Xenophon on the Thirty

1. Five of Xenophon’s Political Principles: (1) the Rule of Law, (2) the Rule of Virtue, (3) the Common Good, (4) Willing Obedience, (5) Open Debate.

2. Xen. Mem. 1.2.32: θαυμαστόν οί δοκοῖ εἶναι, εἰ τις γενόμενος βοῶν ἀγέλης νομεύει καὶ τὰς βοῦς ἔλαττους τε καὶ χείρους ποιῶν μὴ ὁμολογεῖν κακὸς βουκόλος εἶναι, ἔτι δὲ θαυμαστότερον, εἰ τις προστάτης γενόμενος πόλεως καὶ ποιῶν τοὺς πολίτας ἔλαττους τε καὶ χείρους μὴ ἀσχύνεται μηδὲ οὔτε κακὸς εἶναι προστάτης τῆς πόλεως.

3. Xen. Mem. 4.6.12: βασιλείαν δὲ καὶ τυραννίδα ἀρχὰς μὲν ἀμφοτέρας ἤγετο εἶναι, διαφέρειν δὲ ἀλλήλων ἐνόμιζε. τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἐκόντων τε τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ κατὰ νόμους τῶν πόλεων ἄρχην βασιλείαν ἤγετο, τὴν δὲ ἀκόντων τε καὶ μὴ κατὰ νόμους, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ὁ ἄρχων βουλοῦτο, τυραννίδα, καὶ ὅπως μὲν ἐκ τῶν τὰ νόμιμα ἐπιτελοῦσαν αἱ ἀρχαὶ καθίστανται, ταύτην μὲν τὴν πολιτείαν ἀριστοκρατίαν ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι, ὅπου δὲ ἐκ τιμιμάτων, πλουτοκρατίαν, ὅπου δὲ ἐκ πάντων, δημοκρατίαν.

4. Xen. Mem. 4.2.9: ἄργυρισιν καὶ χρυσίσιν οὐδὲν βελτίως ποιεῖν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τὰς δὲ τῶν σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν γνώμας ἀρετὴ πλούτιζεν τοὺς κεκτημένους.

5. Xen. Hell. 2.3.11: αἱρεθέντες δὲ ἐφ’ ὑπὸ συγγράφα τὸ νόμου, καθ’ οὕτωσιν πολιτεύοντο, τούτως μὲν ἀεὶ ἐμὲλλόν συγγράφειν τε καὶ ἀποδεικνύναι, βουλήν δὲ καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἀρχὰς κατέστησαν ὡς ἐδόκει αὐτοῖς.

6. Xen. Hell. 2.3.13: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἢραντο βουλεύεσθαι ὅπως ἄν ἐξεῖν αὐτοὺς τῇ πόλει χρησάμενοι ὅπως βουλοῦντο, ἐκ τοῦτο πρῶτον μὲν πέμψαντες εἰς Λακεδαίμονα...


8. Xen. Hell. 2.3.13–14: ...πέμψαντες εἰς Λακεδαίμονα Αἰσιχήν τε καὶ Ἀριστότελην ἔπεισαν Λύσανδρον φρουροὺς αὕτως συμπερχάσαι ἐλθεῖν, ἐς ὡς δὲ τοὺς πονηροὺς ἐκπολείματος αὐτοῖς καταστήσαντο τὴν πολιτείαν- δρέψαντες δὲ αὐτοὶ ὑπίσχοντο. δὲ πεισθεὶς τοὺς τε φρουροὺς καὶ Καλλιβίδον ἄρμοστὴν συνεπαρξὲν αὐτοῖς πεμφθῆναι.

It would be strange if someone who had become overseer of a herd of cattle and then made his cows fewer and worse were not admitted to be a bad cowherd. But it would be even stranger if someone who had become the prostatēs (“chief statesman”) of a city and then made the citizens fewer and worse were not ashamed and not thought to be a bad prostatēs.

He [Socrates] considered kingship and tyranny both to be constitutional types, although he believed they could be distinguished, since kingship is rule over willing men according to laws and tyranny is rule over unwilling subjects not according to laws, but however the ruler wants. And wherever political offices are allotted from those who fulfill legal requirements, he considered this constitution aristocracy; and wherever office-holding is based on property assessments, plutocracy; and wherever office-holding is open to all, democracy.

Gold and silver do not make men better; those who hold to the opinions of the wise are worthy in regard to virtue.

Being elected for the purpose of drafting the laws by which the Athenians would order their state, they [the Thirty] kept delaying the drafting and publication but rather established a council and other offices as seemed best to them.

Once they began to deliberate about how they could rule the city however they might want, first they sent to Sparta...

The majority was shouting that it would be awful if someone prevented the people from doing whatever it should want.

...They sent Aeschines and Aristotle to Sparta and persuaded Lysander to obtain a garrison for them, who would remain [in Athens] until they [the Thirty] had gotten rid of the “wicked” and established their regime. They promised to pay the expenses themselves. Lysander complied and had a garrison sent to them, with Kallibius as harmost.
9. Xen. Hell. 2.3.14: synonymous with the wicked.

10. Xen. Hell. 2.3.15–16: the death of a man simply because he had been honored by the demos but had not wronged the noble citizens. But Critias (who was still friendly with Theramenes) responded that it would be impossible for those who desired to take more not to get rid of those who were most able to stand in the way.

11. Xen. Hell. 2.3.17–19: It seems to me, that he was an obstacle to their doing whatever they wanted.

12. Xen. Hell. 2.3.20–21: And they held a review, with the Three Thousand in the agora and everyone else in another place. Then they ordered them to pile arms and, after they had left, the Thirty sent in the Spartan garrison along with citizens loyal to themselves to seize the arms of all except the Three Thousand. They carried these onto the acropolis and stored them in the temple. After this had been done, as it was now possible for them to do whatever they wanted, they killed many on the basis of private enmity, and many others for money.

13. Xen. Hell. 2.3.22–23: “It seems to me,” he said, “that those who claim to be the ‘best’ are now acting more unjustly than the sycophants! The latter would settle for a bribe and allow their victims to live, but we are murdering men who have done nothing wrong, so that we can take their money. Isn’t this entirely more unjust than the sycophants were?” But they, seeing that he was an obstacle to their doing whatever they wanted, began to plot against him.

14. Xen. Hell. 2.3.55: Theramenes, as one would expect, was calling on gods and men to witness what was happening. But the council kept silence.