

#### IV. THE CITY

Although Xenophon spent much of his adult life living outside Athens and the *polis* framework, Athens itself and the city as the basis for achieving the good life were central to his thought, both philosophical and practical. He keenly observed the practices of other communities, especially Sparta, long a source of fascination for Athens' elite.<sup>1</sup> He compared the impact of different customs and forms of rule on cities such as Sparta (*Constitution of the Lacedaimonians, Agesilaus*), Syracuse (*Hiero*), and his imagined Persia and Babylon (*Cyropaedia*). Some of his thought on constructing political communities is contained in his *politeia* texts (*LP*; *Cyr.* 1.2), but his most sustained and systematic engagement with the topic is through Socrates' conversations with Athenians in Book 3 of the *Memorabilia*.

In both real and imagined contexts, Xenophon highlights the difficulties of civic elites living up to the expectations placed on them, and the punishments suffered by Athenian generals whose performance in the field displeased the democracy. The latter ranged from dismissal and fines (Timotheus, *Hell.* 6.2.10–13; see Chapter 5) to execution (the Arginusae generals, *Hell.* 1.6–7). He criticizes the tendency of Athenian and other democracies to punish their leaders, arguing that it operates as a disincentive to elite participation in governance (*Hell.* 1.7, *Mem.* 3.1–7). He also criticizes the fickleness of the *dēmos*, while showing how sophistic discourse had subverted the elite's commitment to social unity, typified by his representation of Alcibiades' criticism of Pericles' attempts to define law (*Mem.* 1.2.40–6, discussed below; see also *Cyn.* 13.1–9).<sup>2</sup>

Despite his own experiences, Xenophon argues strongly that political participation is a necessary duty for the elite male citizen, who realizes his potential for excellence by benefiting his community. He treats the education of the young, their first experiences outside their home, as vital for the formation of political community. He has Socrates criticize the hedonist Aristippus for arguing against political participation (*Mem.* 2.1). The idea that the majority might oppress the minority ran counter to the Greek ideal of *homonoia*, consensus and unanimity among the citizen body, an ideal which Xenophon shared (*Mem.* 4.4.16). He

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Ar. *Vesp.* 462–76; Critias fr. DK 88 B6, 34–7. See also Bonazzi 2020: 133–4.

<sup>2</sup> On the *Cynegeticus* passage, see L'Allier 2008.

also addresses questions of inequality between citizens, and the just distribution of reward and honour, but in the context of Cyrus' Persian army rather than Athens itself (*Cyr.* 2.1–4).

Xenophon uses existing typologies and structures to characterize political regimes in terms of the number of persons exercising rule: one, few, or many. He sees good and bad versions of regime types, especially monarchy. He values stability and consensus (*homonoia*), seeing regimes which achieved them as aligned with the divine ordering of the world (*eukosmia*; *Cyr.* 1.2.4, 8.1.33).<sup>3</sup> For Xenophon, such regimes are those outside Athens: Cyrus' Persian empire and Sparta in the past. One problem with Athenian democracy, as he sees it, is that mass participation and debate has led to division and faction, along class lines, eliminating the possibility of consensus and effectively tyrannizing the elite minority. Another is that free citizens have to submit to the rule of office-holders, a situation casually analogized to enslavement in the discussion between Socrates and Aristippus (*Mem.* 2.1.8–17).

Xenophon's political language suggests that he is addressing readers sympathetic with a conservative and anti-democratic perspective. In both historical and philosophical works he refers to the *dēmos* as an *ochlos* ('mob'), and a *plēthos* ('number', 'mass', sometimes 'majority'), less pejorative but also dehumanizing.<sup>4</sup>

### Preparing the next generation: Socrates and other educators

Unlike Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates, Xenophon was not a professional educator; while he is deeply concerned with the education of the next generation, his critique of educators does not arise from a personal stake in the business of teaching. He believes that education can develop cohesion among the governing class, and therefore that the education of civic leaders should be managed by the city itself rather than left to private family arrangements, as was the case in Athens (*LP* 2.2). He praises Sparta's arrangements, which he ascribes to the lawgiver Lycurgus, for preparing its elite male citizens for their military

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ochlos*: *Hell.* 1.3.22, 1.4.13, 1.7.13, 2.2.21, 3.3.7, 3.4.7, 4.4.8, 11, 6.2.33, 6.4.14; *Mem.* 1.1.14, 3.7.5; *Symp.* 2.18, 8.5; *Cyr.* 2.2.21, 7.5.39; *Hiero* 2.3, 6.4; and frequently in the *Anabasis* to refer to the camp followers. *plēthos* referring to the *dēmos*, in a pejorative sense: *Hell.* 1.7.12, 5.2.32; *Mem.* 1.2.43. On Xenophon's sympathy with democracy, see Gray 2011c; Christ 2020.

role, and he assigns a similar set of institutions to Persia. The idea that education, at least for future leaders, was a collective or social responsibility was shared by Plato, seen in his idealized arrangements for Kallipolis (*Republic*) and Magnesia (*Laws*).

Xenophon's educational ideal is evident in the arrangements he describes in his Persian *politeia*. The state education provided in the Persian *agora* is available only to a subset of boys from elite families who can pay for it (*Cyr.* 1.2.15), although it is a necessary qualification for holding office. That education is focused on learning about justice, as a key societal value (1.3.16–17), but also on developing both personal qualities of self-control, and military skills through physical education (1.2.6–8). Boys learn to manage their physical appetites through communal dining overseen by their teachers. Older youths learn additional skills through hunting practice, and from training sessions when they are not hunting.

In describing this educational regime, Xenophon draws on his knowledge of the Spartan education system, which he praises in his *Constitution of the Spartans* (*LP* 2.1–2, 3.2). He argues that arrangements like those he describes in Persia and Sparta ensure that boys and young men develop appropriate self-discipline and good habits. In Sparta, the education of boys is overseen by state-appointed tutors, and continues up to adulthood, a point at which discipline and exercise are particularly important (*LP* 3.1–2). In both Sparta and Persia, Xenophon identifies competition between the young for honour as a driver of moral as well as physical excellence.

Xenophon is concerned in the opening sections of the *Memorabilia* to defend Socrates as an educator, since his teaching drove one of the charges against him, that he corrupted the young (*Mem.* 1.2.1), an assessment that Xenophon finds 'astonishing' and attempts to rebut in detail. Xenophon knows that this charge rested on the fact that several of Socrates' associates had betrayed the city or participated in the 404–403 oligarchy, and that his prosecutors blamed Socrates for the actions of Critias, Alcibiades, and others. But Xenophon argues that these men sought out Socrates for the advantages which studying with him would give them – the increased ability to argue, for example – and that they did not experience the real, moral benefits of his teaching (1.2.24–5). Socrates was banned from teaching, indeed from speaking to young people at all, by the Thirty (1.2.38–41).

Xenophon also places Socrates in his intellectual context, marking out his difference from natural philosophers such as Anaxagoras with

their worryingly unconventional religious views. He first asserts Socrates' religious conventionality, showing how he conforms to correct practice both in his regular actions and also in encouraging others to honour the gods through offerings (*Mem.* 1.3.1–4). In Socrates' subsequent conversation with Aristodemus, who holds unconventional views and does not sacrifice to the usual gods, he sets out reasons for adhering to conventional practice, and gives an account of the power of the traditional gods expressed in terms which accommodate the newer discourse (1.4.2).

Xenophon shows Socrates carefully rebutting Aristodemus' views with an argument from the conscious design of the universe by a divine creator.<sup>5</sup> He points to natural desires – such as those of humans to procreate, of mothers to raise their children, and of children to live – as proof of a divine element in the workings of nature, and goes on to describe the omnipresence of the divine mind even where it cannot be perceived (1.4.7). Aristodemus counters with a common argument, that the gods have no concern for humans (1.4.11), but again Socrates responds with an argument based on the physical design of human beings as evidence that they are part of a cosmos created by an intelligent designer.

Through these two chapters, Xenophon makes it clear that the religious accusation against Socrates was groundless. However, he does also have to account for Socrates' religious peculiarity: his unusual communications from the gods voiced by his *daimonion* (*Mem.* 1.3.5; *Apol.* 8, 12–13). His depiction of the uproar at Socrates' trial acknowledges the jurors' objection to the idea that Socrates receives direct information and so has greater favour with the gods than they do.

In *Memorabilia* 4, Xenophon gives an idealized account of the teaching and encouragement which Socrates did provide, describing his attempt to educate Euthydemus, a young Athenian whom he meets in a saddler's shop at the edge of the *agora*, where the youth, too young to go into the marketplace to conduct business as an adult would, is sitting (*Mem.* 4.2.1).<sup>6</sup> As Christopher Moore has shown, this chapter offers an education in developing self-knowledge, in accordance with the Socratic Delphic maxim.<sup>7</sup> Euthydemus is eager to learn but clueless about how to do so; he has bought many books, but lacks the

<sup>5</sup> Dillery 1995: 186–94; Sedley 2007: 78–86.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson 2005a.

