκρασία/ἐγκράτεια ('lack of self-control'/'self-control') and μαλακία/καρτερία ('softness'/'endurance'). Aristotle classifies τρυφή as a kind of μαλακία (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1150b3).

The Aristotelian system of categorizing virtues and vices plays an important role in shaping Plutarch's portrayal of τρυφή in Sparta. ἀκολασία, τρυφή, ἀκρασία, and μαλακία all appear repeatedly in Plutarch's description of Sparta before the reforms instituted by Lycurgus, on the one hand, and Agis and Cleomenes, on the other (for example, *Lycurgus* 4.4, 14.4; *Agis* 3.1, 6.5, 10.5; *Cleomenes* 12.4). It is particularly interesting that, like Aristotle, Plutarch in his discussions of Sparta links τρυφή and μαλακία on four separate occasions (*Agis* 3.1, 10.5; *Pelopidas* 1.6–7; *Sayings of the Spartans* 19 [= *Moralia* 210a]; cf. *Alcibiades* 16.1).

Plutarch's primary complaint against τρυφή was that it represented a form of excess unhealthy for the body and soul of individuals and for polities as a whole. This is evident in a passage in the *Agis* (10.7–8) in which Agis criticises Leonidas for attempting to thwart reforms to the Spartan state, on the grounds that Leonidas had praised ephors from earlier periods who had tried to remove *tryphê*, extravagance, and ostentation (τρυφήν καὶ πολυτέλειαν καὶ ἀλαζονείαν) from Sparta, precisely what Agis is attempting to do by attacking 'excess and error' (ἀμετρία καὶ πλημμύλεια) in Sparta.

The same of view of τρυφή as unhealthy excess is reflected in Plutarch's claim in the *Comparison of Aristides and Cato* (3.1) that Lycurgus 'stripped away *ta tryphônta* and festering sores and inflammations of wealth' (cf. *On Moral Virtue* 12 [= *Moralia* 452a]).⁹ Plutarch in fact habitually characterises Lycurgus as a physician who cured Sparta's ills (for example, *Lycurgus* 4.3; Lucchesi 2014, 10–52, 63–100).

Within the bounds of Aristotelian ethics, the proper response to either excess or deficit was not the wholesale removal of the impulse in question but rather its moderation. Plutarch himself advocated an Aristotelian inspired ideal of μετριοπάθεια, alternatively known as μετριότης (Dillon 2014, 62–3; Opsomer 2014, 96). μετριοπάθεια involved finding a mean between absence and excess in both emotions and actions in which reason keeps passions in check and within acceptable boundaries (e.g. *On the Control of Anger* 10 [= *Moralia* 458c]).¹⁰

Plutarch praises Lycurgan Sparta in large part because Lycurgus created a lifestyle that produced μετριοπάθεια in its citizens. In the *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa* 2.4, Plutarch specifically states that both lawgivers were laudable for 'removing the excesses and supplying the deficiencies of their citizens' (τὰς οὖν ὑπερβολὰς ἀφαιροῦντες ... καὶ τὰς ἐνδείας ἀναπληροῦντες; cf. *Lycurgus* 7.3). Moreover, Plutarch does not claim that Lycurgus, Agis, and Cleomenes pushed Sparta from one extreme to the other (e.g. from ἀκολασία to ἀναισθησία), but rather that they brought Sparta to a healthy mean. With respect to pleasure and pain, finding the mean meant adopting a lifestyle that fostered σωφροσύνη, ἐγκράτεια, and καρτερία. Those three words occur with almost monotonous regularity in Plutarch's treatment of Sparta,¹¹ and Plutarch explicitly sets τρυφή against σωφροσύνη. For instance, he describes Agesilaus on campaign in Asia Minor as winning good repute because of his σωφροσύνη, which stood out because of the contrast with the τρυφή of Persian officials (*Agesilaus* 14.1–2; see below for further comments on this passage).

The passages thus far considered all present τρυφή in Sparta as an excess explicitly or implicitly measured against σωφροσύνη, such that τρυφή is characterised as a form of μαλακία and hence what could comfortably be labeled as 'decadence'. Plutarch elsewhere presents τρυφή in Sparta as excess in the form of invidious ostentation. Here again Plutarch drew upon

Aristotelian ethics, in which one of the mean/excess/deficit triads pertains to giving and getting greater things, with the mean being μεγαλοπρέπεια ('magnificence'), the excess ἀπειροκαλία ('vulgar extravagance'), and the deficit μικροπρέπεια ('stinginess') (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1107b17–19).

