Dialogues

Compiled by
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Cover Photo:
Logic and Dialetic Personified by Plato and Aristotle, Marble bas-relief
by Lucca della Robbia from the Florence campanile, c. 1437-9.
Museo Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy.

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Dialogues

...is meant to foster discussion between individuals and groups on the myriad ways the ancients continue to shape and affect modern life. The lectures included here cover many disparate topics, but they all reflect the central question we pose to each of our speakers: how does the particular topic illuminate the continuing relevance of the classical heritage to society in the 21st century? Our lives in the modern world are increasingly hectic, fragmented and driven by impersonal technology, we believe that it is ever more important—and comforting—to remember and reflect upon the common foundation that the classical period provides.

Thus, the following essays are designed to demonstrate the ways in which the thoughts, myths and achievements of thousands of years ago can help us understand how we live today. It is our belief that communication about these topics can help to create something whole with which to stabilize our often-overwhelming world.

In this volume, we include papers representing recent lectures given to the SPGH audience. They include "Dictatorships: From Ancient Greece to Modern Iran," by Professor Clive Foss; "Cleopatra's Nose and the Shadow of Helen" by Professor Athanasios Moulakis; "How Christian Byzantium Preserved its Ancient Greek Inheritance" by Professor Judith Herrin; and "Ancient Greek Conversation and Modern American Conversation" by author Stephen Miller.

We plan to publish *Dialogues* each year as a service to our members and friends who do not live in the Washington, D.C. area and are unable to attend SPGH programs on a regular basis. We will also send complimentary copies to departments of classics at colleges and universities across the U.S., with the goal of increasing our audience.

It is our sincere hope that these lectures will encourage further discussion on the important historical and contemporary issues they raise, foster a sense of connection among long-time classicists (both amateur and professional), and inspire new ones to carry on their work.

Contributors

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Dictatorships: From Ancient Greece to Modern Iran

Clive Foss

The greatest legacy left by ancient Greece is certainly democracy. The Athenians of the fifth century B.C. created a political system in which the people ruled themselves through direct participation and by electing officials who were responsible to them. Elaborate electoral rules prevented individuals or groups from dominating, while all male citizens were guaranteed complete equality and freedom of expression. Anyone could make his voice heard in the popular Assembly and participate in debates about crucial issues. Under the democracy, Athens reached the height of power and glory. It was overwhelmingly the largest and richest Greek city, with its influence stretching across the Aegean and into the Black Sea region. Culture flourished under the democracy. Athens was the home of the playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes; of the historians Thucydides and Xenophon; of the philosophers Socrates and Plato. Herodotus, the father of history lived and wrote there, and Aristotle settled there and founded his own school of philosophy. Our idea of ancient Greece inevitably reflects the Athenian democracy.

But, in fact, democracy was only one of several competing forms of Greek political organization, and not even the most prevalent.[1] Oligarchy, or rule by a small group, was always important, and there were periods when tyranny, or arbitrary one-man rule, affected many states. In

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the fifth century B.C., when Athens was at its height, only Argos among the major cities of mainland Greece was a democracy. Sparta, the greatest military power, had a mixed government in which a small citizen body ruled over a majority of subject population; Thebes and Corinth were oligarchies. A recent survey of ancient Greek constitutions identified the workings of some 200 states: of them, 82 had ten years or more of democracy; 95 similar periods of oligarchy, and 88 passed through long or short periods of tyranny.[2] Tyranny and oligarchy were the predominant forms of government in the seventh and sixth centuries, and never completely yielded to democracy.

Ancient despotism and modern dictatorship are the subject of this essay. Although they have much in common, the ancient and modern forms of one-man rule are not identical. The modern dictator has unlimited power without responsibility, ruling above the laws or traditions. Dictatorship has been well described as "a highly oppressive and arbitrary form of rule, established by force or intimidation, enabling a person or a group to monopolize political power without any constitutional limits, thus destroying representative government, political rights, and any organized opposition."[3] Modern dictators often strengthen their control through ideology or a political party; some are totalitarians, who control every aspect of society, as well as the activities and even the thoughts of the population. The early Greek tyrants certainly had arbitrary one-man power, but were less disruptive of traditional society than their followers in the fourth century and later, who often exercised control through mercenary forces, employed violence, basked in personal glory, and introduced elements of populism or social revolution into their programs. Although these approach the modern concept of dictators, they did not have organized parties, rarely proclaimed an ideology, and were never totalitarians.

This essay has three parts. It will first examine what the Greeks called "tyranny" with examples from the Archaic through the Hellenistic periods to illustrate how widespread this form of government actually was and how, in a sense, the Greeks provided the first models for dictatorship. Then, it will discuss two political systems that could not be called dictatorships at all, the real authoritarian system of Sparta, with its absolute control over its citizens, and the imaginary realm of powerful philosopher kings created by Plato in his Republic. This part will include Aristotle's analysis of tyranny, so comprehensive that it could apply to regimes that flourished thousands of years after his time.

The third part will consider how these ancient Greek models have been used in the service of modern dictatorships. The actual Greek tyrants had little influence in later times because of their negative reputations and because too little was known about them to provide useful precedents. Far more important were Sparta and Plato's *Republic*, for they could both be manipulated to provide inspiration, models, or justification for all kinds of tyranny. This section will consider modern dictatorial regimes that have exploited or been influenced by Greek theory or practice, from the Italian Renaissance to contemporary Iran.

This work is based on a talk I had the pleasure of delivering to the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage in Washington, DC. For that, I am indebted to Arthur Houghton for suggesting my name and for a flattering introduction, and to Anna Lea for incorporating the lecture into the Society's program. My thanks also go to colleagues who read and improved the manuscript, notably Peter Fraser, Nigel Hamilton, and George Huxley. I hope the following pages will illuminate a less familiar aspect of the Greek heritage and suggest its relevance for modern times.

Part I: The Greek Tyrants

When Thucydides investigated the ancient past of
Greece, he saw a period when tyrannies replaced
traditional monarchies. This was a time when the country
was growing in power and wealth.[4] His view of tyranny as
the product of economic and social change was followed
by many modern historians, for whom tyranny formed a
transition between monarchy and more representative
systems. In this version, increased trade and production
led to new sources of wealth, creating classes that had
economic but not political power. This coincided with the
introduction of coinage, which made accumulating and
storing wealth easier, and the development of the hoplite
style of fighting, in which heavily armed warriors fought
in close formation, a method suitable for moderately
prosperous peasants. Previously, power and wealth had been
united in a land-owning aristocracy, whose leaders fought
in chariots, standing out from the rest, as in the epics of
Homer. When land was no longer the only source of
wealth, people outside the ruling families could achieve the
means to power, and use it to subvert the existing system.
These phenomena were taken as characterizing the seventh
and sixth centuries B.C., the Archaic period, when most of
the Greek states passed through a turbulent period of
tyranny that rarely lasted past the second generation, and
eventually yielded to new and more stable systems.
Circumstances also played a role, as many tyrants rose to
power during real or threatened military crises. Within this
general pattern, there were many varying interpretations.
Some saw the tyrants as progressive entrepreneurs, or as
statesmen who represented the interests of the lower or
middle classes, or as dynamic popular leaders.[5]

This neat picture cannot withstand the rigors of
modern analysis, which begins with etymology and the
primary sources. The word *tyrannos* does not come from a
Greek root at all. It appears to have been first used in the

mid-seventh century in reference to the Lydian king Gyges. Whatever its exact derivation (there are several theories), it denoted someone with excessive power and came to describe a phenomenon that was new to Greece. *Tyrannos* did not describe an actual office or legal institution, but rather an irregular domination that had no formal place in the Greek states. Originally, it had a neutral meaning, indicating great power, but by the fifth century, it had taken on the negative connotation of our modern "tyrant."[6]

The most important source for Archaic tyranny is Herodotus, who presents a good deal of unsystematic information about the most famous Greek tyrants. Unfortunately, his sources turn out to be heavily influenced by oral tradition, which inextricably mixes real historical information with gossip, folktale and mythology. As a result, our image of those tyrants is very much that of the fifth century B.C., long after they had fallen from power, when their memory was widely despised.[7] This traditional view of tyranny is full of distortions and lacks objectivity, so that it is virtually impossible to reconstruct the origins, careers, objectives, and successes or failures of the tyrants in any but the most general terms. Yet the image that Herodotus and the other sources present cannot be discarded altogether, for it was of real importance in portraying and defining tyranny to the classical Greeks.

Nevertheless, there is enough material to show that the Archaic tyrants were aristocrats who seized power by violence in competition with other members of their own class, and were primarily concerned with personal glory. They were not spokesmen for the poor or great reformers or especially concerned with economics.[8] They were, however, dominant figures in the Greek world of the seventh and sixth centuries, and had many later followers: tyranny revived in the fourth century B.C. and in the Hellenistic periods, when information that is much more reliable is available. Although the un-ideological, aristocratic tyrants

of the Archaic period were very different from modern dictators, their careers (as far as they can be perceived), nevertheless offer some interesting parallels or antecedents. The later tyrants bear a closer resemblance to the modern. The sketch that follows aims to show the importance of tyranny in the Greek world, with the caveat that much about the early tyrants reflects the view of later centuries, and may be not at all accurate.

Archaic Tyranny

Greece gave the world its first *tyrannos* when Cypselus seized control of Corinth in the middle of the seventh century B.C.[9] His career is known primarily from a speech recalled by Herodotus, in which a Corinthian is trying to persuade the Spartans not to restore tyranny to Athens – a negative context, mixed with a good deal of mythology.[10] Corinth had been a leader in the commercial expansion of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. It was ruled by a narrow aristocracy, with power monopolized by one family, the Bacchiadae. Around 650, Cypselus, the polemarch, or military commander, supported perhaps by the common people, overthrew the existing regime. Though a relative of the Bacchiadae, he was not part of their inner ruling circle.[11] He confiscated the wealth of the family, drove them into exile and generally broke the power of the aristocracy. His rule, which lasted for about 30 years, was popular enough for him to dispense with a bodyguard, but he seems to have controlled the state firmly. Like many future tyrants, he was concerned with increasing the power and glory of his state. He sent out new colonies to control the sea route to the West, and made generous dedications at the temples of Zeus in Olympia and Apollo in Delphi.

Cypselus left supreme power to his more famous son Periander (c. 625-585 B.C.), who appears in the sources as

the model of a tyrant. Unlike his father, Periander maintained an armed bodyguard and was accused of using cruelty and violence to maintain his power. He kept the population under control by persecuting the rich and by obliging the country people to stay on the land rather than move into the city where they might provoke discontent. Periander played an active role in international affairs, making alliances with other states and foreign kings, and expanding the commercial power of Corinth. He patronized important public works at home, and presided over major developments in architecture. Periander's Corinth produced the Greek temple as we know it: a solid stone structure with a sloping roof and a triangular space in the front suitable for sculptural decoration. Some later writers named him as one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece; others saw him as a vicious tyrant. In any case, he left power to his nephew Psammetichus, who lasted only three years before he was deposed in a revolution that turned Corinth into the oligarchy that it long remained. Here, as in many other cases, the Greek tyrants created precedents for future dictators by providing magnificence and wealth, public works and commerce, all of it built on complete control of the citizen body.

The most important of the Archaic Greek tyrannies arose in the future heartland of democracy, Athens.[12] In 561 B.C., Pisistratus, an aristocrat and military hero who had the support of the poorer elements of the population, took over the city by trickery; he persuaded the Assembly that he needed a bodyguard and promptly used it to seize the Acropolis. He stayed in power only a short time, ruling moderately according to the laws, until his enemies united and threw him out. A few years later, he returned with the backing of a major aristocratic family, but once again could not maintain his control. Finally, in 546, he turned to methods that were more practical. After making a fortune

exploiting the silver mines of northern Greece, he raised a force of mercenaries, made useful allies in neighboring states, and attacked Athens. He won a decisive battle at Marathon, took over the city, disarmed the population, and ruled until his death. Pisistratus maintained a permanent armed force but, like many dictators after him, kept up the appearance of the established government. Elections continued, but the tyrant, his family and allies often controlled high offices. He even allowed himself to be haled into court on a charge of homicide – but his adversary failed to appear.

Pisistratus permanently weakened the aristocracy by exiling many of them and confiscating their land. At the same time, he favored the poor with cheap loans that encouraged them to stay in the country, where he ensured justice through personal tours of inspection and the setting up of local judges. His relatively mild rule guaranteed Athens a generation of peaceful prosperity. Like Periander, Pisistratus did all he could to increase the prosperity of his city by pursuing an active foreign policy and establishing control of the route to the Black Sea, the source of an important supply of food. At home, he patronized the arts and public works. The first temple of Athena, the Parthenon, was constructed by his regime, and a vast temple of Zeus Olympius was begun. He also improved the water supply. All this activity, of course, provided many jobs and increased the glory as well as the prosperity of Athens. He is supposed to have collected the works of Homer in a definitive edition, and – of lasting importance for future generations – he organized the Panathenaic Festival. These competitions in music and poetry were the ancestors of the tragic drama that became an outstanding part of the cultural achievement of Athens.

When Pisistratus died in 528 B.C., supreme power easily passed to his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus. After

Hipparchus was murdered in 514 – in an act that later Athenians saw as a glorious tyrannicide – Hippias' rule became harsh and unpopular, at a time when the Greek world was facing the ever-growing power of Persia. Finally, in 510, Athenian exiles persuaded Sparta, the traditional enemy of tyrants, to move. Hippias was deposed and went into exile, and Athens rapidly took the first steps toward democracy. This dictatorship, which lasted for over 35 years, provided a period of transition, leaving behind a far richer and more organized state than it had found.

In Athens and Corinth, the tyrants, anxious to establish and maintain their own supremacy, weakened their rival fellow aristocrats by murder, confiscation of wealth or exile. This had important results: not only did it deprive the aristocracy of a base for regaining power, but it strengthened the state by creating a strong central authority where power had previously been diffused among the leading families. Ironically, the careers of Pisistratus and his sons, like those of the Cypselids, did nothing to advance tyranny in their cities, but paved the way for very different developments.

During the fifth century B.C., when two great powers, Athens and Sparta, dominated the Greek world, tyranny was at low ebb. The Spartans were always hostile to tyranny, which could provoke dangerous instability; they supported oligarchies in the Peloponnesus and wherever else they had influence. Athens, on the other hand, fostered democracy in the coastal regions and islands that she controlled. Though most of the allies of Athens eventually became part of her empire, she never encouraged tyranny. The Peloponnesian War of 431-404, and the subsequent struggles that culminated in the collapse of Sparta in 371, disrupted the entire system, brought an end to stability and gave rise to a new crop of tyrants.

The Fourth Century

Tyranny spread in the fourth century, between the Peloponnesian War and the triumph of Macedonia in 338 B.C. that marked the end of Greek independence.[13] As a result of the war, the Persians regained most of the Greek states of Asia Minor. They normally ruled these places through tyrants, who would exercise firm control and at the same time be dependent on their Persian masters since they lacked local popular support. Most of these figures are very poorly known, but one of them will reappear in the discussion, in an unexpected connection with philosophy.

This was a time of rising prosperity and increasing population as expanding networks of trade brought changes to regions economically undeveloped or politically unsophisticated. Pherae, a previously obscure place in Thessaly, produced the most ambitious despot of the age when Jason took control around 380, thanks to a powerful mercenary army.[14] This force was an example of one of the most destabilizing phenomena of the period. Any real or potential tyrant with sufficient means could easily find large numbers of men willing to follow him for pay. The availability of such forces was a prime factor in the incessant wars between the Greek states. For a brief moment, Jason was the most powerful figure in mainland Greece. He had at his disposal the famous cavalry of Thessaly plus a large infantry, and he ruled just at the time when Sparta was crushed by Thebes; he even negotiated the armistice between them. According to rumor, he planned to lead a military expedition against Persia. All his efforts were in vain, though, for he was assassinated in 370 and his vast ambitions collapsed.