<sup>7</sup> Moore 2015: 216–35.

experience and knowledge to make any sense of them. Socrates engages him in conversation to expose the limits of his knowledge; Euthydemus' conventional ideas about justice fall apart under Socratic challenge. Socrates does not dispute Euthydemus' assertion that one cannot be a good citizen without being just (4.2.11), but under his probing Euthydemus is unable to determine what actions can be counted as just or not. The unjust acts which Euthydemus lists might be just in certain circumstances when deployed against enemies and performed to produce good ends: telling a lie is an unjust act, but a military commander might use deception to wrongfoot the enemy. And while Euthydemus readily concedes that deceiving enemies is just, Socrates suggests that deceiving your own citizens or troops might also be just if it improves morale and enables them to act (4.2.15–17).

The followers of Leo Strauss have extrapolated from Strauss's point that Euthydemus 'has a poor nature' the thought that Xenophon here represents the opposite of a Socratic education of a promising student.<sup>8</sup> However, there is no textual basis for this view; Euthydemus is gauche and ill-informed, but not irredeemable or ineducable. His inability to learn from books echoes Plato's views on the limits of writing as a means of transferring and inculcating knowledge. Socrates gently corrects Euthydemus' naïve rejection of religious custom and encourages him to follow 'the customary practice of his city' (4.3.16–18); Xenophon uses the youth to show how Socrates improved his students as participants in civic religion. The programme set out in *Memorabilia* 4 also makes clear the centrality of justice in interpersonal relations mediated through civic structures (4.4).

A key chapter (*Mem.* 4.5) establishes the personal values which the good citizen should demonstrate, particularly self-control (*enkrateia*) and moderation (*sōphrosunē*). Xenophon describes the citizen who has gained mastery of himself in opposition to the enslaved individual, who is imagined as lacking any capacity of self-management. Exercising freedom is impossible if one lacks self-control; such a condition is 'the worst form of slavery' (4.5.5) and akin to being an animal, not a human (4.5.11). Full control over physical appetites creates the space within which useful activity such as civic participation becomes possible (4.5.9–10). While this discussion sets out the

<sup>8</sup> L. Strauss 1972: 94; Pangle 2018: 166–7.

importance of self-mastery as a prelude to action, it does so at the cost of dehumanizing the enslaved who form the counter-example to the citizen who has achieved self-mastery.

Some have thought that Xenophon's depiction of Socrates' educational method is deficient, because he makes little use of the elenchus, a method in which questions and answers lead to a definition or failure. When he does depict an elenchus, it is often abbreviated and the argument incomplete.<sup>9</sup> While the detailed rules for this mode of argument are a *post hoc* rationalization by modern scholars, nonetheless Xenophon presents the elenchus as an initial form of discussion, intended to dispel misplaced self-confidence. Once a student has acknowledged their ignorance, Socrates moves on in established teacher–student relationships to giving speeches of encouragement and advice, intended to move students into self-improvement (*Mem.* 4.2.40).<sup>10</sup>

The contest for custom between different educators, often described as 'sophists', motivates significant parts of fourth-century Athenian prose. The term *sophistēs* developed in meaning over the course of Xenophon's life, and a tension between earlier and later senses, and the educators to whom they were applied, is clearly evident in Plato's Socratic dialogues. Plato criticizes a range of other educators, while Isocrates neatly sets out the rival groups in his abbreviated *Against the Sophists*. Xenophon is not a professional educator and not directly involved in this dispute, but he alludes to it in a diatribe on education which sits oddly within the practical advice on hunting in the *Cynegeticus*.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Xenophon distinguishes the sophists of the present from 'lovers of wisdom' (*Cyn.* 13.6), and sharply criticizes the way in which these sophists teach linguistic trickery rather than anything beneficial to the individual or the community (*Cyn.* 13.1–3). This is similar to the points that others make against eristic philosophers, and to criticisms of earlier teachers. Xenophon argues that practising hunting is a better training in commitment to communal values, because it is a collective enterprise which relies on shared resources.

<sup>9</sup> On Plato's depiction of the elenchus, see Vlastos 1994: 1–37; Benson 2010. On Xenophon's depictions, see Danzig 2017; Lachance 2018.

<sup>10</sup> On whether there is a genre of philosophical 'protreptic' to which this dialogue belongs, see Collins 2015: 16–34.

<sup>11</sup> Some have assumed that this section is an interpolation: see L'Allier 2008.

This point is even more true in Sparta, where sharing hunting dogs and other equipment was customary (*LP* 6.3). The same point is expanded in the *Cyropaedia*, where Cyrus' father, Cambyses, notes that a teacher visiting Persia in the past brought Greek-style teaching, in which boys studied both telling the truth and lying, in order to win arguments against each other (1.6.31–2). These boys did not stop seeking unfair advantage in their dealings with others, and as a result such teaching was made illegal in the hope of developing 'more gentle citizens' (1.6.33). This seems a direct if anachronistic critique of elements of the sophistic education of Athens, such as the use of 'double arguments' for and against a position.<sup>12</sup>

### Modelling the ideal city

Xenophon saw education as preparation for political participation and leadership in cities whose systems of rule and cultural practices he examined in his writings, sometimes using the *politeia* form to explore political ideas. We have one standalone *politeia* text by him, the *Constitution of the Spartans*, and one embedded within a fictional narrative, that of Persia (*Cyropaedia* 1.2); in both cases, he describes a *politeia* established in the past, which present citizens fail to adhere to.<sup>13</sup> Some other contemporary *politeia* texts took a critical perspective and did not aim at comprehensive coverage of their subjects, an approach exemplified by the *Constitution of the Athenians* long attributed to Xenophon, which criticizes Athenian democracy but makes careful note of its successful features.

Xenophon values political stability, which he regards as best achieved by adherence to long-standing laws; in Sparta, the laws of Lycurgus met this criterion. He places the establishment of the Lycurgan *politeia* much earlier than other ancient sources do, at the time of the Heraclids, the Peloponnesians who returned to Sparta following the end of the Trojan War (*LP* 10.8).<sup>14</sup> Like Herodotus, Xenophon notes the involvement of the oracle at Delphi in the establishment of the

<sup>12</sup> See Bonazzi 2020: 1–10.

<sup>13</sup> Bordes 1982: 70–1, 176–203; see also Atack 2018c.

<sup>14</sup> Humble 2022: 49; this would place Lycurgus in the very distant past, while others position him in the more historical eighth century BCE. See Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 1; Hdt. 1.65.2–66.1; Pl. *Leg.* 3.691d–692c.

*politeia* (LP 8.5; Hdt. 1.65–6); this makes obeying the laws a religious as well as a political obligation.

However, Xenophon's focus is not on political institutions, but on the social institutions which structure the daily lives of Sparta's citizen elite, including the communal meals, the sharing of property, and interpersonal relationships within and beyond the family, especially the rearing of children and training of youths. Unlike in other cities, economic activity is forbidden to the elite citizen class (7.1–3), and there is no precious-metal currency through which private wealth can be hoarded (7.5–6). Xenophon emphasizes the centrality to Sparta's political culture of obedience (*to peithesthai*) to the laws, and the increasing importance of the ephors, annually elected officials who monitored political obedience and had summary powers of punishment (8.1–4).

Persia's laws and customs, as set out in the *Cyropaedia*, are presented as long-established; although Xenophon does not give a foundation story for them, he frequently notes their persistence. His model Persia is a community in which the effort of the elite to embody virtue is properly rewarded. Many commentators treat it as a republic with a mixed constitution, in which the leading citizens largely administer themselves according to prescribed norms under the oversight of a constitutional monarch, equally restrained by convention.<sup>15</sup> However, there are limitations to individual freedom and choice; Cambyses, Cyrus' father, is able to mandate participation in hunting expeditions (*Cyr.* 1.2.10). The Persians are acculturated to their laws through their state-managed education, and so have no thought of transgressing them (1.2.3, 15), suggesting that this republic exemplifies 'positive' rather than 'negative' freedom, in Isaiah Berlin's terminology.<sup>16</sup>

Like many *politeiai*, Xenophon's account describes the physical space of the city as a way of exploring its social structure and hierarchy. He separates virtuous civic leadership from business by locating civic activity and trade in separate spaces: a 'free town square' (*eleuthera agora*) by the royal palace and administrative offices; and a separate space for business. The layout of the civic *agora* itself is arranged to provide space for each age class, for the separate activities of boys, youths, men of age to provide military service, and elders (*Cyr.* 1.2.4). Xenophon goes into a great deal of detail in describing the

<sup>15</sup> For 'Republican' readings of Xenophon's Persia, see Newell 1983; Nadon 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Berlin 1969.



hunting expeditions which form part of the training of the young, and the discipline imposed on participants, who are encouraged not to eat while engaged in hunting (1.2.11). He also lists the different military skills deployed by different age groups, as they progress from youths using distance weapons such as bow and arrow to adult men training with close combat weapons. But he then turns to the role of the elders: once men are too old for military service, they play a greater role in administering justice, conducting trials which can result in wrongdoers being disenfranchised and disgraced (1.2.14). Although Persia is populous, only a small proportion enters the first, educational stage, of this *cursus honorum*, and even fewer reach the final stage.