Although τρυφή and ἀπειροκαλία are both excesses in the Aristotelian system of virtues and vices, Aristotle does not connect the two; Plutarch, however, does.¹² In the *Agis* (7.6), Plutarch states that women in Sparta owned much of the wealth and opposed Agis' reforms in part because 'they would be stripped of *tryphê*, which on account of *apeirokalia*, made them reckon themselves happy'.¹³ The same connection is made in Plutarch's life of Dion¹⁴ and in the *Lycurgus*. In the *Lycurgus* (13.3–4), Plutarch claims that one of Lycurgus' rhetras required that houses be built using only axes for the roof and saws for the doors (thus preventing elaborate woodwork such as coffered ceilings). He adds, 'Lycurgus was the first to perceive that a house of that sort does not have room for *tryphê* and *polyteleia*. Nor is anyone so *apeirokalos* and senseless as to introduce into a simple and common house silver-footed couches and purple coverlets and gold drinking-cups...' The conclusion that Plutarch objected to τρυφή in part because it involved a tasteless display of wealth is reinforced by the fact on that on one occasion (*Agis* 10.8) he connects τρυφή to both πολυτέλεια and ἀλαζονεία. This last is yet another Aristotelian excess (for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1108a20–3), which might be defined as 'boastfulness, pretence as exaggeration'.

In characterising Sparta after the reforms of Lycurgus and Agis and Cleomenes, Plutarch relies not on Aristotelian vocabulary for the virtue contrasted with ἀπειροκαλία (μεγαλοπρέπεια), but rather on the Cynic term εὐτέλεια ('simplicity') and its cognates. The Cynic tradition placed emphasis on a pair of binaries, τρυφή/σωφροσύνη and πολυτέλεια/εὐτέλεια, that resonates with, while differing from, those articulated in Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For instance, Teles, in *On Self-Sufficiency* (pg. 6 Hense), criticises *polyteleia* and praises *euteleia* and *sôphrosynê*. The binary pairs τρυφή/σωφροσύνη and πολυτέλεια/εὐτέλεια were also present in the Stoic tradition (Brunt 2013, 111 n.11, 117). For example, they appear in the work of Musonius Rufus, who is frequently characterised as a Stoic, but whose thinking was strongly influenced by Platonism and Cynicism (Inwood 2017).¹⁵ Like Plutarch, Musonius saw much to admire in Sparta (Keith 2011, 170–3). In *Lecture 20* he writes,

Now we should find that the best lawgiver – and I think first all of Lycurgus, who drove *polyteleia* out of Sparta and substituted *euteleia*, who preferred a life of deprivation as a means of producing courage to a life of excess, and who did away with *tryphê* as a corrupting influence.

The influence of Cynic and Stoic ideas about τρυφή and εὐτέλεια on Plutarch is clear at numerous points in his work. We have already seen that Plutarch quotes Krates as saying that '*tryphê* and *polyteleia* were as much to blame as anything for the growth of *stasis* and tyrannies in *poleis*...' (*Advice about Keeping Well* 7 [= *Moralia* 125f]). The Cynic influence on Plutarch's thinking about Sparta in particular is evident from the fact that at *Lycurgus* 31.2 Plutarch claims that Plato, Diogenes, and Zeno all based their ideal polities on Sparta and that Lycurgus made the Spartans 'free and self-sufficient ... and self-controlled' (ἐλευθέριοι καὶ αὐτάρκεις ... καὶ σωφρονοῦντες), thus conferring on the Spartans three traits highly prized by the Cynics. Moreover, εὐτέλεια appears on 13 separate occasions in Plutarch's description of the lifestyle of Spartans and their leaders.¹⁶ One might also note that πολυτέλεια appears in 8 of the 25 passages in which Plutarch uses τρυφή to describe Sparta; in one such passage from the *Lycurgus* (13.3–5), Plutarch uses πολυτέλεια no less than four times.