Mercenaries brought Jason and other tyrants to power, but another new factor that aspiring tyrants could exploit, the growing gulf between the rich and the poor, was an equally important source of instability. Euphron of Sicyon,

a contemporary of Jason, exemplified both. He took over a city of the Peloponnesus that had long been ruled by a Spartan-backed oligarchy, but Sparta's collapse left the door open to drastic political change. In about 368 B.C., Euphron persuaded his fellow citizens that they needed a democracy to guarantee their independence, promised to establish full equality in the city, and got himself elected to the board of generals. He soon disposed of his colleagues, gathered a mercenary force that gave him complete control, and proceeded to confiscate the wealth of the oligarchs and the temples. His revolutionary activities stirred the enmity of neighboring states whose forces occupied part of the city. Euphron thereupon went to Thebes to ask for help, but before he could make his case, he was assassinated by oligarchs from Sicyon. The Thebans acquitted his assassins (in the Classical period and later, Greeks generally approved of tyrannicide) but his fellow citizens buried him in the market place and revered him as their founding father. This, then, is a case of a tyrant who upset the social balance and made himself a popular figure. These strands – mercenary armies and revolution – were to produce yet more dramatic results in the following period.

The Hellenistic Age

Philip of Macedon brought all Greece under his control and, like the Persians, favored tyrants as his subordinates. Although Alexander the Great proclaimed democracy as he liberated the Greek cities of Asia from the Persians, he and his successors wanted to secure their control and see that sufficient taxes were paid. That usually meant ruling through garrisons and appointed commanders, or through a leading citizen who would functionally be a tyrant. Some of these actually managed to play off one ruler against another (for the Greek world was divided after the death of Alexander) and bring some benefit to their native cities,

but for the most part, this was an age of powerful monarchies, local tyrants, and revolution. The conquests of Alexander, which expanded the Greek world to the frontiers of India, left much of mainland Greece an impoverished backwater. Stupendous amounts of money entered circulation, augmenting the gulf between rich and poor, and trade routes shifted, leaving Greece outside the zone of prosperity. Despite massive emigration to Egypt and the East, the country still had a large population from which mercenaries could be recruited. It seethed with demands for drastic change, even for a social revolution that would cancel debts, redistribute the land, confiscate wealth and, in its most extreme form, liberate slaves.

Revolutionary tyranny of a kind resembling modern dictatorship, with its profound disruption of existing social and political orders, appeared in the most unlikely place. For centuries, and through the whole classical period, Sparta had been famed for her stability, equality, internal harmony and, of course, military power.[15] After the Peloponnesian War, though, her situation rapidly changed: money poured into the country, more Spartans than ever went abroad, even serving as mercenaries, and her pristine values were corrupted. More serious was the defeat by the Thebans in 371 B.C., which ended the role of Sparta as a great power. During the fourth and third centuries, Sparta was in constant decline and her social system totally changed. Instead of the traditional equality of an austere ruling military class, the state was dominated by a small land-owning oligarchy, and most of the old Spartan families had lost their citizen rights along with their land. Poverty and debt were so widespread that a revolutionary situation arose in a place famous for its ancient resistance to change. The problems came to a head in the third century when King Agis IV (244-240) tried to make reforms that might restore the commonwealth.[16] He proposed to redistribute

land to create a larger citizen body that could support the common institutions and serve in the army. He also proposed to cancel debts since heavily mortgaged land would be of little value to the recipients. His plans stirred so much opposition that he was soon arrested and executed.

Agis' nephew, Cleomenes III (241-222 B.C.), crossed the line between monarchy and tyranny. Although he was legitimately king, he completely overturned the constitution, establishing a one-man rule that enabled him to embark on far more ambitious reforms. Cleomenes believed that the military power of Sparta could not be restored without fundamental change, but for that, he needed supreme power. Using a force of mercenaries, he seized Sparta, deposed the existing government, and established a new regime. He began the revolution by confiscating the wealth of the rich and redistributing the land in 4,000 equal lots. Since there were too few Spartans to occupy and work these farms, he recruited new citizens from classes that had formerly been excluded. For a brief moment, he restored Spartan power in the Peloponnesus, and stirred tremendous enthusiasm among other cities whose people yearned for revolution, but he could not stand up against the might of the Macedonian king, who joined his enemies. Cleomenes was defeated and his new army disbanded.

The final stage of Spartan dictatorship came a generation later when Nabis (206-192 B.C.) seized power.[17] Although he called himself king, he completely uprooted the traditional system, carrying out radical reforms. Like Cleomenes, he confiscated the wealth of the rich, giving it to the poor, and redistributed the land; but he also freed slaves, whom he raised to the rank of citizen. His actions attracted widespread attention in Greece, enthusiasm among the poor (many of whom flocked to Sparta) and

hatred from the ruling classes, who were backed by the overwhelming power of Rome. Nabis actually managed to hold off the Romans, but was eventually assassinated, leaving his adversaries to triumph over a wrecked state. Here, then, is the final stage of dictatorship in mainland Greece, which evolved from a movement dominated by members of the power-hungry, vainglorious elite to a revolution where the tyrant stood against every aspect of the established order.

Sicily

Thucydides had a low opinion of tyranny. As far as he was concerned, the tyrants were so preoccupied with immediate issues of their own power, their families and security that they never accomplished much of anything – except for the tyrants of Sicily, who rose to great power.[18] In fact, the most fertile ground for tyranny was Sicily, home of some of the richest and most powerful states in the Greek world, and of its most spectacular and successful tyrants.[19] These rulers – especially those of the fourth and third centuries – resemble modern dictators in their destruction of existing social and political systems and in their supreme arbitrary power, use of violence and self-aggrandizement. All the Sicilian states succumbed to tyranny at one time or another and most of them were ruled by tyrants from the sixth through the third century B.C. The first attested tyrant, Panaetius of Leontini, rose around 600, apparently as leader of a revolution of the poor against an aristocratic land-owning class, but very little is known of him or his contemporaries. The most notorious of the early tyrants, Phalaris, ruled Acragas in the early sixth century; stories about him are largely mythical, including the most notorious, that he roasted his opponents in a bronze bull.

The dictators of Syracuse, the largest and richest city of Sicily, achieved the greatest renown. Gelon, who had been

tyrant of Gela, seized Syracuse in 485 B.C. and became famous for his victory over the Carthaginian invaders. When the Persians attacked Greece, Gelon, then the most powerful ruler in the Greek world, proposed to command the resistance. His brother and successor Hiero (478-467) won victories in the chariot races at the Olympic Games, celebrated by the famed poet Pindar; like most of his colleagues, though, he also had a well-deserved reputation for greed and cruelty. These tyrants had much in common with their fellows in other Sicilian cities. They based their power on mercenary troops, rather than the aristocracy or common people; they were great builders and founders of cities; they pursued aggressive foreign policies; and they celebrated their victories, whether in war or in the chariot races, at the international games in the Greek mainland. Like the tyrants of the Greek mainland, they were especially concerned with their own glory. Typically, though they exercised royal power and informally took the title of king, they never managed to found dynasties that lasted past the third generation.

In 466 B.C., Syracuse established a democracy, a form of government that spread to most of Sicily and lasted for some 60 years. A new crisis, provoked by invasion first from Athens and then from Carthage, led to a new coup, with Dionysius seizing control in 405 and maintaining it for 38 years. He, too, rose as champion of the common people against the aristocracy and attacked the incompetence of the city's generals, but once in power he compromised with the rich, and concentrated on ensuring his personal power. He converted an important part of the city into his own fortified palace, built magnificent public works, and came to dominate all Sicily. His regime, though, collapsed during the rule of his incompetent son, also called Dionysius. Both will reappear in this discussion. Despite an interlude of moderate democracy, tyranny remained deeply rooted in Syracuse, to produce one last major example in Hiero II

(269-215) who must have set a record for longevity (he died at 92 after reigning for 54 years). He openly called himself king, patronized science (notably the experiments of Archimedes) and stayed in power by aligning himself with the ever-growing power of Rome, which finally took full control of Sicily in 211.

Syracuse was not alone. The other numerous Sicilian states were usually ruled by dictators, for Sicily faced special problems that encouraged firm one-man rule. Foremost was the constant foreign threat, especially from Carthage, which controlled the western part of the island. In addition, there was frequent danger from the Sicilian natives who, though conquered and pushed back into the mountains, were capable of rising and attacking the coastal Greek states. Most Sicilian states had the additional complication of mixed populations. Even though they were founded by a particular Greek mother city, they contained successive waves of immigrants from other cities or regions – a divisive mixture that was often explosive, for, as Aristotle wrote (*Politics* 1303a), cities with mixed populations were prone to sedition. He, like most Greeks, had no use for diversity or multiculturalism. The Sicilian tyrants, an especially violent and bloodthirsty lot, exacerbated the situation by constantly depopulating cities, massacring or selling their populations, and moving people around on a vast scale. Large numbers of Sicilians at any given time had been uprooted. The tyrants also employed mercenary troops who were often rewarded with land or houses. When the tyrant or his dynasty was overthrown, a general clamor for redistributing the land or restoring property to its rightful owners would arise. Sicilian

dictatorship often reflected the problem of a divided and turbulent population that could only be kept in check by a firm hand. These circumstances made Sicily stand out as a breeding-ground of dictators. Democracy never took root there.

Whatever the prevalence of tyranny, the greatest Greek historians and philosophers had little use for it. Herodotus tells many stories that put the tyrants in the worst possible light, though he does allow that some of them had real accomplishments. Thucydides found tyranny unsympathetic and unproductive, but did not condemn it outright. For Socrates and his followers, though, tyranny was the worst form of government and the tyrant the most miserable of mankind, however he might appear. Plato in his *Republic*, Aristotle in the *Politics* and Xenophon in his *Hiero* or *Tyrannicus*, an imaginary dialogue with a real dictator of Syracuse, make these points forcefully. Despite their (usually well-deserved) bad reputation, however, the Greek tyrants had many accomplishments: they weakened aristocracies and often helped the poor; they established a rule of law less arbitrary than that of the aristocrats; they built public works, civic pride, and the power of their states.[20] In these respects, as well as the negative, they provide a useful model for understanding the forms that dictatorship has assumed since their time.

Part II: Sparta and the Philosophers

Sparta

The Greek "tyrants" are recognizably akin to modern dictators; but the regime that provided an outstanding example of total state control can hardly be called a dictatorship. Sparta preserved the same distinctive constitution for more than 400 years, and thanks to the institutions that accompanied it, was overwhelmingly successful on the battlefield, even defeating its great rival, Athens, in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.). Its government and society, unique in ancient Greece, have always attracted attention and sometimes admiration, well into modern times. Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, the most popular source about Sparta, was written some 500 years later than the society it describes. This short, highly readable and always popular account poses problems similar to Herodotus' portrayal of the Greek tyrants. Plutarch presents an idealized view, not at all analytical, and in many ways deficient, but so appealing that this late construct has provided the base for most visions of Spartan society. It will serve as the base for the present discussion because this image has proved far more important than the (difficult to perceive) reality.[21]

Politically, Sparta had a mixed constitution that combined elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. Two kings headed the state. They commanded the army, led the state religion and had some judicial functions. They operated as a check on each other, for this regime was extremely concerned with limiting the powers of individuals or groups. A council of 28 elders advised the king and formed the main judicial authority. They were elected by the whole citizen body from men over 60 who were distinguished for their morals and virtue. Another

body of officials, however, severely limited the powers of the kings and council. Every year, the people elected five *ephors*, or overseers, whose duty was to secure the rights of the people. The kings swore an oath to the *ephors* to obey the laws and could be tried or dismissed by them if they failed in their obligations. The *ephors* maintained order and discipline, and supervised the workings of the state. In Sparta, the people had considerable power. Citizens aged 30 or more formed the assembly, which elected members of the Council, the *ephors* and other officials, and decided on war or peace. Yet their powers, too, were limited, for they could only vote but not debate on what was brought before them, and the outcome was determined by shouting, with the loudest side winning.

At first sight, Sparta looks too democratic to have a place in this discussion, but this impression disappears when the focus changes. The democracy applied only to the Spartan citizens, a small minority within the entire state. They were a ruling military elite exercising absolute power over the majority agricultural population, who were effectively reduced to slavery. These subjects, or *helots*, the original inhabitants of the land whom the Spartans had conquered, had no rights whatsoever. They tilled the soil, providing food and wine for the Spartan landowners, leaving them free from the burdens of agriculture. Their lot was harsh, especially since they were subject to a regular system of state terrorism. Every year, the *ephors* formally declared war on the *helots*, so that the young Spartans as part of their military training could legally kill any of them who were considered to be a potential source of trouble. This system functioned throughout the classical period, allowing the Spartan citizens to devote themselves entirely to the arts of war. In other words, the democratic Spartans exercised a dictatorship over a much greater number of oppressed serfs.[22]

In order to maintain their supremacy, as well as to protect their state from outside enemies, the Spartans developed a unique social and economic system, which made them very appealing for future dictators. They formed a ruling military class, carefully trained from childhood to sacrifice individual interests and characteristics to the common good of military supremacy. This involved an unparalleled degree of state control, reinforced by enormous social pressure. The Spartan state strove for absolute uniformity by taking over the individual from early childhood and subjecting him to a series of tests that had to be passed before he could qualify as a full Spartan citizen. As Plutarch wrote, "the whole course of their education was one continued exercise of a ready and perfect obedience."[23]

Testing actually began at birth, when the infant was brought before the elders and examined. Any found defective, whether weak or handicapped, were sent out to be exposed to the elements in the mountain behind the city. Only manifestly healthy children had a place in this society. At the age of seven, boys were taken away from their families and enrolled in troops led by older children who had already distinguished themselves by skill and courage. They lived together under the tutelage of older men. They learned very little in the way of reading or writing – only enough to function in an organized society – for their education focused on obedience, enduring hardship, and skills that might be useful in war. When they were 12, the boys enrolled in bands commanded by 20-year olds. They were issued only one coarse tunic a year for their clothing, and slept on beds of rushes that they cut themselves. Food was minimal, to keep them alert and encourage them to steal; any who were caught, however, were whipped, not because they stole but because they hadn't demonstrated enough skill in an activity that could be useful in war.

The boys attended the dinners of the adults, where they would learn by example. Here, the older men might pose questions to test them, such as: Who is the best man in the city? What did they think of the conduct of one individual or another? These were questions that required moral judgments, not specific information or anything theoretical. They learned to express themselves directly in very few words, to speak frankly, and to maintain secrecy. From 18 to 20, they embarked on full military training, part of which involved the annual war against the *helots*. After 20, they were allowed to marry, but had to live in the barracks with their fellow warriors; to see their wives, they had to sneak out at night without torches and return undetected. If the men were caught, they were jeered and humiliated. When they were 30, they were finally admitted to citizenship, but only if they received a unanimous vote. Even when they were finally allowed to live at home with their families, they had to take all their meals with the other citizens until they were 60. The food was very simple, but serious shame and humiliation awaited anyone who did not eat his fill, if he was suspected of eating better at home. As Plutarch summarized: "Their discipline continued after they were full-grown men. No one was allowed to live after his own fancy; but the city was a sort of camp, in which every man had his share of provisions and business set out, and looked upon himself not so much born to serve his own ends as the interest of his country."[24]

Girls, though they stayed at home, were also trained in toughness. They ran and exercised since it was believed that strong bodies would produce healthy babies, and they were required to sing and dance naked before the men, to remove any unnecessary sense of shame. Their songs praised the brave and criticized the cowardly. Spartan women were totally different from those in other Greek states, who normally led secluded lives, far from any public

activities. They were also very unusual in their relations with men, for it was no shame for a Spartan to share his wife with another, if he were considered stronger, healthier or braver. The state was concerned to produce the best children, even if this meant stretching the bonds of matrimony, for the Spartans believed that children belonged not so much to their parents as to the whole society. Spartan women were tough and outspoken, and made model mothers who valued the ideals of the state even more than their own offspring: "with your shield or upon it" was a mother's invocation to her son setting out to war – that is, come back victorious or dead.