Cyrus later describes a key aspect of Persian education: its focus on justice. Boys prosecute and defend each other in mock trials, and are also punished by their teachers (1.2.6–7). Cyrus himself is punished when he intervenes in a dispute between two boys about the ownership of a cloak (1.3.16–17).<sup>17</sup> He has attempted to redistribute the cloaks, so that each boy has the one which fits him best rather than the one which belongs to him, but this contravenes the accepted sense of justice, and so, he explains to his mother, Mandane, the beating he received has taught him about Persian justice.

While the Persians think that this set of practices will make their citizens ‘the best’ (1.2.15), Xenophon does not consider here the consequences for those who do not manage to progress or participate in this process. Yet he recounts the consequences in Sparta of excluding from governance and civic honour those who failed to meet the wealth classification required to belong to the Spartiate elite, and the possibility that they might ally with other lower classes. Downward mobility caused the disaffection at Sparta which led to the Cinadon conspiracy and revolt early in the reign of Agesilaus, suggesting the precarity of his grasp on power (*Hell.* 3.3.4–11).<sup>18</sup>

Spartan kings might promote the interests of their friends, as Agesilaus did in protecting Sphodrias from punishment after his disastrous failed attempt to capture the Piraeus in 378 (*Hell.* 5.4.19–24). He was acquitted after an intervention by the king, motivated partly by the fact that their sons Archidamus and Cleonymus were lovers (5.4.25–33), resulting in what many thought to be the ‘most unjust’ (*adikōtata*) verdict ever delivered in a Spartan court.

<sup>17</sup> Danzig 2009. For more on this scene in its monarchical context, see Chapter 6.

<sup>18</sup> Cartledge 2002: 67–9, 234–5; Gish 2009.

Xenophon structures his narrative so that the young Cleonymus' dedication to his country, and his heroic death at the battle of Leuctra in 371, become the conclusion. This framing presents his narrative as an exemplary one, despite the critical elements.

Some of Xenophon's contemporaries, notably Isocrates, valorized a past version of Athens as an ideal. Xenophon presents Athenian politicians, notably the moderate oligarch Theramenes, engaging in this discourse and appealing to the city's long-established laws and customs to justify political resistance (see pp. 72–3). He also has Socrates suggest, in a conversation with the aspiring general Pericles junior, that the Athens of the present has declined in culture as well as in its empire and influence:

'My own view', Socrates replied, 'is that rather as it can happen with athletes who have been far ahead of the field and won everything – they can relax their efforts and fall behind the competition – in the same way the Athenians, after all that clear superiority, have neglected (*amelēsas*) themselves and so fallen into decline.'

'So what now can they do to recover their old quality (*archaian aretēn*)?'

'There's no mystery, it seems to me,' said Socrates. 'If they rediscover the practices followed by their ancestors (*ta tōn pragonōn epitedeumata*) and follow them as well as they did, they would become just as good as their ancestors.'

(*Mem.* 3.5.13–14)

These deeds featured in the rhetoric of the Athenian funeral speech, and so point to Pericles senior's omission of such patriotic elements in the speech given to him by Thucydides.<sup>19</sup>

Athens thus fits into a model which applies to Sparta and Persia as well: an ideal past version of the city achieved success, including the establishment of a good *politeia* and cultural norms, but the present-day citizens do not live up to those values. Xenophon expresses this explicitly for Sparta and Persia in two chapters which have been considered interpolations to his work (*LP* 14; *Cyr.* 8.8), but which make an argument consistent with the *Memorabilia* passage and other 'ancestral constitution' arguments of his time regarding the problem of cultural decline.<sup>20</sup> The present-day Spartans have lost sight of their traditional values, seeking to gain riches, including making money from holding office overseas (*LP* 14.3–5). As he has previously identified the Lycurgan *politeia* as sanctioned by a divine law, because of its

<sup>19</sup> Thuc. 2.35–46. See also Lysias 2; Loraux 1986; McNamara 2009.

<sup>20</sup> See Humble 2004, 2022: 52–61, 188–97.

authorization by Delphi, this disregard for the city's political and cultural norms is an act of impiety (14.6).

A similar situation holds in Persia, although here Xenophon describes a decline after Cyrus' death, when the Persian elite cease to uphold their traditional values and have become unprincipled and unjust, as seen in their dishonesty (*Cyr.* 8.8.6), drunkenness (8.8.10), unwillingness to exercise (8.8.8, 12), and neglect of traditional education (8.8.13–14). While Xenophon's authorship of this description of moral collapse has been doubted by some, and others have taken it to reveal a hidden criticism of Cyrus himself, Vivienne Gray has shown how its careful structure reflects critiques of political decline in Sparta and Athens.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Xenophon has Socrates praise the stability of the Lycurgan laws, and argue that a lack of change makes *homonoia*, agreement among the citizens, more likely: 'Because the cities whose people abide by the laws prove the strongest and the most prosperous (*eudaimonestatoi*). Without unanimity (*homonoia*) there can be no good government of a city or good management of a household' (*Mem.* 4.4.16). Socrates contrasts the stability of Spartan law with the situation at Athens, where, as his interlocutor Hippias has observed, laws are easily changed; citizens can introduce proposals in the assembly which may be enacted as decrees with legal force (*Mem.* 4.4.14).

Xenophon's comparative thought on constitutions runs deeper than a *post hoc* justification of his preference for Spartan traditions over Athenian practice. It would be possible for a democracy to operate with respect for its original traditions, and for change to be less easy to bring about than he suggests that it is. His account of civil conflict in Athens (*Hell.* 2.2–4) and his suggestions for improving the city's finances (*Poroî*) suggest that his respect for established tradition did not preclude experiment in response to changing circumstances. Despite his love of tradition, he was not simply an originalist.

### **The Socratic citizen: elite participation in democracy**

Xenophon's writing on the city has two main focuses. One is the way in which a citizen – implicitly a member of the moneyed elite – can participate in civic life, and indeed may be obligated to do so, according

<sup>21</sup> Miller 1914: 438–9 brackets the whole chapter. See also Gera 1993: 299–300; Nadon 2001: 139–46; Dorion 2010; Gray 2011b: 246–63.

to the Socratic value system. A second, more practical concern considers the risks and rewards inherent in so doing. This section sets out Xenophon's model of ethical engagement with public life, much of it voiced by Socrates in the *Memorabilia* and so contributing towards Xenophon's defence of Socrates as a teacher of elite citizens. Xenophon attempts to explain to young men of elite status why they should participate in the political life of the city, and accept commanding roles in the military, even though these roles may place them at risk of trial and punishments, including exile and death. Although Socrates' punishment and his own exile might motivate this concern, Xenophon associates the theme with wider political debates, from the connection between political power and the search for pleasure, to the role of civic participation in self-realization. Although, like Plato, he sets his discussion in the lifetime of Socrates, the hedonism of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics was a challenge for philosophers of his own time, leading him to argue that the ethical life was one of political and community involvement.

In his *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon emphasizes the importance of good management and oversight in a domestic context, but the key activity of *epimeleia* is also that of the citizen and leader in the context of the *polis* and its institutions. Managing and administering are activities through which personal virtues can be activated. In this sense, taking part in civic life in a leadership role is necessary for a Xenophontic good citizen to demonstrate and actualize the capacities developed through a Socratic education. There may be some irony in Xenophon's own enforced absence from civic life as an exile.

The question of political involvement is most closely scrutinized in Socrates' dialogue with the fictionalized young Aristippus, a hedonist who disclaims loyalty to any *polis*. Here, Xenophon sets out a case for political obligation, underscored by the story of the young Heracles at the Crossroads and his choice between Virtue and Vice (*Mem.* 2.1.21–34).<sup>22</sup> While the fable has often been read on its own, it should be seen as a counter to the arguments expressed by Aristippus in the first half of the dialogue, and as a strong claim that, as Thomas Pangle notes, 'the transpolitical, philosophic life should and could never leave behind civic engagement'.<sup>23</sup> Notably, Xenophon creates the model of the engaged citizen in opposition to the figure of the slave, explicitly identifying Aristippus as a slave-owner (2.1.5).

<sup>22</sup> On links between Aristippus and the Socratics, see Tsouna-McKirahan 1994; Tsouna 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Pangle 2018: 63. See also L. Strauss 1972: 32–9; Sansone 2004; Johnson 2009.

Aristippus outlines the risks of political participation – prosecution and misery – invoking the analogy of enslavement in a paradoxical inversion where it is the rulers who are enslaved to the ordinary citizens:

Cities expect to treat their rulers as I do my household slaves. I expect my servants to provide me with a limitless supply of the necessities, but not to touch any of them themselves, and cities likewise think that their rulers should bring them maximum benefit while keeping their own hands off any part of it. So I would class as potential rulers those who want to have a lot of trouble themselves and cause a lot of trouble to others, and I would have them educated as you suggest: but as for me personally, I class myself among those who want to lead as easy and enjoyable life as they can.