While εὐτέλεια was regularly connected with σωφροσύνη and resistance to pleasures and pains, Plutarch seems to understand εὐτέλεια as also encompassing resistance to an impulse to put one's wealth display in pursuit of status – an impulse that Aristotle closely associates with people suffering from ἀπειροκαλία. In the *Agesilaus* (14.1–2), Plutarch draws a contrast between the τρυφή of Persian officials and the εὐτέλεια of Agesilaus, who during his campaign in Asia Minor impresses everyone with his unaffected lifestyle, which is described using the phrase σωφροσύνης αὐτοῦ καὶ εὐτελείας καὶ μετριότητος.¹⁷

Conclusion

The revised understanding of the significance of τρυφή for Plutarch proposed here has important ramifications for how we read his description of Sparta. Plutarch remains the fullest ancient literary source for Sparta, and his work has exerted immense influence on modern views. Plutarch has been understood as saying that Lycurgus and, subsequently, Agis and Cleomenes found Sparta suffused in τρυφή, translated as 'luxury', and took steps to eliminate it. Insofar as Lycurgus' reforms were successfully implemented and maintained for centuries, Plutarch has been one of the primary supports for the idea that Spartans abjured luxury of all kinds.

We have seen that Plutarch describes Lycurgus as having extinguished τρυφή, with the result that εὐτέλεια ('simplicity') became one of Sparta's defining traits, and one might be inclined to think that εὐτέλεια implicitly precludes anything that would fall under the heading of luxury. That was certainly the case when that term was used with reference to Diogenes, whose commitment to εὐτέλεια precluded owning something as simple as a cup (Plutarch *Progress in Virtue* 8 [= *Moralia* 79f]), and on occasion Plutarch comes close to portraying specific Spartan leaders as figures whose asceticism was comparable with that of Diogenes.

However, for Plutarch εὐτέλεια was not under normal circumstances about living in extreme poverty modelled on Diogenes.¹⁸ The audience for which Plutarch wrote consisted primarily of affluent elites and, as Lieve van Hoof (2010, 10) has noted, throughout Plutarch's extensive corpus of writing wealth is taken for granted. In his work on Cynic political philosophy, Christopher Turner (2015) translates εὐτέλεια as 'elegant simplicity', an understanding of the term that fits well with how it is used by Plutarch.

Plutarch suggests that after the Lycurgan reforms Spartans took pleasure in tasteful, beautifully made objects. To return to *Lycurgus* 9.3–5, Plutarch states that after Lycurgus extirpated τρυφή, everyday items such as couches, chairs, and tables were crafted with great skill. He goes on to say that 'craftsmen, having been freed from making useless things, displayed the beauty of their workmanship (τὴν καλλιτεχνίαν) in necessary ones'.¹⁹ καλλιτεχνία is a relatively rare word, and occurs only one further time in Plutarch's corpus, in his *Life of Pericles* (13.1), in which it appears in a description of the magnificent structures that resulted from the Periclean building program.

Later in the *Lycurgus* (22.1) Plutarch states that during war time young men were permitted to adorn (καλλωπίζεσθαι) their hair, weapons, and clothes. That statement resonates with a passage (*Philopoemen* 9.3–7) in which Plutarch describes Philopoemen persuading the Achaeans to give up a lifestyle characterised by a devotion to *tryphê* and *polyteleia*, after which the Achaeans melt down their gold and silver table ware to decorate their arms and armour, while also dyeing their helmet plumes purple and embroidering their cloaks. Plutarch states that, 'polyteleia in other objects of display induces *tryphê* and implants *malakia* in those who use them ... but when *polyteleia* is seen in these sort of things [elaborate arms and armour] it

strengthens and exalts the spirit...’ This suggests that in Plutarch’s view young men in Sparta during wartime were permitted not just to adorn themselves but do so with *polyteleia*.

More broadly speaking, Plutarch portrays Sparta as a community steeped in the right kind of philosophy. For Plutarch the Spartan emphasis on education and training of character (e.g. *Lycurgus* 4.1, 13.1, 21.1) meant that the Spartans, although limited in their formal study of reading and writing (*Lycurgus* 16.6), formed a community of philosophers. Plutarch endorses the sentiment that ‘to philosophize more than to exercise was the special characteristic of being a Spartan’ (μᾶλλον ἐστι τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν ἢ τὸ φιλογυμναστεῖν λακωνίζειν: *Lycurgus* 20.6). He also claims (*Lycurgus* 31.2) that Lycurgus ‘gave ... a display of an entire *polis* philosophizing’ (Keith 2011, 106–45, 160–1).