Manifest equality was an important part of this system, for ostentatious differences of wealth or office could lead to discord and disruption of the society. Every Spartan had to appear equal, even if this was not actually the case. Although some might own more land, they all had to share the common existence, live in the common barracks when young, and partake of the common meals. Enjoyment of luxury, even if it existed, was impossible. Nor could monetary wealth be accumulated, for the use of gold and silver was forbidden. Differences of dress, behavior or attitude were not tolerated. Unity and harmony were rigidly enforced. Of course, with such a system of education, constantly inculcating obedience and conformity, there was little likelihood of serious divergence from the accepted norms.

A peculiar economic system supported and strengthened this society. The Spartan citizens were a ruling military elite, highly professional and specialized, free from any other occupation. *Helots* produced the food that supported the common institutions; *perioikoi* were the traders and artisans. No Spartan touched a plow, or did any shopping. In fact, they were forbidden to frequent the market, for that was the place where, in other Greek states,

people would get together, start talking and inevitably turn to politics. Spartans dealt only with each other, and were especially isolated from foreigners. Other Greeks, who had an easier, freer and more comfortable way of life, were a potential source of contamination, for they could bring in unwelcome ideas. Sparta, therefore, was kept isolated from the outside world. Resources and money accomplished this. The region of Sparta had all the essential raw materials – notably wood and iron – for housing, farming and especially weapons. Likewise, Sparta, unique among the developed Greek states, had no convenient means of exchange. Instead of coinage, which facilitated economic development in other Greek states, the Spartans used an ancient system of iron spits. Since these were worthless outside the Spartan realm, no foreign businessmen attempted to bring goods or ideas, which were even more insidious, into the city. In fact, foreigners were carefully kept out; any one who had business with the Spartans would be met at the frontier, investigated and, if approved, brought to the city under escort, watched while there, and brought back when the business was finished. Spartans themselves, unless part of a victorious army, never went abroad. This isolation allowed them to maintain a far lower standard of living than other Greek states, but to be unaware of the differences that this involved.

This system (at least as it was portrayed by Plutarch) subordinated the individual to the state far more than any in the ancient world – and it worked. Designed to ensure military superiority and keep the *helots* under control, it ensured Spartan victories and dominance for 300 years. It stirred curiosity and even admiration among the other Greeks, who had no first hand experience of it. Its example inspired modern despots, who longed to rule a state so disciplined and successful on the battlefield. This discussion will return more than once to Sparta.

Plato

Comparable to Sparta for its influence on ideas of dictatorship is a Greek work about a political and social system that never existed. Plato's *Republic*, written in the fourth century B.C., presents an ideal state, where virtue and justice can reign.[25] It is important to note from the beginning, however, that the traditional name of this work is really a misnomer. Although the Greek title, *Politeia*, can denote a "republic," it more normally conveys a neutral meaning, like "political system" or "state." In fact, as will rapidly become obvious, Plato was not proposing anything that could be called a republic in the modern sense of the term. Better to think of the work as Plato's State. He was not idealizing dictatorship, either. Plato made no secret of his hatred of tyranny, but his "republic" was a kind of totalitarian society where a small group exercised absolute control. As such, it has provided a useful example for some modern despots.

The *Republic* begins with an investigation of justice, equally fundamental for individuals and states. From there, Plato's teacher Socrates, who is portrayed as leading the discussion in this long dialogue, turns to politics and society and begins to create an ideal State that, he believes, will guarantee justice for all. He first posits that a division of labor is essential, with workers, farmers, traders and all those necessary for a successful common existence devoting themselves to their special tasks. Since the state will have to fight wars—this was ancient Greece, after all—it will need trained warriors, who will practice no other occupation. He calls them the Guardians, who will protect and essentially rule the State (though why the rulers should be a military caste he never clearly explains).[26]

An ideal state requires ideal rulers. Plato's Guardians were to be brave, serious, temperate, healthy and indifferent to wealth. For that, they would need a

comprehensive education that would instill virtue in them and banish the luxury, ugliness and vice that lead to corruption. Its essential elements would be physical education for the body, and music (which includes literature) for the soul. Here, Socrates presents the first ominous foreshadowing of a totalitarian state: since virtue is the goal, literature has to be censored, to eliminate potentially corrupting elements. This leads to the conclusion that even Homer – whose works were the basis of Greek education in real states – must be rejected, for he portrays the gods as acting frivolously, and the guardians must be serious. They must value the truth, though the actual rulers may be allowed to lie to citizens or foreigners for the common good; anyone else who lies will be punished severely. These rulers are the elders (the only ones actually called Guardians), people who have completed their training, passed every test, and been subjected to constant scrutiny. The younger ones, still in their long process of education, will be auxiliaries who carry out the orders of the Guardians, while below them would lay the class of farmers and craftsmen, who were essentially subjects. A peculiar ideology will justify this stratification: the people will be told that they are gold, silver or bronze by nature, and that their place in society is therefore ordained.

The future guardians must be removed from all temptation, corruption, or factors that might encourage division. To that end, they should live the life of the military camp, without luxuries, forbidden to use gold or silver coin, being provided only with the basic necessities by the State. They must not own houses or land, for possession of wealth, Socrates argues, inevitably leads to the discord, jealousy and hatred that can disrupt the society. The guardians will have no property and live a communal existence; the rest of the citizens will provide

their support. To ensure social stability, every citizen will stick to his own trade or occupation, and avoid meddling with matters for which he is not qualified. This stable society will guarantee justice – the aim of the entire exercise. Since justice has been achieved, this society is good, and conversely all others are unjust or evil.

Socrates goes on to advocate even more radical changes in society and politics. The first drastic break with normal Greek practice involves women. In most of the Greek states (Sparta, as usual, an exception), women were secluded and played no part in public life. The ideal Republic would be different. Since they have the same inherent qualities as men, women should receive the same education, in music, gymnastics and military training, and participate equally in running the state. They should share the lives of the men, live in the same communal houses, and meet at the common meals. Since having men and women live together in close quarters could raise jealousy and discord, Socrates proposed a solution parallel to his treatment of housing and money: "the wives of the guardians are to be common, and their children are to be common, and no parent is to know his own child, nor any child his parent"[27]. He advocated a program of eugenics, analogous to the breeding of hunting dogs or birds, where the "best of either sex should be united with the best as often, and the inferior with the inferior as seldom, as possible"[28] and "our braver and better youth…might have greater facilities of intercourse with women given them; their bravery will be a reason, and such fathers ought to have as many sons as possible"[29].

The products of these unions were to be segregated at birth. Special officers would entrust the best children to nurses who lived in special buildings, while the children of the inferior, or any deformed infant, would be put away and

never seen again. The parents will not know which are their children or vice versa, so that family ties will be replaced by those of community. In this way, the state (or at least its ruling class) would constitute one large family, and discord, the enemy of all good societies, would disappear. Community of property and family will destroy the basis for dispute as the distinction between "mine" and "not mine" disappears, and with these disputes will vanish law suits, assaults and all similar evils.

Such a state may be ideal, but how to create and maintain it? Socrates, in another drastic leap of logic, proposes that only one condition is necessary: "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils – no, or the human race, as I believe – and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day"[30]. In other words, the ideal state won't be a republic at all, but some sort of monarchy – or totalitarian state.[31] It would not be a dictatorship, though, for Plato regarded tyranny as the worst possible form of government, just as a monarchy led by a philosopher was the best.[32] He saw the tyrant – hated by all, surrounded by enemies, a prey to superficial pleasures – as the most miserable of mankind, while the philosopher-king, serene in his justice, enjoyed the true pleasures of the mind and soul. This ideal ruler, the philosopher, must have outstanding qualities: he must be a lover of truth and justice, of such magnificent intellect that he is not primarily concerned with daily existence, brave, good-natured, temperate, with an excellent memory and a clear sense of proportion. Such a ruler existed in none of the Greek states, and would be extremely hard to find but, as Socrates pointed out, only one was needed.

The supreme Guardians thus had to be philosophers, a qualification they could only attain after long and arduous training. They should be selected when very young and pursue an education that included mathematics, astronomy and dialectics as well as the subjects prescribed for all guardians. Further specialized training would begin at 20, and at 30, the most promising would be selected for advanced classes, concentrating for five years on philosophy alone. The training was not to be entirely theoretical; they were to serve in public office, civil or military, for the next 15 years and finally at the age of 50 devote themselves to contemplation of the good, with an occasional return to public life. When such people (who could be women as well as men) are created, Socrates maintained, states will naturally want them as leaders. Once in charge, they will guarantee the future by expelling from the city everyone over the age of ten, and take control of these children, so far uncorrupted by their parents' ideas, and bring them up along the lines of justice and truth.

Here, then, is a coherent system of government, but nothing that could be remotely described as a "republic." Instead, Plato presents a kind of monarchy, headed by kings, not tyrants, supported by a class of Guardians who live a life of communism, sharing their women, children, housing and institutions, living austerely, without touching money, at the expense of the state. The elders have the authority; the younger, in a long process of education, are their helpers. The influence of Sparta is manifest throughout – in the idea of the state taking control of the children, of a lifelong education, of rulers who share a great deal and eschew money and luxury.[33] But Plato goes much farther in proposing communism of women, and differs strikingly from the Spartans in advocating a higher education – though he shares with them the ideal that

rulers should be brought up to practice virtue and justice. Such a system of tight state control (at least over the ruling class; he says little about the workers and peasants except that they are subordinate) reflects Plato's distrust of democracy, which in his view led easily to anarchy or tyranny. Plato's *Republic*, long considered a work of real philosophical greatness, was destined to have enormous influence, not always for the better, and particularly on regimes that were to stray far from the paths of justice and virtue.

Late in his life, Plato returned to constructing states, settling, perhaps more realistically, on second-best – not the ideal state, but one between that and any present reality. In his *Laws*, longer and less crisply written than the *Republic*, he advocated a political system more balanced than the rule of the philosopher-king, where the Law would be supreme—a mixture of moderate monarchy and moderate democracy.[34] This system provided for an assembly with basic rights of election, though rather weighted in favor of the two upper classes of the four into which the citizen body was divided according to wealth (private property, with some limits, was allowed here). They chose the Guardians of the Law who would serve 20-year terms. They would also elect an executive body, the Council, for a one-year term. Above all of them was the so-called Nocturnal Council, composed of the ten oldest Guardians, whose job was to supervise the operations of the Laws and if necessary to amend them, thus exercising essentially the highest power. The state would play a major social role, closely controlling marriage and education. This really amounted to a gerontocracy (Plato was now very old himself), with the most experienced in full power, and the citizen body largely passive. The *Laws* never exercised the same fascination as

the *Republic*, but it did have considerable influence in fourth century Greece, and especially on the thinking of Greece's other renowned philosopher.

Aristotle spent 20 years at Plato's Academy, imbibing the views of the Master and eventually transforming them into his own concept of political life. In his *Politics*, he expressed a view comparable to that of Plato's *Laws*: that the ideal state should ensure the highest good for everyone. It should not be too big or too small, its citizens should all be landowners, and its population should have functions determined by their age: the young would defend the state, the middle-aged run it and the old be concerned with its religion.[35] This seems more democratic than other proposals until the status of the workers becomes clear. Neither farmers nor artisans were to be citizens, for the citizen needed the leisure that these occupations precluded. In other words, it was the rule of a minority. In this scheme, the state would carefully regulate marriage, reproduction and especially education, to which Aristotle devotes considerable attention. When he discusses actual states, though, Aristotle shows that he favored a middle ground of mixed constitutions with elements of balance so that no one class could dominate, and where the common good would be the goal of the regime. For him, that was not the ideal, but probably the best that could actually be achieved. Such notions resonated in fourth-century Greece, torn between greater powers and racked by internal division.

Plato's Philosophy Applied

Plato was not the only Greek philosopher to be fascinated by authoritarian states or dictatorship, but his work dealt with an ideal form, an imaginary state. Another student of Socrates, Critias, left theory behind when he became leader of an actual dictatorship in Athens itself.

Critias, a member of an ancient aristocratic family (he was Plato's cousin), was a well-known figure, an active participant in the philosophical life of the city, and author of works on philosophy as well as plays and poetry. He appears in four of Plato's dialogues, including one named after him. But his philosophical training did not lead him on a path of moderation.

After Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War in 404 B.C., the victorious Spartans occupied the city and intimidated the popular Assembly into turning control over to a Board of Thirty who would draw up a new constitution. Typically, Sparta favored oligarchy in states it dominated. This one, though, immediately turned into a tyranny, seizing and maintaining supreme power. Under the leadership of Critias, the Thirty ruled with extreme violence, executing their opponents, confiscating property and sending many into exile.[36] The regime lasted only a few months, collapsing soon after Critias himself was killed in a battle with the forces loyal to democracy, but the name of the Thirty long remained bitterly impressed on the memory of the Athenians. Critias' example was a far cry from the teachings of Socrates.

Plato created an ideal state, to be ruled by a philosopher king with virtually dictatorial powers. How, though, could such a system ever actually be brought into being? As it turned out, Plato thought that he had found a way, but it failed completely, nor were his students – or those of other philosophers - much more successful in establishing an ideal state.[37] Society had to wait more than 2,000 years for a truly Platonic regime to appear.

Plato, who grew up in a time of war and revolution, had despaired of entering political life, especially after the actions of the Thirty and the execution of his teacher Socrates in 399 B.C. That event soured him on democracy, and as he contemplated existing states, he concluded that

laws and customs had so deteriorated that every one of them was badly governed. He came to believe that there would be no resolution of current problems until philosophers should rule or rulers should embrace philosophy. By his own account, he developed these ideas long before he wrote the Republic, but despaired of ever seeing them put into practice.

In 388 B.C., when he was about 40, Plato found a possibility for establishing the rule of justice and philosophy in a most unlikely place, Sicily, the mother of tyrants.[38] A visit to the philosophers of Italy and Sicily brought him to Syracuse, where an enormously successful tyrant, Dionysius I, was well entrenched in power. Although he was disgusted by the extravagant luxury of the place, Plato sensed an opportunity when he came into contact with the tyrant's brother-in-law, Dion, then about 20. The young man became his enthusiastic pupil and, according to Plato, his brightest. Plato taught him what was best for society and advised him to try to put the ideas into practice if he should ever have the chance. He then returned to Athens, where he established his school, the Academy, leaving Dion to grow into a serious devotee of virtue, unlike most of his fellows. Dion nevertheless rose to prominence as close adviser and admiral for the tyrant.

When Dionysius died in 367 B.C., his young son, Dionysius II succeeded him. Dion now saw the chance of putting philosophy into practice and wrote to Plato urging him to return and supervise the education of the young ruler, who was anxious to learn. His letter concluded with the hope that his and Plato's dream of seeing a philosopher in power might now be realized. After much hesitation, Plato returned to Syracuse, for he did not want to be seen as a mere theoretician, nor could he pass up the chance of changing the one man who might change all Sicily.