(*Mem.* 2.1.9)

What Aristippus seeks to avoid is either of the states that a citizen in a democracy might occupy: that of ruling or that of being ruled (2.1.11); he argues that there is a middle way ‘of freedom’, which will spare him from the apparent servitude involved in both the other roles.

Socrates disputes that this is the case, using examples which point to the invasion of Attica by the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War. There is no way to opt out of the conflict of civil life:

Or are you unaware of the people who cut the grain and fell the trees that others have sown and planted, and use every means of starving out the weaker folk who refuse them subservience, until they prevail on them to opt for slavery rather than a fight against the stronger?

(*Mem.* 2.1.13)

Aristippus claims in response that he can enjoy guest status without incurring social obligation or needing to defer to other community members. To Socrates, this is an idle fantasy. But for Aristippus, the kind of voluntary sacrifice of effort which Socrates commends for the elite is foolish:

But given that, Socrates, what about those who are being educated for ‘the royal art of government’ (*basilikē technē*), which you seem to equate with happiness (*eudaimonia*)? How do they differ from people compelled to hardship, if they must willingly submit to hunger, thirst, cold, sleeplessness, and all those other tribulations? For my part I can’t see any difference between a voluntary and an involuntary flogging – it’s the same skin – or generally between submitting willingly or unwillingly to all such assaults on one’s body: again, it’s the same body. The only difference, is it not, is the added folly of the man who volunteers to endure the suffering?

(*Mem.* 2.1.17)

Xenophon here skirmishes with sophistic arguments about power and pleasure; Aristippus echoes the views of such Platonic characters as Thrasymachus (*Republic* 1) and Polus (*Gorgias*), for whom power

implies the unrestricted capacity to pursue individual pleasure.<sup>24</sup> He also suggests that the paradoxes expressed by Plato's Socrates are not an obvious answer to these arguments, and offers an alternative way of countering them, through the above-mentioned fable of Heracles at the Crossroads, which he attributes to the sophist Prodicus of Ceos, although its language is particularly Xenophonic.<sup>25</sup>

In the story, the young Heracles encounters two mysterious women who turn out to be personifications of Virtue and Vice, and who set out the attractions of their different approaches to life (2.1.22). Their physical embodiment matches the distinction drawn in the *Oeconomicus* between the good and bad performance of womanhood: Virtue is modest in dress and demeanour, whereas Vice flaunts her abundant flesh through revealing clothes.<sup>26</sup>

After Xenophon has considered the personal relationships of male citizens in Book 2 of the *Memorabilia*, he returns in Book 3 to the question of their engagement in political life. Other elite citizens may try to avoid the attention brought by a public career, to manage their affairs as privately as possible in the context of the city.<sup>27</sup> One character who has succeeded in this quietist approach is Charmides (*Mem.* 3.7), whom Socrates persuades to use his management skills for public benefit, just as he has done in his private life. Xenophon must be deploying a form of irony here, as the historical Charmides, Plato's uncle, held a significant office under the Thirty as one of the board of Ten overseeing the Piraeus, before being killed in the civil war.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, it is to Charmides that Socrates asserts most explicitly the importance of involvement in civic life: 'Good government will be a benefit not only to the other citizens, but also to your friends and, not least, to you yourself' (*Mem.* 3.7.9).

Some of Socrates' other interlocutors have suffered from the enmity of their fellow citizens. A public reputation for wealth attracted negative attention from vexatious litigants and other hangers-on, who saw that they could easily make money if their target settled rather than go to court. This is a problem faced by his friend Crito (*Mem.* 2.9.1).<sup>29</sup> Socrates finds a practical solution for him: he employs the impoverished

<sup>24</sup> Lampe 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Gray 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Glazebrook 2009, Murnaghan 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Carter 1986; Christ 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Nails 2002: 90–4.

<sup>29</sup> Mirroring Plato's *Crito*, in which Crito advises Socrates on his legal situation.

but talented Archedemus to see off court cases and protect his interests (*Mem.* 2.9.4–8).

Xenophon also takes a critical look at Spartan political culture and the exclusion of the majority from active participation in political life. While his account of the Spartan constitution began with praise of Lycurgus, its penultimate chapter criticizes present-day Spartans for their failure to maintain the virtuous habits inculcated by Lycurgus' *politeia*. Xenophon is aware of the class conflict that has developed, as members of elite families have slipped out of the highest property classification and the right to full political participation. This is the background to the conspiracy of Cinadon early in Agesilaus' reign (*Hell.* 3.3.4–11). The young ex-Spartiate sought the equal status denied to him through impoverishment, hoping to engage broad support from the classes below the Spartiate elite, but probably not succeeding in doing so before being reported to the ephors. As Cawkwell notes, Xenophon's account gives us insights into Spartan social structures not available elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

Just as Xenophon depicted the free flow of information through Athens (p. 69), he shows the way it was controlled in Sparta. When news of the defeat at Leuctra arrived during the celebration of the festival of the Gymnopaïdai, the choral performance continues. The ephors inform the families of men who died, but tell them not to wail or lament; the following day, the bereaved appear proud in public, while the families of survivors display their shame (*Hell.* 6.4.16).

### The city and democracy

No work of Xenophon's provides a single theorized consideration of Athenian democracy, or of democracy more generally.<sup>31</sup> But although he used other locations for much of his work, Athens remained central to his thought as, in Matthew Christ's analysis, an engaged critic of the city's democratic regime.<sup>32</sup> Xenophon's ambiguous criticism of both democracy and oligarchy is contained in his most detailed historical narrative (*Hell.* 1–2), which covers the end of the Peloponnesian War, the rule of the Thirty in 404/3 BCE, and the civil war which restored

<sup>30</sup> Cawkwell 1979: 161; Gish 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Dillery 1995: 146–63; on Xenophon's work as political thought, see Gray 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Christ 2020: 26–31.

the democracy, and it offers, in John Dillery's words, 'a prospective paradigm of the bad community that fails'.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than a complete linear narrative, Xenophon provides a series of exemplary portraits of the leaders who represent different responses to the civic struggle, and a typology of political attitudes, comparable with Plato's more abstract descriptions of the personalities related to regime types (*Republic* Books 8–9). Greek political thinking often features analogies, such as that between the individual soul and the city (Pl. *Rep.* 2.368e–369a, 4.435de), and that between the individual body and the corporate political entity (Arist. *Pol.* 3.11.1281a39–b15).<sup>34</sup> The *polis* was, after all, nothing more, nor less, than its collected citizens.

Xenophon thus imposes a pattern on his narrative as he moves from the fragile democracy in the closing stages of the Peloponnesian War to the advent of the Thirty and the descent into civil war, an account which contains some of his sharpest political commentary and most vivid descriptions. It starts with the final stages of the Peloponnesian War, at a point when Athens' defeat was becoming inevitable. Thucydides' narrative breaks off in 411, at a point when Athens appears to be recovering from the massive blow of the loss of the Sicilian Expedition, and is beginning to re-establish its democracy (Thuc. 8.98.4, 106.1).<sup>35</sup> Xenophon claims to begin 'not many days later' than events narrated by Thucydides (*Hell.* 1.1.1), although there is a gap. But, like Thucydides, Xenophon arranges his narrative around the acts of specific commanders, in this case Alcibiades, welcomed back to Athens in 407 and now fighting for his city in the eastern Aegean. His initial successes are followed by defeat by the Spartans under Lysander at Notium (*Hell.* 1.5.16). In one of the first instances of a repeating pattern in the *Hellenica*, Athens votes to relieve Alcibiades of his command; Hermocrates of Syracuse, a general praised by Thucydides for his outstanding intelligence (Thuc. 6.72.2), is also exiled by his city while in the field, to the dismay of his troops (*Hell.* 1.1.27–31, 1.3.13).

#### *Arginusae*

A key episode is the account of the trial in 406/5 BCE of the Arginusae generals (*Hell.* 1.7).<sup>36</sup> This is not a dispassionate or unbiased account of

<sup>33</sup> Dillery 1995: 147.

<sup>34</sup> Brock 2013: 69–82; see also Brock 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Dillery 1995: 9–11; Rood 2004c.

<sup>36</sup> See Andrewes 1974; Due 1983; Pownall 2000; Christ 2020: 17–26.



democratic procedure, but an exemplary account of an attempt to uphold the law in the face of the manipulation of the masses by populist factions among the elite. It features several characters developed elsewhere in Xenophon's work: Socrates, the younger Pericles (*Mem.* 3.5), and Thrasybulus and Theramenes, who go on to be significant players in the civil war.