It would, therefore, be erroneous to say that for Plutarch the absence of τρυφή is tantamount to the absence of what we would call ‘luxury’. Rather the absence of τρυφή is the absence of decadence and invidious, tasteless ostentation. One might say that, with respect to attitudes toward wealth, Plutarch’s Sparta is a place in which an entire community resembled well-mannered elites of his own time, who make proper use of their affluence while living a life of elegant simplicity.

One could, of course, object that Plutarch’s characterisation of Sparta has little to do with the *realia* of life in Sparta, in which case his claim that τρυφή was absent from Sparta can tell us nothing about the presence or absence of luxury (Schneeweiss 1979, 378). Scepticism is certainly a reasonable response to Plutarch’s intimations that the asceticism of certain Spartans rivalled that of Diogenes (for example, *Agesilaus* 14.1–2), and it is no doubt true that descriptions of Sparta in some other ancient sources diverge widely from that provided by Plutarch. Aristotle, for instance, flatly states that in Sparta women ‘live in a dissolute fashion, with respect to every form of dissipation, and suffused in *tryphê*’ (ζῶσι γὰρ ἀκολάστως πρὸς ἅπασαν ἀκολασίαν καὶ τρυφερῶς; *Politics* 1269b23–4). However, even a complete dismissal of what Plutarch says about Sparta is significant with respect to our understanding of luxury in Sparta, because the idea that the Spartans entirely abjured luxury has long been based in no small part on Plutarch’s portrayal of Sparta.

On the other hand, if one wishes to assign any degree of credibility to Plutarch’s treatment of τρυφή in Sparta, then the arguments articulated here suggest that Plutarch’s account leaves ample room for ‘luxury’ in Sparta. There are, moreover, traces in the literary and archaeological record that fit nicely with Plutarch’s work. A fragment of an elegiac poem by Ion of Chios (F 27 West) describes a symposium during which attendants dispense wine using silver pitchers (προχύταισιν ἐν ἀργυρέοις). Edmund Stewart (2019) has persuasively argued that this poem commemorates a symposium, held by King Archidamus II, that Ion attended during a visit to Sparta; moreover, Stewart suggests that a corrupted line in the poem characterises Archidamus as drinking from a gold cup. Aristotle’s description of μεγαλοπρέπεια includes magnificence in the treatment of foreign guests, which recalls the stories, going back to Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 1.2.61) and repeated by Plutarch (*Cimon* 10.5), that the wealthy Spartan Lichas entertained all foreign visitors who came to Sparta for the Gymnopaïdai festival. One cannot help but wonder if Sparta was in reality not nearly as spartan as we have, due in part to mis-reading Plutarch, imagined it to be.

Abbreviations

BNJ = Brill's New Jacoby (<https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-jacoby>), Leiden, 2007–.

FGrH = F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin, 1923–.

Notes

¹ On Plutarch's influence on modern understandings of Sparta, see Powell 2018b, 6.

² See, for example, Cook 1962; Hodkinson 2000, 19–64.

³ See Osborne's and Millender's essays in this volume (Chapters 1 and 6) for further discussion of luxury as a form of something approximating decadence or ostentation. Millender argues that for Euripides, Plato, and Aristotle *tryphê* is a form of sumptuous extravagance or license resulting from lack of regulation. Osborne connects luxury to 'self-indulgent behaviour'.

⁴ This discussion of the meaning of ἀβροσύνη and τρυφή is much indebted to the Gormans' stimulating work (especially pp. 25–75), though I remain unconvinced by their argument that the concept of luxury as a corrupting force that led to the downfall of states was unknown before the Roman period.

⁵ On Ephorus in general, see Parmeggiani 2011. On Ephorus' portrayal of Sparta and its impact on later writers, see Christesen 2010.

⁶ The opposition between ἀχρήστων and περισσῶν on one hand and ἀναγκαίους and ἀναγκαῖα in this passage might conceivably speak to an opposition between what economists in the modern day call luxury and necessity goods (Hubbard, Garnett and Lewis 2013, 92–100), which would in turn suggest that τρυφή could be translated as 'luxury'. However, given that ἀχρήστων and περισσῶν are linked to τρυφή, it seems more likely that the intended opposition is between goods that 'incline' decadence and ostentation and those that do not.