Plato got a fabulous reception, and at first seemed to be enjoying real success: the whole atmosphere of the court changed, but not for long, for Syracusan reality was not at all what he had hoped. The young ruler turned out to be spoiled, lazy and a drunkard; civil strife afflicted the city; and a powerful faction at court opposed Dion and all his ideas. Nevertheless, Plato and Dion set to work, trying to instill the principles of philosophy into the recalcitrant Dionysius, with the hope that he would become a just king rather than a tyrant. The lessons that he should practice self-control, choose his friends carefully and study philosophy seriously had little impact. After three months, the situation deteriorated when Dion was sent into exile, accused by his enemies of trying to take control of the government. Plato stayed behind, though virtually under house arrest. Dionysius actually showed some interest in Plato's instruction, but he was very unstable, and kept demanding that Plato be devoted entirely to him and forget about Dion. Plato finally managed to get away, deeply disappointed.

Meanwhile, Dion had been allowed to keep his wealth and settled in Greece. He frequented the Academy, bought a comfortable estate, and made close contact with Plato's nephew Speusippus who later succeeded as head of the Academy. Dion became even more imbued with philosophy. Meanwhile in Syracuse, the young tyrant boasted of his relation with Plato, invited philosophers to his court, and showed off his rather superficial knowledge. He now started pleading with Plato to return, as did many in Syracuse who believed that he could still be a good influence. Finally, in 362 B.C., when Dionysius convinced Plato that he had indeed made progress in philosophy, was sincere in his desire to continue, and promised to be reconciled with Dion, Plato agreed to return, still hoping to see a philosopher on a throne. The results were the same as

before: Plato tried to teach, but Dionysius was convinced he already knew far more than he really did and showed little respect for the philosopher. He also confiscated Dion's goods despite his previous promise. Once again, Plato left, discouraged.

Plato returned to Greece in time for the Olympic games of 360 B.C., where he met Dion and told him the whole story. Dion now decided that the only solution was to raise an army, return to Syracuse and depose his nephew. Plato refused to help him, but Speusippus and other philosophers urged him on; several of them even joined his expedition. After much fighting, Dion entered Syracuse in 357 B.C., proclaiming the end of tyranny and the restoration of the people's liberty. Finally, the true pupil of Plato was in charge, but he never managed to become a philosopher king. Although he ended the dictatorship, he faced real opposition from the extreme democrats who wanted no limits imposed on the power of the people. Dion, who maintained his austere philosophical lifestyle (which didn't endear him to the Syracusans) hoped instead to install a mixed government, rather like that of Sparta. He never had the chance. After a very short time in power, he was assassinated and Plato's dreams died with him. The first attempt to unite philosophy and politics came to an end, but philosophers did not give up the struggle for an ideal state, even if they often had to be content with less grand ambitions.

Two students of the Plato's later years, Erastus and Coriscus, were natives of Scepsis in the Troad. After several years of study, they were invited to return to their homeland by the local tyrant, Hermias of Atarneus.[39] Like many in the region, he ruled as a dependent of the Persians. They tended to control their Greek subjects through the intermediary of tyrants who, lacking a popular base, would be loyal to the foreign ruler. Hermias welcomed

the Platonists, gave them positions of real authority, and submitted to lessons in philosophy. The exact results are unknown, but the dictator was said to have moderated his government, establishing a "milder form of constitution." Hermias certainly did not become a philosopher-king, but by now, Plato's dominant teaching was that of the *Laws* rather than the *Republic*. His students had learned to aim realistically for a constitution that, if not ideal, might at least be attainable. Philosophy and dictatorship united here, evidently to the benefit of both.

The philosophers were so successful that they established a Platonic school of their own in the port city of Assos, and when the Master died in 347 B.C., his student Aristotle came to join them. He did very well during the three years of his stay, not only learning all about power and economics from the tyrant, but actually marrying his niece. By the time the Persians deposed and executed Hermias in 341, however, Aristotle had left the country and embarked on his spectacular career, which involved association not with tyrants but monarchs – Philip of Macedon, his patron, and Alexander the Great, his pupil. Hermias himself, as he was being tortured to death in the Persian capital, said: "Tell my friends and companions that I have done nothing weak or unworthy of philosophy." Aristotle wrote a short *Hymn to Virtue* in his memory.[40]

Plato had another pupil whose role in politics was almost enough to give philosophy a bad name.[41] Clearchus of Heraclea Pontica, a Greek city on the Black Sea coast of Asia Minor, studied with the idealist Plato and the practical Isocrates, who taught rhetoric and took a sober view of politics. Isocrates dealt with the problems of democracy, particularly trying to find cures for the internal divisions that plagued the Greek states. At this time, in 364 B.C., Heraclea was on the verge of revolution, with the

poor demanding cancellation of debts and division of the land, and the rich opposing them through their control of the local council. Since no resolution seemed possible, the councilors invited Clearchus to come as an arbiter, with the idea of protecting the interests of the ruling class. He was known as a politician who favored democracy, and as a student of philosophy. Clearchus accepted the proposal, but saw in the bitterly divided population a situation ideal for exploitation. He called on Mithradates, son of the local Persian governor, promising to turn the city over to him in return for armed support. Instead, he betrayed Mithradates, capturing him and taking over the city at the same time. Once in power, he took up the cause of the poor with a vengeance, arresting senators and stripping them of their wealth. When those who escaped into exile raised an army against him, Clearchus freed their slaves and, according to one source, forced the wives and daughters of the senators to marry them. He assured his own control through violence and brutality for 12 years, following a typical pattern of radical tyranny, hardly tempered by philosophy. At the same time, his regime ensured stability and even benefited the people, as Clearchus became the first ruler to establish a public library. Finally, he became increasingly megalomaniac, wearing the robes, boots and crown of a king, calling himself the son of Zeus, and even naming his son Thunderbolt (the instrument of Zeus). In a sense, he was ahead of his time, for Alexander, Aristotle's student, acted much the same way. Yet philosophy was not extinct at Heraclea: two of Plato's pupils managed to assassinate the tyrant in 352 B.C. But it did no good, as they were killed immediately and the tyranny lasted another 60 years.

The closest Greece came to having a philosopher-king was, suitably enough, in Athens. By this time, the city had been taken over by Philip and Alexander of Macedon and their successors, who ruled through an oligarchy. For a brief moment in 318 B.C., democracy was reestablished, but

when King Cassander took control in 317 B.C., he installed a new regime. The man he chose to rule the city of philosophy was himself a philosopher, Demetrius of Phaleron, a pupil of Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor as head of the Peripatetic school.[42] Demetrius was about 30 and already well-known as a public speaker. In power, he followed the precepts of Aristotle, mixing democracy and oligarchy. Ruling as the agent of Cassander but with considerable autonomy, he held regular Athenian offices, as well as a title from his boss. Demetrius restricted citizenship to those who had 1,000 drachmas, and carried out a census to determine their numbers. He revised the constitution by making posts elective rather than chosen by lot, thereby allowing well known people to gain greater influence, and he introduced a new Platonic element into the constitution, a board of Guardians of the Law, whose job was to ensure legality and to preside over the popular Assembly. He is most famous for his legislation against conspicuous consumption (a constant source of resentment and division in the society), forbidding elaborate funerals and appointing special officials, the *gynaikonomoi*, or "supervisors of women," to control extravagance of dress, jewelry or attendants. Austerity was for the citizen body, not Demetrius himself, who was noted for his extravagant life style and debauchery – though he carried that on in private.

In all this, Demetrius was aiming not at a Platonic ideal state but an Aristotelian mean, where the middle classes would be dominant, and the excesses of tyranny and democracy avoided. In many ways, he approached the Aristotelian ideal of a positive tyrant, whose moderation would lead to stability. In fact, Athens prospered during his ten year reign, which was finally brought to an end by Antigonus, king of Thrace in 307 B.C. Demetrius himself went into exile in Alexandria, where he was active in organizing the Museum and Library. But the Athenians, in a moment of revulsion against their philosopher-king,

forbad the opening of any new philosophical school. They repealed the law within a year, however, and the city long flourished as an intellectual center. Demetrius of Phaleron, then, was the closest ancient Greece ever came to a having a ruler who was also a philosopher, but his moderation contrasts strongly with the totalitarian ideal of Plato. He was a *tyrannos* indeed, but a pretty mild one.

Aristotle's Accurate Analysis

Plato had envisioned an ideal state, rather like a dictatorship; succeeding philosophers tried in vain to create something like it, but it remained for Aristotle to produce a comprehensive analysis of actual dictatorship. By his time (he lived from 384 to 322 B.C.), most Greek states had passed through some kind of tyranny or lived with it for a long time. By drawing on a vast range of examples, Aristotle synthesized the elements of the system in a way that still rings true. His discussion is so accurate and comprehensive that it can describe not only tyrants of his time, but even modern dictators, who have evolved in conditions far different from those of fourth-century Greece.

Aristotle's *Politics* remains one of the best introductions to dictatorship and other political systems, even though it was written more than 2,000 years ago.[43] In it, he classified regimes according to the number of people in power, and evaluated them according to their aims: good governments are devoted to the common interest, bad ones focus only on the interests of an individual or a ruling class. Each system therefore has a "correct" form and a "deviation": one man rule can be kingship (positive) or tyranny (in modern terms, dictatorship: negative); the rule of the few, aristocracy or oligarchy; and the rule of the many "polity" (in modern terms, democracy) or "democracy" (not in the current sense, but rather what would now be called mob rule or revolutionary government in the interests of the

poor).[44] Aristotle viewed tyranny as allied with oligarchy or mob rule because they are all essentially selfish in their aims, and because dictators usually rise from the masses, and act with them against the other classes.

Aristotle considered how regimes could be maintained or destroyed.[45] Tyranny was the most vulnerable of all since it represented essential inequality, based on the interest of one man only. He describes both positive and negative methods for a dictator to stay in power, and shows how dictatorship can ultimately be successful by turning itself in a "correct" form of government: kingship. Aristotle's ideas are universal and timeless: he could be describing systems he never even imagined, thousands of years in the future. Yet this does not mean that the modern despots were in any way directly influenced by Aristotle's teachings. They probably never read him, and certainly give no indication that he influenced their policies.

Aristotle presents a complete program for keeping dictators in power, first by positive measures that could apply to any form of government, then by the negative that are the particular specialty of tyrants. These are the positive means:

Make sure the regime is broadly based; encourage equality; help the poor[46]. Aristotle is here dealing with populist regimes, as many dictatorships have been. In his time, one-party or ideological states did not exist, but his precepts could apply to them just as well.

Crack down on lawbreaking, even minor[47]. Dictators inevitably establish law and order (of their own kind) and ultimately bring their societies under complete control. In some cases, the stability they create is missed after they are gone – at least by those who forget the horrors that accompanied it. The only lawbreaking is done by the regime itself.

Make sure the leaders of the regime are loyal, capable, and just (according to the prevailing system of justice). Don't show too much favor to individuals; and, most important, avoid corruption[48]. Successful dictators in all periods follow this, but many succumb to the lure of wealth.

Educate the citizens in spirit of the regime; make sure the majority is on your side; don't try to fool the people[49]. These are extremely important for dictators: they encourage literacy and mass education in order to subject the population to a constant barrage of propaganda. In contemporary terms, this involves a very important phenomenon that did not exist in Aristotle's time: modern communication. Dictators are extremely concerned to bring all mass media under their firm control; education and propaganda combine to ensure that the majority is on the dictator's side. On the other hand, the third part of this precept does not hold sway. Dictators are exceedingly skilled at fooling their people, and never hesitate to do so.

Some of these positive precepts may seem unfamiliar in a modern context, but the negative methods Aristotle discusses will capture the essence of modern as well as ancient dictatorship:

Cut down potential opposition; the leader must be supreme[50]. *Keep the population from meeting in groups, whether in common meals, clubs or cultural activities*[51]. Dictators are intensely suspicious of competition of any kind, and realize that, when people get together in activities independent of the state, the discussion may turn to politics and subversion. They are therefore determined to control all public activities and limit the possibility of large-scale private gatherings.

Maintain a network of spies[52]. This, too, strikes a modern note, appropriate to the secret police dictators regularly employ.

Encourage slaves and women[53]. Aristotle's point here is that the tyrant can hope, by supporting classes usually neglected, to gain their favor so that they will report on

their husbands or owners. In modern terms, this involves an attack on the organization most resistant to dictatorship, the nuclear family, or its subordination to the aims of the regime.

Stir mutual distrust[54]. This is a natural consequence of the two preceding points and encapsulates their ideal results. Modern dictators have carried this to its logical extreme, so that the population lives in fear, not knowing whom to trust or when the arbitrary vengeance of the State might descend.

Keep the people poor and busy, especially with public works [55]. This principle is basic: people who have to scramble for a living and are exhausted are unlikely to cause trouble. But the public works that dictators love to patronize also have a positive aspect, for they create jobs and can build pride by making the state seem more magnificent.

A state of emergency is useful for keeping people on their guard[56]. The lesson here is that a crisis allows the government to take more power by making the people frightened and dependent and keeping the leaders on their toes.

Make war[57]. This might be a last resort but, as Aristotle points out, it keeps the people occupied and increases the need for a leader. It bears significant risks, as some modern dictators have discovered.

Basically, break the spirit of the population so that they are incapable of action against the regime[58]. This has been the aim of dictators ever since Aristotle's time.

So far, Aristotle's analysis describes how a dictator can remain a dictator, but as he notes, they rarely last very long. If a tyrant is to be successful ultimately, he needs to become a king rather than a dictator – that is, to rule or be seen to rule for the benefit of the people rather than just himself. In that way, his regime can become permanent. History provides fewer examples of this phenomenon; for most dictators remain just that and, however successful they may be, their regimes rarely outlast them.

Don't treat the state as a private possession, but act as its steward: account for expenses; raise taxes for useful purposes such as public works or military emergencies[59]. In other words, create and maintain a responsible, acceptable government that carefully manages the resources of the state.

Adorn the city like a steward, not a tyrant[60]. Cultivate a serious image without being harsh; inspire respect not fear. This is often associated with military success.

Be moderate and hard working. Avoid personal extravagance[61]. That is, emphasize the state, not the ruler; avoid creating public works and monuments for personal glory.

Cultivate the state religion[62]. In modern times, this can mean coming to terms with the accepted religion, or imposing and exploiting an official ideology.

Make sure your followers are above suspicion; honor good men but don't show too much favor to any one; keep watch on potential enemies (for a tyrant is always in danger of assassination)[63].

Treat the people fairly; avoid sex offenses[64].

Let each class believe that it owes its survival to the regime; favor the strongest and make them partners in rule[65].

Dictators who follow precepts like these essentially become kings, presiding over stable and enduring regimes that bring real benefits to their subjects. However, most dictatorships, as Aristotle explains, do not last long. This is especially true of the second generation: the founder of a dictatorship tends to gain power by his own merits, but his sons who did nothing but inherit power rarely manage to retain it. In ancient Greece, dictatorships rarely lasted into the third generation. In modern times, sons of dictators often fail to keep power.[66]

Aristotle does not give a program for getting rid of dictators, but he does describe a couple of very important factors that can undermine them. The hatred and contempt they usually inspire can lead to fatal conspiracies. Dissent within the ruling clique can have similar results. Dictatorships also face a special problem: they inspire the opposition of powerful states that have very different forms of government. Aristotle had Athens and Sparta in mind. Neither of them was fond of tyranny. But, as Aristotle well knew, many dictators, even the most loathsome, manage to maintain power and die peacefully in their beds.