The story begins with a fraught naval battle in the waters around the Arginusae islands, between Lesbos and the Lydian coast. During the battle twenty-five Athenian ships are lost, and the Athenians are unable to collect the bodies of the dead or rescue the shipwrecked, because, as Xenophon emphasizes, a storm blows up (*Hell.* 1.6.29–34, 1.7.29–31). Xenophon's main interest is to reveal the illegality and unfairness of the subsequent prosecution at Athens, and the manipulation of democratic processes which lead to the generals' conviction. He sets out the complex and multi-stage processes which characterized Athenian politics and justice: a procedural attack on two of the generals, on an unrelated charge of fraudulent handling of public funds, is replaced by a single prosecution against them all – illegal under Athenian legal convention (1.7.2–5). Although the assembly eagerly take up this proposal, it runs out of time as, after a long day, it becomes too dark to take a vote, and the motion to condemn the generals is postponed to another assembly meeting.

Xenophon shows pressure to prosecute the generals becoming a factional matter as the populist Theramenes, who was the naval officer charged with retrieving the dead, attempts to strengthen feeling against his commanders, by paying for people to appear as mourners bereaved by the incident at the Apaturia, a key Athenian festival at which sons honoured their fathers and new citizens were enrolled (*Hell.* 1.7.8).<sup>37</sup> Theramenes also bribes Callixeinos, a member of the Council, to attack the generals, and he goes on to propose the motion condemning them.

Xenophon's narrative of the assembly meeting which serves as a trial focuses on one man, Euryptolemus, a relative of the younger Pericles, one of those charged, and a cousin and aide-de-camp to Alcibiades.<sup>38</sup> He sets out the popular response:

Some of the people praised this, but the masses (*plēthos*) cried that it was terrible if anyone prevented the people (*dēmos*) from doing whatever it wanted. On top of this,

<sup>37</sup> R. Parker 2007: 458–61.

<sup>38</sup> *Hell.* 1.4.19. See Gray 1989: 83–91; Nails 2002: 150.

when Lyciscus proposed that these men should be tried with the same vote as the generals, unless they withdrew this summons, the crowd (*ochlos*) erupted in disorder again, and they were forced to give up on it. (*Hell.* 1.7.12–13)

Frances Pownall noted the shift in language here, as Xenophon deploys pejorative terms to show his disapproval of the actions of the people.<sup>39</sup> Launching a counter-suit that a proposal was ‘contrary to the law’ (a type of case known as a *graphē paranomōn*), by suing its originator, was becoming an important manoeuvre in the Athenian assembly and courts.<sup>40</sup>

Xenophon links this episode to his defence of Socrates, who, he says, was the chair of the assembly meeting in question (1.7.15), a duty which might fall by lot to any citizen who had been selected as a member of the Council (*boulē*) during the month when their tribe held the presidency.<sup>41</sup> Socrates ‘said that he would not do anything contrary to the law’. In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon adds that Socrates ‘thought it more important to abide by his oath than to give in to an illegal popular demand or protect himself against intimidation’ (*Mem.* 1.1.18). However, the other presiding councillors took the easier option of accepting the motion onto the agenda, and so it was debated and put to the vote.

As the trial continues, Euryptolemus speaks in defence of the generals as a group, taking in the role of justice and knowledge within the city (*Hell.* 1.7.16–33):

No! If you listen to me and take just and pious actions, by doing so you will best discover the truth and will not find out, after coming to realize it late, that you have committed the greatest crimes against both the gods and yourselves.

(*Hell.* 1.7.19)

For Xenophon, acting justly will generate political knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

The rhetorical conclusion of Euryptolemus’ speech is a plea for the virtues of following due process:

<sup>39</sup> Pownall 2000: 500.

<sup>40</sup> Hansen 1999: 205–12.

<sup>41</sup> Rhodes 1972: 16–30; Hansen 1999: 250; and Cammack 2021 on active and passive roles in Athenian decision-making bodies.

<sup>42</sup> Xenophon’s account of events is contradicted by the other ancient source for the episode, Diodorus Siculus 13.101, who emphasizes the personal dispute between the generals and the commanders Thrasybulus and Theramenes; see Andrewes 1974.

If these things are done, those who commit crimes will meet with the most severe punishment, while those who are blameless will be set free by you, men of Athens, and will not be wrongly killed. And you, respecting your religion and your oaths, will judge in accordance with the law, and not fight alongside the Spartans by putting to death without a trial and against the law those men who captured seventy of their ships and were victorious over them. (*Hell.* 1.7.24–5)

Xenophon's alignment of piety and observance of the law, as well as his practical concern for the maintenance of military resources, are evident throughout the speech, which provides a frame for reading his account of generals and their actions in subsequent conflicts.<sup>43</sup>

*The end of the war and the advent of the Thirty*

The Athenian politicians Theramenes and Thrasylbulus emerge as significant actors as opponents of the post-war oligarchic regime of 404/3. Xenophon's narrative follows Theramenes' change of heart with sympathy and agreement, suggesting that the author followed a similar trajectory of disillusionment.<sup>44</sup>

Successive defeats at sea, particularly that at Aegospotami in the Hellespont in 405, pointed to an inevitable defeat for a city which was still, as Xenophon depicts it, capable of decisive collective action. He provides a vivid description of the arrival of the news of defeat on the city's messenger trireme, the *Paralus*, and artfully frames the frantic response to the Spartans' anticipated actions:

When the *Paralus* arrived at Athens in the night, they began to speak about the disaster. The wailing passed from the Piraeus through the Long Walls up to the city, one man announcing the news to another, and nobody slept that night, not just mourning the dead, but even more mourning themselves, thinking that they too would suffer what they had done to the Melians, as Spartan colonists, defeating them through a siege, and the Histiaeans and the Scionaeans and the Toronaeans and the Aeginetans and many other Greeks. On the next day they held an assembly, in which they decided to block all their harbours but one, to put the walls in good order, to position guards, and to get ready for a siege in every other respect. And that is what they did. (*Hell.* 2.2.3–4)

Xenophon echoes Thucydides' report of the arrival of the news of the loss of the Sicilian Expedition, barely a decade previously, which had eventually triggered a brief replacement of the democracy by

<sup>43</sup> Tuplin 1993.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 2.

oligarchy.<sup>45</sup> His account shows the movement of information from the harbour to the heart of the city, but, although the information spreads in a disorderly way as a rumour, the response of the city's democratic institutions is swift and decisive, and does not betray the political fault-lines which will shortly emerge.

The defeat at Aegospotami closed off vital grain supplies from the Black Sea, which enabled the Spartan commander Lysander to starve the city out from a distance (2.2.10–11). Athens attempted to negotiate; after an initial round of talks failed, Theramenes asked to be sent to discuss possible terms for peace with Lysander (2.2.16–20).<sup>46</sup> After several months, possibly delaying Athens' surrender, he returned to the city with a harsh offer which would demilitarize the city, although Xenophon suggests that it was Sparta's allies Corinth and Thebes, rather than Sparta itself, who insisted on this (2.2.19). Athens was required to demolish the Long Walls which connected the city to its harbour at the Piraeus, and the fortifications there, as well as committing to acting in support of Sparta. Xenophon reports the return of the embassy and the Athenian response:

Theramenes and the ambassadors who were with him brought these terms back to Athens. A great crowd (*ochlos*) surrounded them as they entered the city, fearing that they had come back without completing their task. For there was no longer any time to delay, on account of the number (*plēthos*) of people dying from hunger. On the next day the ambassadors reported the conditions under which the Spartans would make peace; Theramenes argued for the deal, saying that it was necessary to obey the Spartans and take down the walls. Some people spoke against this, but a much greater number joined in agreeing to them, and it was decided to accept the peace terms. After this Lysander sailed into the Piraeus, the exiles returned, and, thinking that this day was the beginning of freedom (*eleutherias*) for Greece, they eagerly tore down the walls as flute-girls played. (*Hell.* 2.2.22–4)

Again, although more briefly, the dockside scene becomes a place for the display of public mood, and the assembly one of unresolved conflict, in contrast to the decisive action after Aegospotami. Xenophon's quick sketch provides more than a vivid image; the sympotic performance of the destruction of the walls suggests the pro-Spartan enthusiasm of Athens' conservative elite.<sup>47</sup> This may hint at the unrest to come.

<sup>45</sup> Thuc. 8.1.1; Rood 2012a: 78–80.

<sup>46</sup> Krentz 1982: 34–7; Dillery 1995: 23; Christ 2020: 32.

<sup>47</sup> Azoulay and Ismard 2020: 63.