⁷ Identification of the philosophical traditions that influenced Plutarch's characterization of Sparta is challenging for a variety of reasons. As Thomas Keith has noted, several different facets of Spartan society were regularly cited as an example, both positive and negative, by Hellenistic and Imperial philosophers from a variety of schools (Keith 2011, 4 and *passim*). In addition, adherents of the various schools engaged in a long-running dialogue over all things philosophical, with the result that different traditions overlapped and influenced each other, as did their treatments of Sparta. Moreover, it can be challenging to identify specific ways in which philosophical traditions in particular influenced Plutarch's portrayal of Sparta because 'for thinkers in the Socratic tradition – Stoics, Cynics, and Platonists above all – ... key terms that were used to characterize Sparta in popular discourse frequently overlapped with the ethical vocabulary particular to their own philosophical traditions – without, however, necessarily being synonymous with it' (Keith 2011, 4). The scholarly literature on Plutarch's philosophical commitments is substantial and growing rapidly. A good starting place can be found in the articles in Beck 2014, especially Becchi 2014, Dillon 2014, and Opsomer 2014.

⁸ See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1117b23–1119b18; *Eudemian Ethics* 1221a29–33; *Rhetoric* 1384a1–3.

⁹ On the Platonic resonances here, see de Blois 2005, 95.

¹⁰ In valorising μετριοπάθεια, Plutarch acknowledges ἀπάθεια, a complete immunity to emotions, as a possible ideal, but one unattainable by humans under normal circumstances.

¹¹ For σωφροσύνη, see e.g. *Lycurgus* 5.6, 12.4, 15.5, 26.1; *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa* 1.1, 2.1; *Agessilaus* 14.1; *Agis* 7.3; *Cleomenes* 2.1; *Comparison of Agis and Cleomenes and the Gracchi* 1.4; *Comparison of Lysander and Sulla* 5.5; *Sayings of Spartan Women* 24 (= *Moralia* 242c).

¹² The connection Plutarch draws between τρυφή and ἀπειροκαλία is atypical and may well have its roots in Stoicism. Epictetus (F13 Schenkl) reads, in part, as follows: 'But, says someone, I see the good and excellent perishing from hunger and cold. – And do you not see those who are not good and excellent perishing from *tryphê* and *alazoneia* and *apeirokalia*?' Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.3.35, a chapter with the title "Ὅτι οὐ χρὴ περὶ τὴν πολυτέλειαν τῶν σκευῶν ἐσπουδακέναι", which characterises elaborate drinking vessels as 'proofs of *apeirokalos tryphê*'.

¹³ For an astute analysis of the portrayal of the *tryphê* of Spartan women in the work of Euripides, Plato, and Aristotle, see Millender's essay in this volume, Chapter 6.

¹⁴ Plutarch notes (4.6) that Dion responded readily to Plato's 'call to virtue' even though Dion 'was fully accustomed ... to ostentatious service at court and *apeirokalos tryphê* and a regimen that counts pleasures and excesses as the highest good'.

¹⁵ The attitudes of Stoics toward Sparta were not uniform: Keith 2011, 256–7 and *passim*. Context is also important in that, as Keith points out (91), ‘Plutarch shows a respect for Stoicism in his Spartan *Lives* generally that is noticeably greater than elsewhere in his corpus’.

¹⁶ The relevant passages are: *Lycurgus* 4.3, 10.3, 12.1, 19.3, 24.4; *Agesilaus* 14.1; *Agis* 14.4; *Cleomenes* 11.4, 13.1, 32.5; *Comparison of Agis and Cleomenes and the Gracchi* 1.4; *Sayings of the Spartans* 22 (= *Moralia* 228d), *Ancient Customs of the Spartans* 13 (= *Moralia* 237e).

¹⁷ On this passage, see Shipley 1997, 196–200.

¹⁸ Brunt points out that for the Stoics, despite their invectives against τρυφή and praise of the simple life, ‘moderation is the real lesson, not any fundamental departure from the lifestyle of the upper classes whom they addressed’ (Brunt 2013, 140).

¹⁹ Note also Plutarch’s reference at *Agesilaos* 19.5-6 (drawing on Xenophon, *Agesilaos* 8.7)) to the decorated *kannathra* that carried Spartiate girls in sacred processions. Cf. Annalisa Paradiso and James Roy’s discussion (this volume, Chapter 4) of the skilled labour available in Sparta for the manufacture of such elegant carriages.

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