Aristotle's analyses are surprisingly perceptive; sometimes it almost seems as if he had modern examples in mind. But, of course, he is writing in the context of his own time, and cannot take account of changed aspects of society and economy. In terms of keeping tyrants in power, therefore, he does not systematically discuss control of the centers of power in a society. These can include the army, religion, political parties, trade unions, banking and finance, communications, and the mass media. In his time, there was no professional army, just the mass of citizens or mercenaries; modern economy and communications did not exist. Nor does he specifically consider dictators' frequent desire to pass themselves off as something they are not, by holding "elections" or calling their regimes People's Democracies or something similar. Yet in his own terms, and frequently in ours, Aristotle provides real insights into the phenomenon of dictatorship, not simply as it existed in ancient Greece, but for all time.

Part III: Using the Greeks

The Italian Renaissance

During the long Middle Ages, when wealth and power depended on control of land and an aristocracy ruled, dictatorship virtually disappeared. It only revived when independent states grew and flourished in Italy, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. The situation there came to resemble that of ancient Sicily, and was equally productive of dictatorship. Relatively small city-states entered into rivalry with each other as they struggled for territory and glory. Most of them were bitterly divided internally, between factions aligned with the Holy Roman Emperor or the Pope, between the ruling elites and the guilds of tradesmen and artisans, between rival potential leaders, and between rich and poor, all ready to attack the other whenever possible. To make matters worse, many of the cities concentrated their efforts on making money, leaving their defense or aggression in the hands of mercenary armies whose loyalty could change at a moment's notice. As a result, most of them were ruled by *signori* – called princes in common English usage – whose arbitrary one-man rule corresponds to modern notions of dictatorship. Some were constantly so ruled; others maintained other kinds of regimes more or less successfully. Among the major powers, Florence, the centre of art and culture – in a sense, the Athens of Italy – was a republic, though it eventually fell under the domination of the Medici family; Milan, the most powerful, was a dictatorship; Venice, the most stable, retained an oligarchic form of government that long outlasted the Renaissance. In the constant play for supremacy, Milan came the closest to success under Giangaleazzo Visconti (1378-1402) who brought most of northern Italy under his control and was about to attack his most bitter enemy, Florence, when he

suddenly died. In all this turmoil, Greek literature and ideas returned to Western Europe, with their first major impact on the cities of Italy.

Plato was always read and appreciated in the Greek and Byzantine East, but knowledge of his works died out in the medieval West. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, only four of his dialogues (not including the *Republic*) were known, in translations of highly varying quality.[67] All that changed in 1396 with the arrival in Florence of a Greek diplomatist, Manuel Chrysoloras, sent by the Byzantine Emperor in an effort to raise support against the ever-encroaching power of the Turks. The locals soon persuaded him to stay and teach Greek, for which there was much demand. Despite considerable success in Florence, where he taught one of the founders of the Renaissance, Leonardo Bruni, Chrysoloras moved to Milan in 1400, following the orders of the Emperor, who was hoping to find allies there, in the most powerful of the Italian states.

Milan's Duke, Giangaleazzo Visconti, like most of the renaissance "princes," had essentially dictatorial powers. Since he was an active patron of the arts and letters, and violently hostile to Florence, attracting such a famous and valuable teacher as Chrysoloras was a real coup. The Greek scholar started work and, in collaboration with his local pupil Uberto Decembrio, produced the first Latin translation of the *Republic* in 1402. This volume immediately showed its value in the ongoing war of words between Florence and Milan. Visconti may even have had it translated because he learned something of its contents, and saw it as a valuable piece of propaganda, since it advocated a system where a philosopher-king, highly educated and with full military training, should preside over a society whose stability was ensured by having all elements fixed in their place. No direct parallel was made

between Visconti and the philosopher-king, but the implication was strong. Decembrio went on to explicate the *Republic* as justifying the kind of government that existed in Milan, a stable, healthy state as opposed to the "fevered," more chaotic regimes of Florence or Venice. Although he believed that a philosopher-king was so rare as to be a virtual impossibility, he did see the *Republic* as advocating the rule of a wise, highly educated prince who would choose his followers according to their talents rather than their ancestry. The good prince should be able to classify his subjects according to their innate abilities (using Plato's' analogy of gold, silver, bronze and iron), employ them accordingly, and regulate marriages so that the best would flourish. In all this, a stable state could be achieved, based on meritocracy, and under the necessary leadership of an all-competent prince. All this, at least by implication, could apply to Milan, which would thus have a powerful antique precedent.

Uberto's son, Pier Candido Decembrio, made another translation of the *Republic*, and similarly used Plato's works as justifying the autocratic government of Milan.[68] He compared the Visconti with Plato's philosopher-king, and derided the regimes of Florence and Venice as belonging to lower Platonic categories of government, inferior to the honorable, or timocratic, rule of Milan. He regarded the *Republic*, though, as an ideal rather than a model that the states of his time could follow. Like many of his contemporaries, he had to deal with the problem that much of Plato's teaching was incompatible with Christianity. This factor seriously limited the practical influence that Plato's works might have had.

Ironically enough, similar arguments based on Plato were used in republican Florence when it fell under the domination of the Medici in the mid-fifteenth century.[69] Their family, whose fortune derived from trade and banking, was never part of the local aristocracy, and

therefore lacked standing or legitimacy as rulers. Their supporters and apologists turned to Plato, who offered some very cogent arguments that could justify the rule of such upstarts. From the Republic, the Medici could derive the notion that power is legitimate when combined with wisdom; that the rule of a good man is superior to adherence to old customs; and that position in society should be determined according to ability rather than inherited titles. The general notion that the wise should rule, the rulers should be wise, and that power should be exercised for the benefit of the whole society and not just for its parts all found support in Plato, whose works again served, though in a very different setting, to justify despotic rule.

Both in Milan and Florence, Plato's primary value was for propaganda. He could be adduced in support of despotic or illegitimate regimes, and his works could influence the political thought of the day. That does not mean, of course, that the Visconti or Medici ever modeled themselves on Plato, or used his teaching as a basis for their regimes; but he proved to offer very convenient support for what they were already doing. From the beginning of modern times, then, Plato, who despised tyrants, could be cited in support of tyranny. The association between his teaching and dictatorship was to have many ramifications.

Revolutionary France

The French Revolution arose at a time of tremendous enthusiasm for the Classics. Its leaders had almost invariably been educated in the Latin writers, but of the Greeks they were only really familiar with Plutarch, whose *Lives* portrayed the virtuous golden ages of Athens (which stood for liberty) and Sparta (where equality was supreme).[70] They were full of romantic ideas about ancient virtue and morality. Even if they didn't read them very much, they were certainly conscious of the Greek models:

the meeting hall of the Convention, the supreme revolutionary body during its most extreme phase, 1792-1794, was adorned with full-length statues of Solon, Lycurgus, Plato and Demosthenes (along with four Romans). During the first stages of the revolution, though, when the common goal was to establish a constitutional monarchy, the classical political models were admired, but there was little desire to copy them, since the scale and problems of the modern country were so different, and since so many of them were far removed from contemporary ideas of equality. America seemed to provide a better and more relevant model than Sparta or Athens.

As the Revolution became more radical, however, and a republic replaced the monarchy, the leaders started to pay more serious attention to the Greeks. Their influence also came indirectly, through two contemporary philosophers who were much admired at the time. Most prominent in his influence was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who taught that the general will of the people should rule, and that all should be obliged or even forced to follow it. His ideas were Platonic in that he believed in a state based on morality where the individual would find fulfillment, and Spartan, since he postulated a disciplined population conforming closely to the ideals of the state. Both Plato and Sparta influenced his ideas on education (he called Plato's *Republic* the best book on the subject ever written), which involved the state taking control from the parents. Rousseau's doctrine easily led to dictatorship, for a small group would have to interpret the general will, and all who opposed it would by definition be totally wrong. This notion of a small highly educated ruling elite was also perfectly Platonic. Similarly, Gabriel de Mably (1709-1785), now forgotten but extremely influential at the time, advocated a kind of Platonic communism, with the abolition of private property, and a Spartan education, with the boys organized into troops.[72] Both Mably and

Rousseau, however, differed from the Greeks in advocating real equality for all.

When Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety took over the revolution in 1793 and turned France into a dictatorship enforced by the Terror, they were much influenced by Rousseau's General Will, which (they believed) they were uniquely qualified to interpret. In more practical terms, though, they turned their attention to education, for, like most dictators, they planned to create a new kind of citizen who would break with the past and embody new radical ideas. They wanted to ensure that the society they envisaged would take root. For that, it needed to be freed from the dead hand of tradition (parents) and religion (the Catholic Church). Here, the Spartan model had a lot to offer. The first concrete proposal for a new education was drawn up by Michel Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau, who did not live to publicize it, for he was assassinated by a royalist just after voting for the execution of Louis XVI. He was one of the Revolution's first martyrs.[73]

Lepeletier left behind a manuscript with full details of his educational plan. His brother Felix got permission to present it to the Convention, but made the mistake of letting Robespierre borrow it. On the next day, 13 July 1793, Robespierre, to the chagrin of Felix, presented it himself. Actually, since he was then the dominant force in France, his advocacy of the plan gave it more weight than it might otherwise have had. The proposal, long and complex, had many Spartan aspects. It proposed that all education be free and compulsory, and that the state should raise all boys from the age of five till 12 and girls until 11, giving them the same food, clothing and care in Houses of National Education.[74] The education would strengthen the children's bodies, accustom them to hard work and give them the necessary knowledge to practice a trade. For this, much attention would be devoted to manual training, study and exercise. At the same time, patriotism would be

instilled by teaching them revolutionary songs and stories. Propaganda and indoctrination would form a large part of this system, but so would physical discipline. Sleeping on hard beds, without servants to care for them, the children would grow up to be strong and self-reliant. The girls would follow a similar regimen to the boys, though being trained in domestic more than manual or agricultural skills. The teachers would be supervised by a council of parents, some of whose members would actually reside at the school, so that there would be constant control. By these means, the child would belong to the nation, would become in the words of the Marseillaise, a true *enfant de la patrie*. Most of this, of course, was really Spartan, but as usual with significant differences: this was not the training of a military aristocracy, but of functioning citizens. Hence, it would be a universal system, and concerned with practical matters, not just fighting. The plan was eventually passed by the Convention, though much changed since it was judged too expensive. In any case, it was never put into effect since the regime soon underwent drastic changes, which included sending Robespierre to the guillotine in 1794.

Lepeletier was not the only one to advocate a Spartan education. A friend and pupil of Rousseau, Alexandre Deleyre, came up with a similar proposal which envisaged the state taking control of the lives of children from the age of seven to 18.[75] All their activities would be in common, causing them to lead, as Deleyre specified, "la vie fraternelle des Spartiates." They would even read Plutarch for inspiration, listen to martial music and spend much time in exercise and warlike dances. Girls would be taught something similar. Although presented to the Convention, Deleyre's plan never attracted serious attention since the influence of Robespierre was so overwhelming.

Antoine Saint-Just, the youngest and probably most radical of the leaders of the Terror, a member of the Committee of Public Safety with Robespierre and executed with him at the age of 27, was another admirer of Sparta. He had ambitious plans for the Republic, imagining a total reconstruction of the state from a regime based on force to one where spontaneous harmony ruled. His model, not surprisingly, lay in Antiquity, since he could see little in his immediate violent surroundings conducive to tranquility. His plan, which survives in a series of notes for a major work, the *Republican Institutions*, only saw the light long after his death.[76] Its section on education is especially relevant, following closely as it does in the footsteps of Lepeletier and Robespierre. Social harmony was to be ensured on the basis of sworn friendship between individuals, a solemn act to take place in public temples. Such friends would fight together and develop an acute sense of cohesiveness as well as exerting social pressure on each other. Those who did not believe in friendship or who had no friends would be banished. So far, this is reminiscent of the Sacred Band of Thebes, but Sparta comes to the forefront as Saint-Just advances a plan for education.

In this ideal state, all children belong to their mother for the first five years, then to the Republic until their death. The very young were to learn a laconic simplicity of language and to despise rhetoricians; their games would preclude any declamations – they should get used to simple truth. The boys were to be brought up by the state (their tutors chosen from citizens over 60), not meeting their mothers again for 20 years. From the age of five till ten, they would learn to read, write and swim. They would dress in coarse cloth, sleep on straw, and live on vegetables. From ten to 16, the training turned more martial, and the boys, organized into companies, battalions and legions (a Roman

touch here) would demonstrate their skills in public at an annual camp. From 16 to 20 they would learn a profession, whether agricultural (which this training also stresses), industrial or naval; then from 20 to 25 they would perform their military service. Girls, on the other hand, would be brought up in their mothers' homes. All this is extremely Spartan, as is the idea that all citizens should own land. The only major difference is that these citizens will also work the land, for this is no slave or *helot* society with a permanent underclass.

In this case, the Greek heritage expressed itself in education. Though Plato's influence was in the background of much of the Revolution's ideology, it was Sparta that came to the fore. The model for inculcating correct ideas, revolutionary enthusiasm and disciplined devotion could be found in the pages of Plutarch. The French of the late eighteenth century were not the last to advance such notions.

Plato's American Republic

The appearance of the United States in a discussion of Greek political influence and of dictatorship might seem incongruous. The American republic was created with virtually no input from ancient Greece, and could not be more different from dictatorship. Yet this nation produced a community that brought Plato's *Republic* into reality far more than any other, ancient or modern. Communism of property and of women, as well as eugenics, flourished successfully among the Perfectionists of nineteenth-century New York state. Although their society differed from Plato in some fundamental respects, its application of similar principles suggests how the Republic might actually have worked.

The Founding Fathers of the new American nation, like their successors in France, were steeped in the classics.[77] As they made their plans for a new government, they constantly looked back to the Greeks and Romans, for no

large republic had existed since classical times. They drew far more inspiration from the Romans, though, for Greek democracy was viewed as too radical and unstable, while the Roman republic, which seemed to represent a compromise between monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, had lasted for centuries. Plato rarely appears in the debates about the American constitution, since his constructs were considered too idealistic to have any practical value. Although his philosophical works were well known and admired, Plato's influence as a political model was negligible.[78]

Dictatorship, of course, is impossible under the American Constitution. No national official has ever attained arbitrary, absolute power, though, in his day, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was suspected by some to be heading in that direction, as was Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. On a local level, however, there have been individuals who exercised considerable control over their communities. Most notable, perhaps, was Huey Long, who dominated Louisiana from 1928 until his assassination in 1935. Likewise, big-city political "bosses" have often been virtual dictators in their own municipalities. None of them, though, owed anything to the ancient Greeks.

Leaders of religious communities can also manifest a kind of microcosmic dictatorial power, especially when they claim to be prophets, with an authority deriving from God. Most outstanding among them was surely Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, who used his uncontestable power, strengthened by constant revelations, to run a virtually independent statelet in Illinois until he was murdered in 1844.

Smith's contemporary and fellow Vermonter, John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886), likewise founded a religious community of which he was the unquestioned head.[79] His doctrine of Perfectionism, his idiosyncratic interpretation of the Scriptures, and the relative isolation in which his

people lived, enabled him to create a society that in many ways resembles Plato's *Republic*. A revelation in 1834 convinced Noyes that he had a special relation to the Divinity, and that he could achieve a kind of personal perfection that would allow him to live entirely free from sin – or at least enable him to avoid knowingly doing anything wrong. His doctrine suited the optimistic atmosphere of the time, with its notion of unlimited possibilities of human progress, for he taught that individuals could achieve perfection and thus hasten the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on this earth. Love and harmony were key concepts for the group that Noyes gathered in Putney, Vermont in 1838 and for the larger and more famous community of Oneida, New York, whose 300 or so members lived together successfully for more than 30 years (1848-1880).