Xenophon shows how the subsequent behaviour of the Thirty, the oligarchic regime installed by Sparta, rendered any optimism misplaced. Rather than solving the difficulties of Athenian democracy, the new regime quickly developed into a violent and destructive tyranny. Xenophon's own authorial stance shifts: he moves to showing the democratic resistance to the Thirty, and presenting the leaders of that resistance in a positive light, suggesting that his political preferences were not purely oligarchic. Scholars have not agreed on this shift: William Higgins detected a continuing sympathy for Critias, the leader of the regime, whereas Matthew Christ found Xenophon more critical of the Thirty.<sup>48</sup>

Xenophon reports the assembly decision to appoint a council of Thirty, who were supposed to 'write up the ancestral laws (*patrios nomous*)' (2.3.2). For Athenians the 'ancestral constitution' (*patrios politeia*) was largely a nostalgic fantasy, which had first emerged as a political programme during the previous oligarchic revolution in 411/10 ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 29.3), and which remained a favoured project of Athenian conservatives throughout the fourth century, advocated by Isocrates and indeed by Xenophon in his visions of Sparta and Persia.<sup>49</sup> Although Xenophon notes Spartan involvement in the establishment of the Thirty, he represents the regime as chosen by the Athenians rather than imposed from outside; as John Dillery noted, his own experience under the regime may have affected his views, even if writing about the events decades later.<sup>50</sup>

Xenophon also shapes the story into a negative exemplum. He shows the new regime consolidating personal power and taking immediate action to appeal to its supporters.<sup>51</sup> The elite had long complained about harassment from vexatious prosecutions by other citizens bearing grudges (as happened to Crito, *Mem.* 2.9); now those in power could punish citizens who had used the courts to harass their political opponents (*Hell.* 2.3.12). There was little opposition to these figures being prosecuted and put to death. However, the new regime did not stop there, but sought Spartan military backing for a programme intended to eliminate political opposition (2.3.13).

<sup>48</sup> Higgins 1977: 108–9; Shear 2011: 180–7; Christ 2020: 26–7.

<sup>49</sup> See Fuks 1971; Rhodes 2006; Shear 2011: 167–75.

<sup>50</sup> Dillery 1995: 146–8.

<sup>51</sup> Xenophon does not explain that the peace settlement mandated the return to an 'ancestral constitution' ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 34.3); see Rhodes 1993.

*Opposition to the Thirty*

Xenophon emphasizes the role of individuals in opposing the regime, starting with Theramenes, who argues that more citizens should be admitted to full participation in the regime:<sup>52</sup>

But, while many were being killed, and unjustly so, many others were openly coming together in amazement at the state of the *politeia*, and Theramenes said again, that unless they admitted sufficient numbers into the administration as partners (*koinōnous*), it would be impossible for the oligarchy to continue.

(*Hell.* 2.3.17)

However, the creation of a list of three thousand citizens (including Socrates) does not ameliorate the situation; rather than being empowered, these citizens are rounded up and their weapons removed, and Theramenes himself is arrested. Xenophon does not overlook the regime's violence.<sup>53</sup> The stage is set for a confrontation between Critias and Theramenes. Unusually, Xenophon presents a pair of speeches in which the opposed positions are clearly set out, Critias (2.3.24–34) voicing a hard-line *realpolitik* and Theramenes (2.3.35–49) a conservative but still democratic line.

Critias' opening words are particularly powerful:

Gentlemen of the council, if any of you think that more men are being killed than the occasion demands (*kairou*), recall that whenever a regime is being changed anywhere this kind of thing happens. It is necessary that those setting up an oligarchy will have the most numerous enemies, because the city is the most populous of Greek states and because its people have been brought up in freedom for the longest time. But since we recognize that democracy is a difficult regime for people like you and us, and we also know that the people would never become friendly to the Spartans who saved us, but the best people (*bestioi*) would always remain faithful, we set up this present regime with the approval of the Spartans. And if we perceive that someone is opposed to the oligarchy, we have him put out of the way, and most particularly, we think it right that if any of our own people is dissatisfied with this state of affairs (*katastasis*), he should be punished.

(*Hell.* 2.3.24–6)

Critias attempts to deflect criticism of the regime by attacking Theramenes' character; based on the way he appeared to have switched sides after Arginusae, Critias mocks him as a 'stage boot' (*cothurnos*, *Hell.* 2.3.31), after a shoe which could be worn on either foot.

<sup>52</sup> Krentz 1982: 67–8; Dillery 1995: 146–51.

<sup>53</sup> Dillery 1995: 146–63; Pownall 2019; Wolpert 2019.

Theramenes answers this and reasserts a moderate line, opposed to the extreme and equally changeable violence he attributes to Critias:

I am forever at war with those who think that there would be no good democracy until both slaves and those who would hand over the city for the lack of a drachma participate in politics, and indeed I am also opposed to those who think that there would be no good oligarchy until the city has been set up to be tyrannized by a few men. But I previously thought it best to benefit the government of the city with those who are capable, both with their shields and their horses, and I do not change that view now.

(*Hell.* 2.3.48)

This is the closest Xenophon comes to identifying his favoured form of democracy: full political participation for the section of citizens of sufficient means to serve as hoplites or in the cavalry.<sup>54</sup> This model, which might be seen as either a broad oligarchy or a narrow democracy, possibly resembles the so-called constitution of the ‘Five Thousand’ briefly in place in the earlier oligarchic revolution of 411/10, in which all those who could afford hoplite armour were granted full participation.<sup>55</sup> Aristotle, writing after Athenian democracy had been re-established, regards this form of democracy as earlier and less extreme (*Pol.* 4.4.1291b21–33); in this form of democracy, those with limited means for leisure need to restrict the amount of time they spend in the assembly and so accept the rule of law (*Pol.* 4.4.1291b30–38).

The final appearance of Theramenes continues the theme of political life as a sympotic performance which runs through this part of the *Hellenica*, and it confirms his elite status as an internal critic of the regime.<sup>56</sup> The condemned man demonstrates his contempt by toasting Critias with the hemlock he has been condemned to drink, and flinging the dregs from a cup as if he were playing the party game of *kottabos* (*Hell.* 2.3.56).

### Law and justice

In his accounts of the Arginusae trial and of the democracy’s treatment of subsequent generals, Xenophon insists on the centrality of law and justice to the existence of community. This matches the value placed

<sup>54</sup> Christ 2020: 30.

<sup>55</sup> Thucydides had described the Athenians as ‘conducting political life well (*eu politeusantes*) for the first time in my experience’, on the basis of a mixed regime (8.97.2).

<sup>56</sup> Azoulay and Ismard 2020: 70–1.

on law in the Spartan and Persian *politeiai*. In his more theoretical exploration of law in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon regards it as a way of ensuring that social order reflects the cosmic order of the gods, including ‘unwritten laws’ (*Mem.* 4.4.19) that govern conventional morality.<sup>57</sup> He also shows Socrates instilling respect for the law in his associates.

While Xenophon is concerned with defending Socrates against both the actual charges brought against him and also the underlying suspicion that Socrates was responsible for the illegal acts of his former students (*Mem.* 1.2.12–39), he has a wider concern that democratic factionalism had led to the manipulation and misuse of the law, so that it no longer fulfils its function in maintaining cosmic order. He emphasizes the oaths sworn when the democratic party imposed peace terms after the brutal Athenian civil war of 404/3; Thrasybulus asks that his opponents show that they can keep their oaths and respect the gods (*euorkoi kai hosioi*), and observe the ancient laws (*nomoi archaiois*, *Hell.* 2.4.42).

#### *Socrates and Athens*

In Xenophon’s version of the Arginusae trial, Socrates stands as an exemplar of the ordinary citizen carrying out his political duty for the public good (*Hell.* 1.7.15). Xenophon’s other depiction of an Athenian trial, that of Socrates in the court of the King Archon, is contained within his *Apology*. Here, Xenophon is explicit that he is not setting out a full account of the events, but trying to explain why Socrates’ defence of his religious practice, centred on his belief that a *daimonion* or spirit offered him personal guidance which was of benefit to his fellow citizens, came across to the jurors as arrogant.<sup>58</sup> Xenophon concludes that ‘by singing his own praises in court he invited the resentment of the jury and made them more inclined to convict him’ (*Apol.* 32).

In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon explores the likely underlying reason for prejudice against Socrates: his role in educating wealthy upper-class citizens, future leaders of the oligarchy (*Mem.* 1.2.12–14). He argues that Socrates made an immense contribution to the well-being of the

<sup>57</sup> See also Schofield 2021 on the *LP* as unwritten law.

<sup>58</sup> Baragwanath 2017: 280.



Athenians through his conversations with them at gymnasia and in the *agora* (1.1.10).<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the conversations Xenophon reports with Athenian craft workers such as the painter Parrhasius, the sculptor Clito, and the armourer Pistias (3.10) are as much engagements with Plato's ideas on the limits of artistic representation and mimesis as they are with Socrates' ostensible interlocutors.<sup>60</sup> Through these conversations, Xenophon has Socrates make claims about the possibility of representing abstract qualities in two-dimensional art (3.10.3–5) and qualities of the soul in three-dimensional art (3.10.6–8), and of the importance of fitness for purpose in manufactured tools and objects such as armour (3.10.13–15). This chapter, along with the two which precede it, offer a close engagement with Platonic ideas and suggest that Xenophon was aiming to keep track of philosophical developments. *Mem.* 3.8 depicts Socrates in conversation with Aristippus about the good and the beautiful; this discussion appears to respond to the Platonic Theory of Forms as it appears in *Republic* Book 5, showing Xenophon engaging with Plato's metaphysics.

