**Lycurgus' Extreme Wisdom: Competing Views of the Lawgiver**

**in Plato and Xenophon**

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Link to Abstract:

[Lycurgus' Extreme Wisdom: Competing Views of the Lawgiver in Plato and Xenophon](https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2022/2602XenophonPlatoLycurgus.pdf)

**Example 1: Plato criticizes Xenophon**

**1a.** **Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*** (c. 360 BC): a hagiographic and idealized account of the upbringing and education of Cyrus the Great.

**1b.** **Plato's *Laws*** (c. 347 BC) 694c6-8:

The Athenian: Μαντεύομαι δὴ νῦν περί γε Κύρου τὰ μὲν ἄλλ’ αὐτὸν στρατηγόν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ φιλόπολιν, **παιδείας δὲ ὀρθῆς οὐχ ἧφθαι τὸ παράπαν** . . .

The Athenian: Now in regards to Cyrus, I think he was a good general and he loved his country, **but he did not have a good education at all** . . .

**Example 2: Xenophon criticizes Plato**

**2a. Plato's *Symposium*** (c. 380 BC)

-Phaedrus (178e2-179b2): says that an army composed of lovers would be unbeatable because each soldier would act bravely in the presence of his beloved.

-Pausanias (181c2-182a10): praises lifelong love between men and boys.

**2b. Xenophon's *Symposium*** (360s BC)

-Socrates (8.32-34): says that Pausanias was wrong to praise an army of lovers because sexual relations are inappropriate among members of a fighting force.

**3a. Diotima's Speech on Eros as the Desire for Immortality**

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| **Part 5: Physical Love**  (207a5-208b6) | **Part 6: Love of Body and Soul**  (208b7-209e4) - children | **Part 7: Ladder of Wisdom**  (209e5-212c3) - love objects |
|  |
| 8. The Form of Beauty |
|  |
| 7. The Single Knowledge of Beauty |
|  |
| 6. The Beauty of All Knowledge --> endless philosophical discourse |
|  |
| 5. The Beauty of Branches of Knowledge |
|  |  |
| Laws & Customs  (Lycurgus and Solon) | 4. The Beauty of Laws and Customs |
|  |  |
| Poems  (Homer and Hesiod) | 3. The Beauty of Body and Soul |
|  |  |
|  | 2. All Beautiful Bodies |
| Virtuous Logoi |  |
| Humans |  | 1. One Beautiful Body |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Animals |  |  |

Physical love Love of another's body and soul Love of wisdom

produces another self produces cultural creations & produces immortality of the

immortal fame after death soul.

**3b. Xenophon's *Constitution of the Spartans*** (360s BC): 1.1-2

1) Ἀλλ’ ἐγω ἐννοήσας ποτὲ ὡς **ἡ Σπάρτη** . . . **δυνατωτάτη τε καὶ ὀνομαστοτάτη ἐν τῇ ῾Ελλάδι ἐφάνη**, ἐθαύμασα ὅτῳ ποτὲ τρόπῳ τοῦτ’ ἐγένετο· ἐπεὶ μέντοι κατενόησα τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν, οὐκέτι ἐθαύμαζον. (2) **Λυκοῦργον** μέντοι τὸν θέντα αὐτοῖς τοὺς νόμους, οἷς πειθόμενοι ηὐδαιμόνησαν, τοῦτον καὶ **θαυμάζω καὶ εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα σοφὸν ἡγοῦμαι.** ἐκεῖνος . . . προέχουσαν εὐδαιμονίᾳ τὴν πατρίδα ἐπέδειξεν.

(1) Once, when I was considering how **Sparta . . . became the most powerful and the most famous polis in Hellas**, I wondered how this happened. But when I considered the social institutions of the Spartiates, I no longer wondered. (2) Nevertheless I do wonder at **Lycurgus**, who established the laws for them, in obedience to which they flourished, and **I consider him wise to the extreme (εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα σοφὸν).** For he . . . made his fatherland outstanding in prosperity.

4. The Greeks identified **moderation** **and** **self-restraint** with **wisdom**, and anything **extreme** **or excessive** with **folly**:

**a. Homer:**

-King Alcinoos (*Odyssey* 7.310): ἀμείνω δ’ αἴσιμα πάντα "Moderation in all things is best."

-Menelaus (*Odyssey* 15.71): ἀμείνω δ’ αἴσιμα πάντα "Moderation in all things is best."

**b. Hesiod** (*WD* 38-40): βασιλῆας δωροφάγους . . . νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασιν ὅσῳ πλέον ἥμισυ παντός.

-"gift-devouring kings . . . fools, who do not know how much greater the half is than the whole."

**c. Pindar** (*Isth*. 8.25-26): τοῦ μὲν ἀντίθεοι . . υἱέες . . . σωφρονές τ’ἐγένοντο πινυτοί τε θυμόν.

-His godlike sons . . . were self-restrained and wise of spirit.

**d. Seven Sages' Proverbs** (Diels-Kranz):

μέτρον ἄριστον. Measure is best.

μηδὲν ἄγαν. Nothing in excess.

ἡ γλῶσσά σου μὴ προτρεχέτω τοῦ νοῦ. Don't let your tongue outrun your mind.

θυμοῦ κράτει. Control your spirit.

βλαβερὸν ἀκρασία. Lack of self-restraint is harmful.

μέτρῳ χρῶ. Live according to measure.

**e. Xenophon** (*Memorabilia* 3.9.4): [ὁ Σωκράτης] σοφίαν δὲ καὶ σωφροσύνην οὐ διώριζεν.

-Socrates did not distinguish between wisdom and self-restraint.

**f. Plato** (*Protagoras* 332a-333b): ὁ Σωκράτης· Οὐκοῦν ἓν ἄν εἴη ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ σοφία;

-Socrates: Isn't it the case that self-restraint and wisdom are one thing?

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