To achieve perfection, individuals had to be in harmony with the group and subordinate their interests to it. They had to avoid the possessiveness, jealousy and competitiveness that arose from property and differences in wealth. From the mid-1840s on, therefore, the members agreed to share all their belongings, turning their goods and money over to the community which provided all their support.[80] Noyes saw this also as a means of imitating the earliest Christians, who after the Pentecost had all things in common, sold all their goods and distributed them as needed (Acts 2:44-45). In the creation of his ideal "state," Noyes took the same first step as Plato, who saw private property as the inevitable source of divisiveness and so ordained communism for his Guardians. Both of them were concerned with profound questions of how unity, stability and peace could be established in a society, and how the society as a whole should relate to the individuals who composed it.

Noyes saw that marriage and sexuality were key elements in the functioning of society. After contemplating

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them for a long time, he found some remarkable solutions. Once again, he based his doctrine on Scripture, notably Matthew 22:30, where Jesus is quoted as saying "in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage." This was normally taken to mean that Heaven was a sexless place, but Noyes saw it differently. He maintained, on the contrary, that Jesus actually meant there would be no conventional monogamous marriage in Heaven. Jesus had also prayed that all men should be one, and perfect in one (John 17: 21-23) and that they should love God and their neighbors. For Noyes, this showed that there should be no exclusivity in marriage, but that all men would be married to all women, a system he called "complex marriage."[81] He introduced it with considerable success in Oneida. Like Plato, he saw sexual rivalry as an important force in disrupting the harmony of a community.

Plato also advocated a community of children: offspring of his Guardians should be raised and educated by the State, not knowing who their parents were and vice versa. Plato never explained how this could be accomplished; Noyes dealt with the practicalities. At first, he hesitated to introduce complex marriage, not just because of social disapproval from the outside world, but because it would produce a mass of illegitimate children. He found a solution derived from his own experience, in "male continence," whereby the man would not ejaculate in sexual congress, though the woman could be completely satisfied. Using this method, the members of the community shared each others beds, but produced very few children. Noyes was careful to avoid complete sexual freedom, though, which could also undermine the community. As in Plato's *Republic*, where the elders regulated the choice of partners and procreation, Noyes set up an elaborate system to enable complex marriage to function without disruption. Sexual liaisons were strictly controlled; prospective partners had to be approved by

the central members – Noyes, his family and close older associates – and their activity was carefully regulated, so that no bonds of exclusive love attachments could be formed, and to ensure that old and young alike could participate.

Oneida nevertheless produced children, and some were brought in by converts. Their upbringing was Platonic. As soon as they were weaned, they were taken away from their parents and lodged in the Children's House where they received all their basic education, training and socialization from adults to whom they were not related.[82] They, of course, did know their parents, but saw them less often than their guardians – all this was designed to break or at least diminish the natural bonds of affection (again, an exclusive, potentially disruptive force) by distributing the love between children and adults as widely as possible. Unlike Plato, Noyes had no illusion about parents and children not knowing each other. This system also seemed to have worked: adults reminiscing about their time in the children's house usually saw it as happy, though the mothers had a difficult time adjusting to the loss of their offspring.

The women of the Perfectionist community, largely relieved of the burdens of bearing and raising children, were free to participate in every activity. Like Plato, Noyes believed that women should have the same privileges and rights as men. That became a striking aspect of the Oneida community, where both sexes shared the same jobs and where women often rose to the highest levels of the hierarchy (though many of them did tend to follow traditionally feminine occupations).[83]

As time went on, it became clear that the Kingdom of Heaven was not immediately at hand, so Noyes took a further step for strengthening defense against the Devil. He allowed the community to reproduce naturally, but along strictly eugenic lines, what he called "stirpiculture."[84] In

this, he was greatly influenced by the new theories of Darwin, and by the writings of Francis Galton (1822-1911), the founder of modern eugenics. But in the work where he explained his novel doctrine, Noyes quoted a highly relevant passage from the fifth book of Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates, making an analogy with the breeding of animals, concludes, "What extremely perfect government must we have, if the same applies to the human race!"[85] Like Plato, Noyes saw the possibility of improving humanity by selective breeding. For Oneida, this meant that those with the highest level of spiritual development would be favored as parents. The Community accepted the new dispensation, often applying in couples to a selection committee, which could accept or reject the application, or suggest suitable parents. This experiment produced 45 children between 1869 and 1879; nine of them were sired by Noyes himself, since he was the closest to perfection. Ironically, this experiment was one of the roots of the ultimate failure of the community, since these parents could not avoid the exclusive love of their children, tended to favor matrimony, and often attracted the unwelcome jealousy of those not selected to participate.

Communism, sharing wives, women's rights, eugenics – all sound like a recreation of Plato's *Republic* in the New World, but with some significant differences. Most important, the Perfectionists were no small elite class of Guardians, organized for war. They did not look down on manual labor or money-making, On the contrary, they were workers and farmers, actively involved in every aspect of the life of the community. They had nothing to do with the military, and their community was financially active and successful. Likewise, their education was relatively normal, with a high dose of Bible study, not the arduous philosophical training of the Guardians.

Politically, though, there were some resemblances between Greek theory and American reality. Although no

one would call Noyes a philosopher-king, he, like the perfected Guardians, did have complete control of the religious and social lives of his followers.[86] Noyes delegated some authority to an inner circle of his family and senior members; he left most day-to-day decisions to the community as a whole; and never hesitated to change plans and adapt to circumstances. In the final analysis, however, he exercised a kind of despotic or dictatorial control, made all the firmer by the social system he put into practice. It was Noyes who had the ultimate power over the sex lives of the Community, and it was Noyes who instituted and often presided over the greatest element of social control – public criticism sessions where the wayward were exposed to detailed and often harsh appraisals of their actions by everyone. In other words, a tightly controlled Platonic community came into being in America and enjoyed a moment of considerable success.

It is hard to know how far the Perfectionist movement was directly influenced by Plato. Noyes, of course, always appealed to the Bible to support his audacious social experiments, but he did study Greek at Dartmouth and his brother and close associate Horatio was a scholar of the classics at Yale.[87] Both of them necessarily read extracts from Plato's *Crito* and *Phaedo* in the volumes of *Collectanea graeca maiora* that were in ubiquitous use in early nineteenth century American higher education.[88] It is likely, therefore, that Noyes was aware the Republic from an early age; he certainly knew it by the 1860s, when he proclaimed "stirpiculture." In any case, his Community incorporated so many Platonic elements that it can serve as an illustration of how the Philosopher's teachings might have worked in practice.

Nazi Germany

The Germans of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had such a fascination with classical antiquity that Greek philosophy and literature exercised an overwhelming influence on German thought and education. Plato was a special favorite who inspired endless writing, some of which took a sinister turn during the declining years of the post-World War I Weimar Republic.[89] Nazis and their sympathizers found much to like in him, particularly in the *Republic*. Carefully selected passages or forced interpretations presented Plato as giving sanction to racism and dictatorship. Alfred Rosenberg, Nazism's prime ideologue, for example, could write: "Plato was really a man who wanted to save his people on a racial foundation by a powerful – even in detail dictatorial – state constitution."[90] For Hans Guenther, the chief Nazi authority on racial matters, Plato provided firm backing for eugenics, that is, for eliminating "inferior" elements from the population.[91] In a work whose title speaks for itself – *Hitler's Struggle and Plato's State: A Study on the Ideological Construction of the National Socialist Freedom Movement*, Joachim Bannes stressed Plato's support of eugenics but also revealed that his ideal of rule by the wisest and the best was fulfilled in the person of Adolf Hitler.[92] By that time, one of the founders of Hitler's own party, Gottfried Feder, had brought Plato to center stage in a pamphlet that defined the party's program. He proclaimed that the greatest task of National Socialism was to bring the world back into order and to preside over that order as guardians "in the highest Platonic sense."[93] When the Nazis were in power, they ensured that Plato received appropriate attention in the schools by producing selected passages from his works where Platonic and Nazi ideology could be seen to coincide.[94]

Much as they admired the artistic and architectural achievements of the ancient Greeks, and saw merit in Plato, the real enthusiasm of the Nazis was directed toward the highly organized militaristic Spartans. Among the Greeks, who had developed democracy and manifested other signs of decadence, the Spartans stood out as true Nordics. For in the contorted racial theorizing of the Third Reich, Spartans, who were seen as blond and blue-eyed, were true racial leaders, ultimately akin to the Germans themselves. Once again, Hans Guenther expatiated on the Nordic origins of the Spartans and explained their later decay, while Alfred Rosenberg revealed how they, like the Macedonians, brought a vital infusion of Nordic blood to the Greek world. He saw them as part of the noble Aryan race, itself responsible for virtually all forms of civilization in the Western world.[95] Historians, even respectable ones, presented Sparta as a model for the Nazi regime, while the Ministry of Education considered Sparta as the ancient Greek society most worthy of study. All Antiquity – for the Germans had not lost their admiration for Greece – was studied in a new light, with students writing papers on such topics as "Xenophon in the *Anabasis* and Adolf Hitler in his struggle for power" or "Heroism in the Odyssey and today, especially as embodied in the Fuehrer of ancient and modern times."[96]

The Spartans had another "Nazi" virtue: they believed in eugenics, by removing the weak from the community soon after birth. This aspect especially appealed to Adolf Hitler as he campaigned for high office in the late 1920s. He considered the rule of 6,000 Spartans over 350,000 as only conceivable because of the high racial value of the Spartans, itself the result of a planned racial preservation; Sparta, he wrote, was the first *voelkisch* state. He saw the Spartans as following a law of nature by making a selection of their offspring, removing worthless elements so that the rest could live better.[97] The Spartan model so suited his

ideas that the *New York Times* could quote him in 1931 as saying "It will be in Berlin that we will inform the world of our program which is based on the Spartan state ideal."[98]

The notion of the Third Reich as a kind of Spartan revival drew strength from its rigid military discipline, its focus on warlike virtues and the control the state exercised over individuals. It seemed natural to an objective American observer, writing in 1940, to call Nazi Germany a New (or Modern) Sparta. He was particularly referring to the Labor Service, where all young men were set to public works as a kind of paramilitary training.[99] During the war, the Spartan ideal took on another aspect, when after the defeat at Stalingrad the German fighters were likened to the 300 Spartans who had fallen holding back the Persian hordes at Thermopylae.[100] Even in the last desperate days of the Third Reich, when it was obvious to everyone that the regime was collapsing, Hitler still remembered the Spartans. On 6 February 1945, as he contemplated the irresistible advance of Germany's enemies and the imminent destruction of all he stood for, he said:

> If the Fates have decreed that we should once more in the course of our history be crushed by forces superior to our own, then let us go down with our heads high and secure in the knowledge that the honor of the German people remains without blemish. A desperate fight remains for all time a shining example. Let us remember Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans.[101]

The most important Spartan influence, however, manifests itself in Hitler's plans for his future state that he drew up while imprisoned in 1924, and subsequently published in his autobiographical *Mein Kampf*. In a long section devoted to the State and to Subjects and Citizens, he sets out his projects for the education that would form

the ideal citizen.[102] For him, the idea of race must be kept in the centre, just as the race must be kept pure. The physically or mentally unhealthy must not be allowed to reproduce. Rather than fill the heads of children with useless ballast, soon forgotten, schools should devote far more time to physical exercise and the creation of absolutely healthy bodies, for, as Hitler maintained, "a man of little scientific education but physically healthy, with a good, firm character, imbued with the joy of determination and willpower, is more valuable for the national community than a clever weakling" (408). Sport should not only make the individual strong, it should toughen him and teach him teach him to bear hardships. Education should instill self-confidence to such a degree that its subject will be absolutely confident that he is superior to others. Loyalty, self-sacrifice, discretion, and silence in the face of suffering or adversity are the prime virtues to be taught in school. But education was not to end with the school; it was only the first step to producing the citizen, and would find its culmination in military service. There, the young man would not only learn to obey but to command. After that, in a solemn ceremony, he would receive the certificate of citizenship that qualified him for all the privileges in the new society. Hitler did not forget the girls, though he paid far less attention to them. They too were to receive physical training, and only after spiritual and intellectual education, all of which should prepare them for their role as mothers. The Spartan elements in this – removal of the weak, limited education, training in virtues ultimately useful for war – will be obvious.

In Hitler's time, many of the Greek classics were part of everybody's culture, so familiar as to be commonplace. The young Hitler, with his admiration for heroes and warriors, almost certainly would have read Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, although he never quoted it directly.[103] He did

know the verses written in eulogy of the Spartans who fell at Thermopylae, and made famous by Goethe, for he quotes them in *Mein Kampf* (259), slightly transformed, to honor the German dead of the World War. In any case, his plans for education have a distinctively Spartan flavor and would have produced citizens not very different from the ancient Spartans.

Nazi Germany, of course, is long gone (and few regret its demise), but its ideas linger on in a kind of lunatic fringe which often expresses itself forcefully, especially on the Internet. One such group that calls itself "BlutKriegSieg" (Blood, War, Victory) has actually produced an essay about Sparta, showing how it was the forerunner of the Nazi state.[104] By this reasoning, Sparta, though divided into three classes with very distinct functions, could nevertheless offer a parallel to the "classless" Nazi society: the full citizens, the warriors, were the counterpart of the SS Nordics; the *perioikoi* corresponded to the rest of the Germans; while the *helots* were "the societal dregs and undesirables" (the author conveniently forgets that the *helots* did the work and produced the food that allowed the Spartan elite to concentrate on fighting). The policies and military achievements of Sparta offer the closest parallels: the Spartans, who looked to their own interests first, were the champions of the Greeks against the Persians, but after that war returned to affairs closer to home, in the Peloponnesus. Likewise, Hitler was the defender of all Teutonic peoples, but did not try to impose his rule on all of them. In warfare, this reasoning finds a close parallel between the tiny number of Spartans who held off the Persians at Thermopylae and the relatively few Germans who fought the far more numerous French and Russians. In both cases, the society stressed human quality over quantity. Similarly, militaristic education of the youth permeated both societies, who believed that to die in battle was the supreme glory. "Aryan virtues of honor, strength, tactical

thought and skill were taught on the wind-swept plains of Laconia just as they were taught on the grassy plains of Germania."[105]

It is hardly surprising that an aggressive militaristic group like the Nazis should turn to Sparta for inspiration, since there they could find a model of total obedience suitable to the totalitarian regime they were hoping to create. Their leader never forgot the Spartan example, which could be used in bad times as well as good. Yet Plato had his uses too, especially as a supposed advocate of eugenics, justifying the peculiar racial theories that the Nazis advanced.

The Soviet Union

At first sight, the most "Platonic" state in the modern world would seem to be the Soviet Union. After all, Plato had advocated the abolition of private property and of the traditional family; he favored sexual equality and a strictly regimented system of education in which the children would be taken away from their parents and formed by the state. He could even be considered a revolutionary, since his proposals involved a complete break with traditional society and politics. His ideals seemed to correspond so closely to those of the Marxists that an observant visitor, Bertrand Russell, who saw the new Soviet state in 1920, could write:

> Far closer than any actual historical parallel is the parallel of Plato's *Republic*. The Communist party corresponds to the guardians; the soldiers have about the same status in both; there is in Russia an attempt to deal with life more or less as Plato suggested…the parallel is extraordinarily exact between Plato's *Republic* and the regime which the better Bolsheviks are endeavoring to create.[106]

Russell seems to have fallen into a misinterpretation of Plato that has been current since the time of Aristotle.[107] Many commentators have considered the *Republic* as advocating a kind of communism, an impression that seems obvious at first sight: after all, what else could the absence of private property or money, and the sharing of wives and children mean? Real communists knew better. Marxists in fact had already thought about Plato, and found him seriously wanting. His communism only applied to the ruling class; he believed that workers and peasants – producers who apparently owned land or goods of their own – should naturally retain their permanently inferior status, and he showed no interest whatsoever in the class struggle that is so fundamental to Marxism. If Marxists favored any Greek philosopher, it was not Plato but Democritus (460-370 B.C.), who took an uncompromisingly materialistic view of the universe, believing that everything was composed of invisible atoms. They also had some affinity with Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who followed Democritus and opposed Plato's ideas of ideal forms and immaterial soul. Marx, who was a student of Greek philosophy, had in fact written his doctoral dissertation on Democritus and Epicurus. There, he was concerned with the eternal question of free will or determinism – that is, how far could people control their own destiny, or how far were they constrained by historical, geographic or other kinds of circumstances.