Xenophon is at pains to present a Socrates who follows the normal practices of Athenian public and private religion (*Mem.* 1.1, 4.8). This responds both to the likely subtext of the original charges and to later writings expanding on the original accusation and defence. Although his literary defence of Socrates is not a straightforward documentation of the historical event, but a response to later discussions and publications by early Socratics and their critics, parts of the defence do provide a useful depiction of negative attitudes to law and community, and a rejection of communal values, among the Athenian elite.

#### *Defining law*

The accusers suggested that Socrates encouraged such negative attitudes in his students; Xenophon suggests rather that they were responses to the sophistic undercutting of more traditional values. The young Alcibiades attempts to demonstrate inconsistency in his guardian Pericles' understanding of the law through exploiting

<sup>59</sup> Matching Pl. *Ap.* 22de.

<sup>60</sup> Clearly engaging with the discussion of mimesis in Pl. *Rep.* 10.

two incompatible aspects of that understanding (*Mem.* 1.2.39–46).<sup>61</sup> Pericles first suggests that laws are ‘all that the people at large, after due assembly and approval, have enacted to declare what should and should not be done’ (*Mem.* 1.2.42). Alcibiades offers counter-examples of law under the rule of a few, or of a single person, to which the imagined Pericles replies:

‘Everything enacted by the ruling power in a state, after due consideration of what should be done, is called law.’

‘And so even if that ruling power in the state is a tyrant, and it is he who enacts what should be done by the citizens, is that also law?’

‘Yes, even the enactments of a tyrant in power are also called law.’

‘But, Pericles, what constitutes force and the antithesis of law? Is it not when the stronger imposes whatever he wants on the weaker by means of force, not persuasion?’

‘I would agree with that,’ said Pericles.

‘And so whatever enactments a tyrant imposes on the citizens other than by persuasion are the antithesis of law?’

‘Yes, I agree,’ said Pericles, ‘and I take back my statement that whatever a tyrant enacts without persuasion is law.’

(*Mem.* 1.2.43–4)

Two definitions of law are in conflict: the rules set out by whoever is in power, and the communally accepted agreements of a community. Pericles’ error, which he acknowledges, is to say that the edicts of a tyrant constitute law. For this leads him (in real life, the most committed of democrats) into accepting that the majority of a citizenry can also constitute a tyranny, a key tenet of Athenian anti-democratic thought; the idea of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ appears in theoretical texts but was already well established in the mid-fifth century as a trope of Athenian comedy.<sup>62</sup> By showing Alcibiades in debate with Pericles, Xenophon perhaps anachronistically shows the continuing development in elite Athenian thought from the strongly democratic views of the mid-fifth century to the anti-democratic views of the period of the war.<sup>63</sup>

The *Memorabilia*’s final discussion of law emphasizes its apologetic function, gathering evidence that Socrates’ life was exemplary in its accordance with the law (4.4.1–4), before reporting a conversation between Socrates and Hippias of Elis, a renowned sophist visiting

<sup>61</sup> See Dorion and Bandini 2000–11: i.clx–clxix, 103–9; Danzig 2014; Johnson 2021: 95–8.

<sup>62</sup> See Connor 1977; Morgan 2003 (esp. Kallet 2003; Raaflaub 2003; Osborne 2003). Also Hoekstra 2016; Lane 2016; and on tyranny more broadly, Luraghi 2015.

<sup>63</sup> This echoes the presentation of political conflict as intergenerational conflict, with the older generation as the more radical, seen in Aristophanic comedy.

Athens for the first time.<sup>64</sup> This conversation begins to explore the idea that laws are based on the natural divine order of the cosmos, that there are ‘unwritten’ laws distinct from the specific, positive laws adopted by different cities. Xenophon thus stands, as some claim too for his contemporary Plato, at the beginning of an important tradition in political and legal theory, the natural law tradition.<sup>65</sup>

Hippias expresses dissatisfaction with Socrates’ methodology, particularly his refusal to offer his own definitions but rather to proceed by attacking definitions put forward by his interlocutor. Eventually, Socrates concedes and gives a definition of the lawful, one which points back to Pericles’ earlier definition (1.2.42):

‘Well, I had thought that refusal to act unjustly was sufficient evidence of justice,’ said Socrates. ‘But if you don’t agree, see whether this is more to your liking. I say that whatever is lawful (*nomimon*) is just (*dikaion*).’

‘Are you saying, Socrates, that “lawful” and “just” are the same?’

‘I am indeed.’

‘I ask because I don’t have a sense of what you mean by “lawful” or what you mean by “just”.’

‘You accept that cities have laws?’

‘I do.’

‘And what do you think they are?’

‘Prescriptions agreed and enacted by the citizen body setting out what should be done and what should not be done.’

‘So any citizen living his life in accordance with these prescriptions would be acting lawfully, and anyone contravening them would be acting unlawfully?’

‘Certainly,’ he said.

‘And so anyone obeying these prescriptions would be acting justly, and anyone disobeying them would be acting unjustly?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Wouldn’t then the man who acts justly be just, and the man who acts unjustly be unjust?’

‘Of course.’

‘It follows then that lawful is just, and unlawful is unjust.’

(*Mem.* 4.4.12–13)

After securing Hippias’ agreement, Socrates makes a further claim, that underlying cities’ positive laws are ‘unwritten laws’ (*agraphous...nomous*, 4.4.19), which govern personal interactions and include reverence for the

<sup>64</sup> Xenophon’s presentation of Hippias echoes that of Plato; see Plato *Hippias Minor*.

<sup>65</sup> The Straussian tradition views classical Greek thinkers as part of the natural law tradition (see L. Strauss 1972; cf. Horkey 2021); others attribute the theory of natural law’s origins to later Stoic thinkers (see Long 2005).

gods, respecting parents, refraining from incest, and honouring reciprocal obligations (4.4.20–3). In some cases, breaking an unwritten law results in automatic punishment; incest, for example, results in the birth of imperfect children. Xenophon suggests that this demonstrates the divine origin of unwritten law.

### Equality and distribution

The problem of distributing material goods, as well as immaterial goods such as honour, among citizens deserving of different amounts was a key preoccupation of fourth-century Greek political thought.<sup>66</sup> If one accepted that citizens were not actually of equal worth or status despite their formal political equality, as most Greek political thinkers did, a mechanism was needed for equitable exchange between them, both for goods and for acts of *charis*. The idea of ‘geometric equality’ delivered that: rather than straightforward exchanges of equal value (arithmetic equality), this concept permitted exchanges between non-equals.

However, Xenophon only touches this topic in passing in discussing Athens (*Mem.* 1.3.3, 2.4.5), exploring it in the greatest detail within the context of Cyrus’ personal development (*Cyr.* 1.3), and where it relates to the distribution of the spoils of war, and of immaterial goods among them such as honour and prestige, among troops (2.2.17–24). A new geometric distribution of the spoils of battle amends the system that Cyrus had set up for organizing and rewarding his forces (2.1). Yet Cyrus faces a challenge in getting the mass meeting of soldiers to vote for the unequal distribution of rewards. In the meeting, the proposal (2.3.2–4) is backed both by the *homotimos* Chrysantas (2.3.5–6) and by a commoner, Pheraulas (2.3.8–15). In this idealized society, the interests of both elite and mass happily coincide. But Xenophon’s depiction of the Persian commoners’ attitude to their inferior status is idealized, and hard to apply to Athenian politics.

### Collective religious action

Xenophon’s portrayal of the closing stages of the Athenian civil war of 403 emphasizes the religious propriety of the democratic side, both in

<sup>66</sup> See Harvey 1965; other accounts include Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.3.1131a10–b24; Pl. *Leg.* 6.757b–c; Isoc. *Areopagiticus* 21–2. See also Chapters 5 and 6.

their treatment of their opponents and also in their consideration of the city's relationship with its gods, disturbed by the brutal conflict. The centrality of religion to civic identity is underscored by the powerful speech made by Cleocritus, herald of the Eleusinian Mysteries, to encourage civic reconciliation (*Hell.* 2.4.20–2).<sup>67</sup> He asks for peace between the factions in the name of the city's ancestral and mother gods, and the bonds of family and friendship, and begs all the citizens:

Stop committing crimes against your fatherland, and do not obey the Thirty, the most unholy men, who in eight months have, for their private advantage, killed only a few less Athenians than all the Peloponnesians did in fighting us for ten years. Although it is possible for us to conduct our political affairs in peace, these men supply us with a war between ourselves, the most shameful of all things, and most painful and most impious and most hostile to both men and gods. (*Hell.* 2.4.21–2)

Xenophon emphasizes the importance of these points with a string of superlative adjectives. Cleocritus, as the hereditary holder of an elite religious role, might well have been expected to side with the Thirty; Eleusis became a retreat for those who did not wish to abide by the oath of reconciliation. Although his speech fails to persuade them to seek peace, it sets the tone for the conflict which follows. The leading oligarchs are killed in battle, including Critias and Charmides, one of the board controlling the Piraeus. When the democrats gain access to the city, they process up to the Acropolis and sacrifice to the city's patron goddess, Athena (2.4.19), as if taking part in a Panathenaic procession in celebration of her birthday.