Nevertheless, the leading Marxist theoretician, the German Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) presented a sympathetic view of Plato, stressing those elements that his ideal state had in common with the vision of Communism.[108] Also, during the efflorescence of truly "revolutionary" ideas in the first few years of the Revolution, Plato briefly came into his own, with new editions, translations and discussions that stressed his relevance to contemporary events and ideals.[109] Associating the new regime with

something so ancient and famous as Plato's ideal state was a temptation hard to resist. Orthodoxy soon triumphed, however: in 1923, Lenin ordered all philosophical works not suitable for mass consumption to be removed from public libraries and be made available only for serious research.[110] Such research produced denunciations of earlier Marxists sympathetic to Plato and toed the official line that he was a utopian reactionary whose idealism was in direct contrast to the materialism the Soviets favored; his "communism" was firmly rooted in an aristocratic society and had no relevance for current problems.[111]

Russians may have understood how little Plato had to offer their society, but for some foreign observers, commenting at a safe distance, a connection was inescapable. Werner Fite, writing on Plato's philosophy in 1934, for example, could postulate:

> If Plato were alive today he would find his conception of an organized state illustrated on a grand scale – doubtless very imperfectly, but the idea is there – in the Russian Union of Soviet Republics…the Soviet state is the first attempt in history to realize Plato's conception of a state organized from top to bottom on scientific principles.[112]

Since the regime controlled all sources of information – in an especially ferocious manner under Stalin – suitably chosen selections from Plato, ironically, could reemerge in a favorable light. When the new Constitution of the USSR was being drawn up in 1936, some of his works, along with selections from Aristotle, were published again or discussed. Properly edited, they could be used to lend support or respectability to current developments. This kind of use appears in a grandiose commemorative issue of the widely distributed propaganda magazine, *USSR in Construction*. Its special issue for 1937, celebrating at the same time the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution and the

promulgation of the new Constitution, opens with portraits of the "most intelligent and generous men of all ages and countries who favored social equality." The first is Plato, quoted as saying that if a regime is created where all property is in common and there is no private property, it will be a very happy country.[113]

Plato never quite said that, but there was no way the Soviet readers could know. Some of them may indeed have believed they were living in Platonic bliss, but in fact, the philosopher's ideas never overcame the natural Marxist aversion to his elite attitude, and Greek influence remained far more limited than outside observers imagined. On the other hand, the insidious Platonic notion that society should be run by a well-educated ruling elite was at the core of Lenin's thinking. Whether he derived this directly through his studies or indirectly through Rousseau and the French Revolution, it justified the notion of an all-wise Party that knew what was best for the rest of the population and could follow any policy it thought necessary or appropriate, regardless of the consequences.

Modern Greece

The Greeks may have invented dictatorship, but they had been free of it for over 2,000 years when general Theodore Pangalos seized power in 1925. He only lasted a few months, not long enough to develop an ideology (if he ever had one), and is only remembered for legislating on the length of women's skirts. A far more serious figure, and one most significant for understanding the attachment of dictatorship to the ancient Greek past, was Ioannis Metaxas who ruled Greece from 1936 to 1941. He took control with the backing of the king, George II, not as the result of a popular revolution. Consequently, he lacked widespread support or the cornerstone that a mass organization would have provided. This dictatorship

needed an ideology. To some, the answer was obvious: Metaxas was a Fascist. His regime did indeed have fascistic aspects: he took the title *archegos* (the Greek equivalent of Duce or Fuehrer), he was a populist who liked to be called First Worker or First Peasant, he set up a National Youth Organization (modeled on the Hitler Youth) to indoctrinate the young, and he used an effective secret police to round up real or potential enemies, especially Communists. His slogan "One Nation, One King, One Leader, One Youth" was certainly reminiscent of Nazi Germany. Yet geopolitical realities kept him from falling into the embrace of Hitler or Mussolini. Italy was a natural rival in the Balkans and aimed to extend its domination to Greece, and Greece had been and remained closely allied with Great Britain. So, pure Fascism was no use as a defining ideology.

Instead, Metaxas turned to the past of his own country, well suited to his purposes. He developed a doctrine based on ancient and medieval history, calling his regime the Third Hellenic Civilization[114]. Ancient Sparta was the first, medieval Byzantium the second. He could hope to combine the military virtues of Sparta with the intense Christianity of Byzantium, taking his model from two authoritarian states.[115] By so doing, he followed the mid-nineteenth century Greek view of history, which looked back to Antiquity and Byzantium, seeing the rising new Greek state as heir to both.[116] But there was a big difference. When most Greeks turned to the past, they contemplated the glories of Athens, which combined empire with democracy, and represented the acme of Greek culture. Athens, however, was of no use to Metaxas: it was not only a democracy, but its people were too individualistic, a feature, he believed, that led to the ultimate collapse of its power. Sparta, on the other hand, had citizens who were idealistic and devoted to the State; they were also overwhelmingly successful on the battlefield for 300 years.

Metaxas firmly expressed the value of ancient Sparta as a model for the present in a speech (a typical example of his style) he gave at Sparta itself in May 1938:

> I have thought, I think and I believe that of all the ancient models and ideals, the best are the ideals that inspired your ancient Fatherland, Sparta. I have expressed this publicly, not because I thought that the other ancient ideals were inferior, but I thought and I think and I believe that in the times we are experiencing - times of danger, times when we must be strong, ready to sacrifice everything for the Fatherland, and when we have determined to offer our lives, our material well-being and our happiness for Greece because without such determination it will not be possible for Greece to be preserved - I thought that the most appropriate ancient model to whose ideals Greece hould correspond was ancient Sparta. Indeed – I repeat – we cannot bring that past back to life, but it must exist within us. Consider now what I have proclaimed everywhere, that is, the two characteristics of the August Fourth regime: absolute national discipline combined with a rational, but as far as possible greater, personal freedom. This is what the Mayor has characterized as "disciplined freedom." Was not this the ideal of ancient Sparta? On the basis of these ideas I have advanced forward…[117]

As a result of thinking like this, the educational system was modified to exclude some favorite classics: the funeral speech of Pericles in Thucydides' history, a magnificent piece of praise of democracy, was censored, and Sophocles' play *Antigone* was banned since it offered severe criticism of arbitrary one-man rule. Looking back to Sparta had

another aspect: the regime wanted to be perceived as providing a firm end to the political chaos that had afflicted Greece since the First World War, and as offering a unity on the basis of disciplined citizens. This was a comprehensive ideology, suitable for a dictator, but there is no evidence it ever really took root. Metaxas died after only five years in power and his successors had far more to worry about than ancient Greece. On the other hand, the Spartan ideal may have had one positive result: Metaxas rebuilt the army so well that the Greeks could resist and even push back the onslaught of Mussolini's legions in 1940.

Among those who attended the military academy under Metaxas' regime, and therefore imbibed its propaganda, were the leaders of the April 1967 coup, which brought dictatorship back to Greece for the last time. They lasted only seven years, long enough to announce their programs and to develop an ideology. In that, though, they seem to have accomplished very little, advocating only Helleno-Christian virtues, anti-communism, populism and other vague generalities. They were well aware of the ancient Greek past and saw it as a model for all civilizations, but committed themselves to nothing specific. Despite their training under Metaxas, they had nothing to offer that could compare with his well-defined retrospective ideology.[118]

Malawi

It would be hard to imagine a less likely venue for the recreation of Plato's *Republic* than Africa. Yet one of its most colorful dictators, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who ruled Malawi from independence in 1966 until 1994, has been described as attempting exactly that. A successful doctor and ardent proponent of independence, who had spent most of his life abroad, Banda was recalled to his native country at a time when it was being prepared for independence by young politicians who believed they

needed a well-known, revered older leader, preferably as a
figurehead. He soon disillusioned them by displaying
remarkable and unexpected political skills, first taking
supreme control of the major political party, then becoming
undisputed ruler of the new country, enforcing openly-
declared one man rule. He expressed his views in pithy
phrases like: "There is no dispute in our party. We don't say
'what do you want, what is it?' It is what Kamuzu says that
goes over here" or "I want you to be vigilant. One party,
one leader, one government and no nonsense about it."[119]
Far from the Greek spirit as these sentiments may appear,
Banda was an enthusiast for the Classics. He read Cicero
over breakfast and issued an order that appeared as a
newspaper headline: ALL EDUCATED PEOPLE MUST
LEARN LATIN. An American who was recruited to build
a classics department in the local university believed that
Banda was in fact trying to establish his version of
Republic, with himself as philosopher-king, and his special
agency and youth movement corresponding to the
guardians.[120] Like Plato, he censored music and literature.
Nice as the parallels may be, there is no published evidence
that Banda actually read or modeled himself on Plato;
rather, he behaved like many other modern dictators.
The only difference was that in this case a devoted
classicist was in charge.

The Last Platonist

One of the most glorious moments in the history of the
ancient world was the victory of the tiny freedom-loving
Greek states over the vast might of the Persian Empire
with its enslaved population. Ironic, therefore, that modern
Persia – Iran – should turn out to be the last bastion of
Plato's politics. Unlike the states already studied, where
Greek influence had a partial or indirect influence,
especially on an educational system, Iran has in the

present day a government clearly derived from a Platonic model. This is not a case of something peripheral, but of the fundamental concepts of the regime created by the Ayatollah (or Imam, as his followers called him) Ruhollah Khomeini. A state descended from the enemies of the Greeks, far removed in space and time from Sparta, Plato or Aristotle, is the most classical in inspiration and form of any yet considered. The explanation lies in the transmission of learning through the Middle Ages. Major philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle were translated into Arabic by the ninth century, and were studied by Moslem intellectuals and philosophers. Many attempted to coordinate them with the teachings of Islam, and to see what practical lessons could be drawn from them for their own situations. Plato, whom the Arabs revered as a great sage, came to have a considerable influence that has continued till modern times.[121]

The regime created by Khomeini and his Islamic Revolution was naturally true to the tenets of the Shiite Islam followed in Iran, but with some major, even radical differences.[122] In Shiism, only the divinely inspired Imams, spiritual heirs of the Prophet Mohammed, were considered legitimate rulers. Since the 12th of them went into hiding in 939 A.D., there has been no legitimate head of their state or religion. Shiites have long considered most secular rulers as usurpers to be tolerated, but given religious authority to those learned in the Koran, Law and traditions. These are the *ulema*, among whom the most learned can gain the title of Ayatollah by universal recognition. But there was no feeling that the clergy should assume civil powers, and much clear opposition to the idea.

Khomeini, an extremely learned religious scholar who had studied Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists, either in translation or through the intermediary of medieval Arab commentators and interpreters, reached a different solution. He advanced his ideas in his highly influential Islamic Government, published in 1970 when he was

powerless (though increasingly well-known) in exile in Iraq. There, he proposed that the state should be ruled by a man most learned in the Law and an ardent practitioner of justice—a combination of a philosopher and a religious authority, both educated and inspired, with a close mystical connection to the Divine. He should also be of excellent moral character, and devout. The combination could lead to supreme power: "If a worthy individual possessing these two qualities [knowledge of the law and justice] arises and establishes a government, he will possess the same authority as the Most Noble Messenger in the administration of society, and it will be the duty of all people to obey him."[123] This would necessarily be one of the *ulema*, since secular rulers could not be expected to be sufficiently well informed.

Some of Khomeini's core ideas came from a medieval Arab philosopher, al-Farabi (A.D. 870-950) who advocated a very Platonic political system in his *The Virtuous City*, a work designed to answer the eternally vexed question of who should head the Islamic community.[124] He wrote that people flourished best in a community that pursued the common good, so that a state – ideally a city – was necessary for their fulfillment. The best community needed to be ruled by the best man, one with a natural disposition and desire to rule, with a mind that could comprehend the material and the intelligible. When such a man received divine revelation, he would become a wise man, a philosopher, a visionary prophet. He would also have supreme power: "This is the sovereign over whom no other human being has any sovereignty whatsoever; he is the Imam; he is the first sovereign of the excellent city; he is the sovereign of the excellent nation, and the sovereign of the universal state."[125] But such people rarely exist, so al-Farabi proposed in more practical terms that the ruler should at least be a philosopher, who knew the laws, was capable of legislating, was skilled in deliberation and leading, and was tough. In any case, the one essential

quality for a leader was philosophy; without that, there could be no real ruler and the community would be the Ignorant or even Wicked City. The debt of all this to Plato is obvious: a highly trained philosopher-king should rule.

Khomeini not only took up these ideas and expanded on them intellectually (combining them with Islamic doctrine), but actually put them into practice. The state that he established, which he called the Government of God, was in many ways a recreation of the ideal polity of the prophet Mohammed, who headed both the religion and the government. Khomeini, of course, could not claim to be a prophet or to rival Mohammed in any way, but he could assume power as the most learned and dynamic *faqih*, a term usually translated as "jurist." In his developed system, formalized in the Iranian Constitution of 1979, the Jurist (who was to be Khomeini during his lifetime) had supreme power: he commanded the armed forces, could nominate and dismiss the President (Iran also had a regular government, with a Parliament), name chief justices, declare war or peace and had various powers of veto.[126] He had no defined duties, and was subject to no authority but that of God. This system had no precedent in Shiite Islam, where clergy and state were separate, but (apart from the religious elements) would have looked very familiar to Plato. Here, finally, a philosopher-king ruled on earth.

Khomeini's system had another important element derived from Plato. To make sure that the government obeyed the religious laws and did not attempt to violate any of the teachings of Islam, the Constitution provided for a Council of Guardians, half of them clergy named by the Jurist, half civil lawyers appointed by the parliament. Their job was to review all decisions of the parliament; they were free to reject any they considered unsuitable.[127] Khomeini finally went even further. In 1988, he decreed that the power of the Jurist was absolute, that is that the State had

the same power it had in the time of the Prophet and could override any later Islamic practices. He put himself above the laws in a way that seemed heretical to many Moslems but would have accorded perfectly well with Plato. Except for Islam, then, the Islamic Republic could hardly be closer to Plato's *Republic*: it was a state ruled by a philosopher with total power, and a regime supervised by Guardians who have a special education. With that, the discussion has come full circle, as a contemporary regime with many elements of dictatorship looks back to Plato for its inspiration. Implausible as it may seem, the Islamic Republic owes more to ancient Greece than any of the States that have been considered here.

Conclusion

Ancient Greece had its share of tyrants who came more and more to resemble modern dictators, but their bad reputation and general obscurity meant that they had no influence on later potentates. Likewise, Aristotle analyzed tyranny in ways that still ring true, but modern dictators did not consciously follow his precepts. Much more important for modern times were Plato and the Spartans, who both hated tyranny. Plato (like most Greeks) condemned it in his writings, Sparta actively fought against it. Yet, ironically, they have provided models for modern dictatorships. Plato, because he posits the rule of an elite headed by a philosopher-king; Sparta because of the totalitarian aspects of their militarized society.