The conflict finally ends with an agreement and oath that there will be an amnesty for actions committed during the civil war. Xenophon concludes that this oath continues to be kept (2.4.43), but the trial of Socrates four years later brought that into question. Xenophon's description of Socrates' religious practice shows the ways in which citizens were expected to participate in the religious life of their *polis*. Socrates, he says, was often 'seen sacrificing either at home or at the city's communal altars' (*Mem.* 1.1.2), and he advised his friends to consult the Delphic Oracle for guidance on complex matters (1.1.6).

But, although Xenophon frequently depicts the use of oracles and sacrifices by individuals, especially at home and on campaign, he rarely depicts the collective religious life of the city. His interest is in prescribing the proper performance of religious spectacle, such as the

<sup>67</sup> Christ 2020: 28.

displays presented by the cavalry in processions and civic festivals (*Hipp.* 3.1–14; cf. *Cyr.* 8.3). Yet he emphasizes the consequences of failure to act piously: leaders and their communities can feel the long tail of divine retribution for past impiety. Xenophon attributes such retribution as a cause of the failure of Spartan hegemony in the early fourth century; events are driven by the gods' response to the Spartans' impiety in capturing Thebes' citadel (*Hell.* 5.4.1), rather than by human action or diplomacy.<sup>68</sup>

### Leadership and the economy

It might be expected from Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* that his views on the running of households would extend to the larger-scale problem of managing a city and its finances. He has Socrates express views on the desirability of politicians understanding the practical and financial aspects of managing the city, in a series of discussions with two would-be politicians, the younger Pericles (*Mem.* 3.5) and Glaucon (3.6), and one older Athenian, Charmides (3.7). Xenophon's choice of interlocutors for Socrates here suggests an engagement with Plato's work. Unlike Plato, he regards a practical command of finance essential to good government, and so, at the level of the city, as at the level of the citizen, he is concerned that good decisions and actions are taken involving money.

Xenophon also addresses the ideological aversion to engagement with finance that went with the quietist anti-democratic views with which he is otherwise aligned. He shows Ischomachus as a leading citizen actively engaged with business and finance (*Oec.* 7.1–2). And he has Socrates criticize young Athenians for failing to learn about economic matters (*Mem.* 3.5–6). For Matthew Christ, this pragmatic insistence that the elite should participate in the management of the city's economy shows Xenophon's realistic engagement with the issues of Athenian democracy.<sup>69</sup>

Xenophon's concerns are also those of the fourth-century context in which he was writing, rather than the fifth-century Athens of Socrates' later life. The financial management of the *polis* had become a preoccupation of the democracy, and new roles requiring specialist

<sup>68</sup> Tuplin 1993; Dillery 1995. See also Chapter 5.

<sup>69</sup> Christ 2020: 72–3.

expertise offered a path to civic honour for politicians such as Eubulus and Lycurgus.<sup>70</sup> Eubulus, who held the elected office of treasurer in Athens during the 350s, is said to have sponsored the lifting of the decree of exile against Xenophon (DL 2.56).

Socrates' discussion with the aspiring politician Glaucon reflects this concern. The young Glaucon has been trying to establish himself in politics, but has been ridiculed when he has spoken in public, and Socrates tries to show why this has happened:

So now Socrates continued, saying, 'Well, Glaucon, one obvious point is that if you want to win all that honour you must do some good (*ōphelēteia*) to the city. Is that not so?'

'Absolutely,' he said.

'Well, come on then,' said Socrates, 'don't keep it to yourself, but tell us what will be the first thing you will do for the good of the city (*euergetein*)?'

When Glaucon fell silent, as if this was the first time he had had to think about where to begin, Socrates said, 'If it was your aim to extend a friend's family holding, you would set about making him wealthier (*plousiōteron*). Will you in the same way try to make the city wealthier?'

'Absolutely,' he said.

'And the city would be wealthier if it had more sources of revenue?'

'I guess so,' he said.

'Tell me, then,' said Socrates, 'what the city's present sources of revenue are, and how much they bring in. Obviously you will have looked into this, so that you can boost any that are failing and exploit any missed opportunities.'

'Well no, frankly,' said Glaucon, 'I haven't looked into that.'

(*Mem.* 3.6.3–5)

Socrates insists that good service to the *polis* involves improving its financial resources. The elite should enable the city to generate wealth in the same way that a well-run private estate might, as a form of euergetism. This requires specialist expertise: knowledge of income, expenditure, and potential sources for improvement to both. Given the use of Plato's brother as interlocutor, it is hard not to read this as Xenophon's critique of Plato's valorization of more abstract knowledge. Glaucon makes a policy suggestion, increasing reparations levied on enemies (3.6.7), but Socrates' careful questioning reveals his ignorance about the city's current military and financial position.

Xenophon strongly advocated having a firm grasp on resources and finance. Towards the end of his life, he offered his advice to the city,

<sup>70</sup> For fourth-century context, see Whitehead 2019; Cartledge 2016.

then impoverished by defeat in the Social War of 357–355.<sup>71</sup> His short pamphlet, *Poroi* ('Revenues'), considers ways in which Athens might boost its economy and increase revenues. Philippe Gauthier and others have argued that Xenophon aims to solidify political order, rather than encourage economic growth as a goal in its own right. Matthew Christ adds that Xenophon's arguments here reshape elite engagement with the city.<sup>72</sup>

In the *Poroi*, Xenophon offers a realistic assessment of Athens' current strengths and weaknesses. He suggests ways of extracting more revenue from different sectors of the economy. This includes the more efficient exploitation of the economic and military capacity of resident non-citizens (metics), while at the same time improving their engagement with the city (*Poroi* 2.1–7). The aim is to preserve the existing order.<sup>73</sup>

This plan extends to the enslaved population of the city. Xenophon notes that those holding leases on the silver mines have enjoyed better returns when they have invested in increasing the enslaved workforce labouring on extracting silver (4.14). He suggests that, once a public fund has been raised by a peacetime tax on wealthy citizens, the money can be invested in enterprises such as building a workforce of enslaved labourers who can be leased to citizens, enabling improved productivity and returns on mining leases (4.18–26), and building a pool of economic resources such as merchant ships (3.14). All citizens would benefit from this new fund; all citizens would receive a daily three-obol allowance from it (3.8–9); wealthy citizens would also benefit from the availability of labour resources to make their own enterprises more productive.

The purpose of this increase in economic activity is to make peace pay and reduce the need to go to war to capture resources, a risk which the city cannot currently afford. For Xenophon, economic activity is sustained by peace, and vice versa. Athens' location, and its established port facilities, mean that it is a hub for trade across the Greek world in both material goods and immaterial ones such as education and theatrical production (1.6–7, 5.3–4).<sup>74</sup> Building a

<sup>71</sup> Whitehead 2019: 7–12; Bloch 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Gauthier 1976: 21; Christ 2020: 143.

<sup>73</sup> Whitehead 2019: 38–9.

<sup>74</sup> Farrell 2016; Whitehead 2019: 7–12.



peacetime economy would solidify Athens' status more effectively than attempting to dominate other cities through war.

Although this is a radically different policy from that which Athens had been pursuing, and failing at, Xenophon is at pains to show that it would enable a restoration of the city and its traditional arrangements (6.1). Although Eubulus and Xenophon could possibly have been in contact, there is little evidence of Eubulus taking up these plans in his own administration.<sup>75</sup> However, David Whitehead has argued that the policies of a later politician, Lycurgus (who administered the city c.336–324), do seem to reflect Xenophon's suggestions made two decades previously.<sup>76</sup> An example is the leasing of public land at the Piraeus to non-Greek Cypriot merchants from Citium to build their own temple, proposed by Lycurgus and agreed in an assembly resolution in 333/2 BCE.<sup>77</sup> Lycurgus' policies need not necessarily have been influenced by Xenophon, and Athens' situation in the 330s, after defeat by the Macedonians at Chaeronea in 338, was even less strong than it had been in the 350s. But the similarity between Xenophon's proposals and the decisions made by Athens at this later point suggests that his ideas were not out of line with those of the city's administrators.

### Conclusion

The question of what constitutes good government at the scale of the city is central to many of Xenophon's works. He found answers in idealized versions of the arrangements of Sparta, including those he presented as a Persian *politeia*. He praises arrangements where traditional values are upheld – or at least those values currently considered traditional – and where change is difficult to implement. Although he criticizes the changeability of Athenian law under the democratic regime, his account of the excesses of the Thirty shows that he recognizes that extremism is a vice at both ends of the political spectrum. While Sparta and Persia exemplify his long-standing ideals, he takes a practical interest in the immediate problems of Athens.

<sup>75</sup> Whitehead 2019: 21–30 contra Cawkwell 1963; cf. Gauthier 1976: 223–31.

<sup>76</sup> Whitehead 2019: 42–52.

<sup>77</sup> RO 91 = *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 337.