Plato's *Republic* could be used as propaganda to buttress a Renaissance despot, or as part of the theoretical background for French and German revolutionary tyrannies. The Nazis admired him for sanctioning dictatorship and eugenics, but few thought of trying to recreate his "republic." Foreigners imagined the Soviet Union had done

exactly that, but the communists knew perfectly well that the elitist Plato was not one of them. Hastings Banda may have looked like a Platonist, but he wasn't. It was an American religious leader, who tightly controlled his own little community, who put some of Plato's most radical social ideas into practice. But it remained for the religious ruler of Iran to create a political system that incorporated important elements from Plato and to come closer than anyone to establishing a Platonic republic.

In practical terms, Sparta was far more appealing for modern dictators. The French revolutionaries saw its control over families and children as an inspiration for their own ideas of a state-run education. Hitler advocated something similar, with an increased emphasis on Spartan-style militarism. For General Metaxas, Sparta was in ideal to be recreated in his Third Hellenic Civilization, though his regime never approached Spartan levels of control.

In all these cases, then, a less familiar aspect of the Greek heritage has lived on, sometimes taking unexpected or peculiar forms. This is not the democracy that everyone knows and praises, but the darker side, tyranny, widespread in reality and theory among the ancient Greek, and still present in the modern world. ■

Notes

[1] This is the subject of an interesting series of essays, *Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece*, ed. Roger Brock and Stephen Hodkinson (Oxford 2000); see especially their introduction, 14-21. Oddly enough though, none of the essays in the volume deals with tyranny.

[2] See the comprehensive analysis of M. H. Hansen and T. H. Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004) 80-85, with the table listing all known city constitutions, 1338-1340. Note that the numbers here add up to more than 200 because many cities experienced more than one form of government.

[3] Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter, *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge 2004) 25; see the essays in that volume for recent thinking on the subject. Similar definitions may be found in the classic work of Richard Cobban, *Dictatorship* (London, 1939) 21-26 or in Barry Rubin, *Modern Dictators* (London 1987) 11. See also Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge MA 1956) 3-13.

[4] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (many editions and translations) I.13.

[5] For a summary of earlier views of tyranny, see the indispensable and comprehensive *Die archaische Tyrannis* of Loretana de Libero (Stuttgart 1996) 11-19. The 'traditional' views can be found in textbooks of Greek history like R. Sealey, *A History of the Greek City States* (Berkeley 1976) 38-59 or O. Murray, *Early Greece* (Cambridge MA 1993) 132-153. Variations of it appear in the encyclopedic *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen* of H. Berve (Munich 1967), the popular *The Greek Tyrants* of A. Andrewes (London 1956) and the clear *La tyrannie dans la Grece antique* (Paris 1969) of C. Mossé. Berve and Mossé are still useful

for later tyrants. Despite its promising title, J. McGlew's *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca 1993) does not seem to contribute much to the subject.

[6] For the changing meanings of tyrant, see Kathryn Morgan, ed., *Popular Tyranny* (Austin 2003), especially the essays of Dewald, Kallet and Raaflaub.

[7] Current thinking is conveniently summarized in Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200-479 B.C.* (London 1996)192-197.

[8] They may not even have been tyrants: Greg Anderson, "Before *Turannoi* were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History," *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005) 173-222, makes a convincing case for believing that the so-called "tyrants" were really no different from the oligarchs of their day, and that they had no intention of subverting, but only of controlling, the existing political system.

[9] Some authors present the shadowy Pheidon of Argos as the first tyrant, but the sources about him are hopelessly contradictory: he lived in the eighth or sixth century; he was king or tyrant. Recent research has concluded that he was not a tyrant at all: see de Libero 207-215 and, for a sketch of the chronological problems, Mossé 23-25.

[10] Herodotus V.92; see also the following note.

[11] For Cypselus, see de Libero 138-150, with full reference; cf. the provocative essay of J.-P. Vernant, "From Oedipus to Periander: Lameness, Tyranny, Incest in Legend and History," *Arethusa* 15 (1982) 19-38, which points out the mythical elements in the story of Cypselus.

[12] The major source is Aristotle, *The Constitution of Athens* chaps. 14-19, a coherent narrative. Pisistratus is treated in detail by de Libero 50-116; cf. Andrewes 100-115; Mossé 49-78; Berve 41-77.

[13] The numerous tyrants of this period are well surveyed by Berve 283-342; cf. Mossé 121-128; the main source for them is Xenophon's *Hellenica*.

[14] For his career, see S. Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* (Krakow 1990) and for his position, *idem*, "Were Lycophron and Jason tyrants of Pherae? Xenophon on the History of Thessaly" in C. Tuplin, ed., *Xenophon and His World* (Stuttgart 2004) 437-452.

[15] All this will be discussed in the following section.

[16] For the two Spartan kings, see their lives by Plutarch, conveniently translated by Richard Talbert in *Plutarch on Sparta* (London 1988) 53-108.

[17] For his career, see Mossé 179-192.

[18] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.17

[19] For the tyrants of the sixth and fifth centuries, the detailed study of Nino Luraghi, *Tirannidi arcaiche in Sicilia e Magna Grecia* (Florence 1994) is fundamental; note especially the general conclusions, 378-384. For later periods, see the various chapters of Berve. M. I. Finley, *Ancient Sicily* (Totowa NJ 1979) 45-108 offers a convenient summary of the entire subject.

[20] These points are made by John Salmon, "Lopping off the heads? Tyrants, Politics and the *Polis*" in L. G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes, edd., The *Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece* (London 1997) 60-73.

[21] *Lycurgus* is available in many editions and translations; the most accessible is Talbert, *Plutarch on Sparta*, (above, n.16) 8-46. For clear modern accounts, see Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans* (New York 2003) or Anton Powell, *Athens and Sparta* (London 2001), and, for recent thinking on specific aspects, Paul Cartledge, *Spartan Reflections* (Berkeley 2001) and Michael Whitby, ed., *Sparta* (New York 2002).

[22] There was also an intermediate class in the population, the *perioikoi* or 'neighbors', who lived in small towns in the Laconian countryside. They were free, but had no political rights; they were the artisans and traders of the society.

[23] Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 16.5

[24] *Ibid.*, 24.1

[25] There are numerous editions and translations. I have used the version of Benjamin Jowett (1894, reprinted many times) and the Greek text of J. Burnet (Oxford 1892 and many reprints). The *Republic* is normally cited by page numbers of the 1578 edition of Stephanus, as in the following notes. The Penguin Classics translation (Desmond Lee, *Plato The Republic*, London 2003 revised reprint) provides a useful introduction and bibliography. There is a helpful summary and analysis of the work in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Christopher Rowe and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge 2000) 190-232.

[26] The influence of a Spartan model is important (see n.33 below), but an Athenian legend may actually be in the background. According to Plato's *Critias* 110cd, cf. 112b-d, the Athenians of 9000 years earlier, when they were fighting a great war against Atlantis, had a stratified society, with a separate military class who guarded the citizens. They were supported by the state and had no property of their own.

[27] *Republic* 457d.

[28] *Republic* 459d.

[29] *Republic* 460b.

[30] *Republic* 473d.

[31] For a forceful argument that Plato was a totalitarian, see Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. I: *The Spell of Plato* (Princeton 1966).

[32] For Plato's view of tyrants, see *Republic* 562a-576b, and for the contrast between tyrants and monarchs, 576b-588a.

[33] The importance of the Spartan model for creating an ideal state (by Plato and others) is well known: see E. N. Tigerstedt, *The legend of Sparta in classical antiquity* (Stockholm 1965) 244-

276, especially 252-256, but note that Plato's attitude is complex, far from an uncritical admiration of the Spartans.

[34] This and the theories of Aristotle are analyzed in detail by E. Barker in *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York 1906 and reprints). See also, *Cambridge History* (above, n.25) 258-292, especially 278-285 for the *Laws* and 366-389 for Aristotle's *Politics*.

[35] Aristotle, *Politics* book VII, especially 1328-1329.

[36] Critias is the subject of a brief biography in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* I.17 (translated by W. C. Wright in the Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA 1921.45-51). For the actions of the Thirty, see the dramatic account in Xenophon, *Hellenica* II.iii-iv. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (www.iep.utm.edu/c/critias.htm) has a comprehensive article, with full references. See also P. Krenz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca 1982) where Critias appears as the leader of an oligarchy, rather than a dictator. His position, it seems to me, was analogous to that of Robespierre in the Committee of Public Safety which ran France during the most violent phase of the Revolution; not officially its head, and never designated as a dictator, but overwhelmingly the dominant force in a dictatorial regime.

[37] It has sometimes been assumed that Plato was actually training his students for practical politics. That notion cannot be sustained: see *Cambridge History* (above, n.25) 293-302.

[38] For what follows, see Plutarch's *Life of Dion* and Plato's *Seventh Epistle*, both available in numerous editions. There is considerable discussion about the authenticity of the *Seventh Epistle*; scholarly consensus seems to regard it as genuine.

[39] For the Platonic philosophers at the court of Hermias, see Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development* (Oxford 1948) 111-116.

[40] *Ibid*, 118, with 117 n.1 for the chronology.

[41] See S. Burstein, *Outpost of Hellenism: The Emergence of Heraclea on the Black Sea* (Berkeley, 1976) 47-64, with full reference to the sources (the most important is the late Roman historian, Justin).

[42] For the sources and their interpretation, see the comprehensive volume of W. W. Fortenbaugh and E. Schütrumpf, *Demetrius of Phalerum, Text, Translation and Discussion* (New Brunswick 2000), especially the essays of S. Tracy, M. Gagarin and H. Gottschalk which demonstrate that Demetrius was not a dictator, that he had no comprehensive program of legislation and explore his relation to the philosophic tradition. They revise previous interpretations, such as found in the summaries of Mossé 155-166 and Peter Green, *From Alexander to Actium* (Berkeley 1990) 44-51.

[43] The standard edition of the Greek text (*Aristotelis Politica*) was edited by W. D. Ross (Oxford 1957); it was translated by E. Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford 1952), with many explanatory notes, by P. L. Phillips Simpson (Chapel Hill 1997; clear summaries and fluent translation, but with a novel arrangement of the books), and by T. A. Sinclair, revised by T. J. Saunders (Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1981; useful summaries and clear translation). R. G. Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory: an Introduction for Students of Political Theory.* (Oxford 1977) offers a useful summary and analysis of the *Politics*.

[44] *Politics* III.6-8. Aristotle's "polity" is a mixed regime, corresponding most closely in modern terms to a constitutional government or a republic. "Democracy" for Aristotle is a more narrow system, focusing only on the interests of the many, tending to be or become radical. For the meaning of "polity" and "democracy," see *Cambridge History* (above n.25) 384ff and Andrew Lintott, "Aristotle and the Mixed Constitution" in *Alternatives to Athens* (above, n.1) 152-166.

[45] Most of Book V of the *Politics* is devoted to this.

[46] Reference to specific passages in Aristotle's works is normally made, as here, to the edition of I. Bekker

(Berlin 1831-1870), as given here in square brackets (referring to the beginning of a topic), and found in the margins or texts of modern editions and translations. *Politics* 1308b24, 1309a14

[47] *Politics* 1307b30.

[48] *Politics* 1309a33, 1308b10, 1308b31.

[49] *Politics* 1310a12, 1337a11, 1308a3, 1310a2, 1307b40.

[50] *Politics* 1311a15, 1314a.

[51] *Politics* 1313a41.

[52] *Politics* 1313b11.

[53] *Politics* 1313b32.

[54] *Politics* 1313b30, 1314a17.

[55] *Politics* 1313b18.

[56] *Politics* 1308a24.

[57] *Politics* 1313b28.

[58] *Politics* 1314a15.

[59] *Politics* 1314b1.

[60] *Politics* 1314b36.

[61] *Politics* 1314b18, b28.

[62] *Politics* 1314b37.

[63] *Politics* 1315a8, a24.

[64] *Politics* 1314a40, b23.

[65] *Politics* 1315a31.

[66] Richard Cromwell, the Shah of Iran or Baby Doc Duvalier, for example. The verdict, of course, is not yet in on Kim Jong Il (North Korea) or Bashar al-Assad (Syria).

[67] See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden 1990), especially I.105-117 for the *Republic* in Milan.

[68] *Ibid.*, 140-144

[69] See A. Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and Its Contributions to Early Modern Political Thought," *The Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986) 383-413.

[70] For what follows, see the classic study of Harold Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries* (Chicago 1937).

[71] Rousseau and Plato: F. Novotny, *The Posthumous Life of Plato* (The Hague 1977) 498f.; and Sparta: E. Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford 1969) 231-241

[72] See Rawson (previous note) 245-251.

[73] For Lepeletier, see Rawson 281-3, Parker 127-131

[74] See the full text in M. J. Guillaume, ed., *Proces-verbaux du Comité d'instruction publique de la Convention* (Paris 1891-1907) II. 31-61, especially 54-60; usefully summarized in J. M. Eagan, *Maximilien Robespierre: Nationalist Dictator* (New York 1938) 76-80.

[75] For his proposal, see Guillaume (previous note) I.645-671, and the succinct discussion of Parker (above, n.70) 127-130.

[76] The text is printed, among other editions, in *Oeuvres completes de Saint-Just*, ed. M. Duval (Paris 1984) 966-1009; see especially 982f.

[77] The depth of their knowledge is questionable. See the classic, perhaps romantic or exaggerated, view of Richard Gummere in *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge MA 1963) 173-190. Meyer Reinhold presents a more realistic assessment, in *Classica Americana* (Detroit 1984) 94-115. Note that Plato hardly ever appears in Reinhold's account, though he does note (112 n.31) that the Founding Fathers were familiar with book 8 of the *Republic*.

[78] See the remarks of Gummere (previous note) 178f.

[79] There is a substantial bibliography on Noyes. A convenient introduction is the chapter on the Perfectionists by an observant eyewitness, Charles Nordhoff in his *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (New York 1875 and

reprints) 259-301. Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin* (New York 1993) is a modern biography, with a valuable note on sources; the much shorter, *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (New York 1971) by Maren Lockwood Carden is helpfully analytical. Many of Noyes' own works are available online from the University of Syracuse (see individual references below).

[80] See Noyes' exposition of communism and its biblical justifications in *Bible Communism* (Brooklyn 1853, available from http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/b) 10-12.

[81] Marriage and sexuality were the subjects of greatest curiosity about the Perfectionists, and have been much discussed: see, for example, Klaw 154-189, Carden 49-61 and Noyes' own lengthy presentation in *Bible Communism* (previous note) 21-38, 42-57.

[82] Described in Klaw 141-153.

[83] See Klaw 130-140.

[84] See Klaw 201-211 and Carden 61-65 and especially the comprehensive discussion of Martin Richards, "Perfecting people: selective breeding at the Oneida Community (1869-1879) and the Eugenics Movement," *New Genetics and Society* 23 (2004) 47-71

[85] *Republic* V.459, cited in John Humphrey Noyes, *Essay on Scientific Propagation* (Oneida NY 1872, available from http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/e) 1f.

[86] See Carden 85-88 on Despotism and Democracy in Utopia.

[87] It is not possible to determine exactly what Noyes read at Dartmouth, for catalogues earlier than 1832 do not survive (he graduated in 1830). At that time, the standard curriculum involved reading Plato in the second year Greek course; Noyes most likely did the same. My thanks to Barbara Krieger, Archival Specialist in Dartmouth's Rauner Library, for her help. On the other hand, Yale catalogues, which reveal a remarkably similar curriculum to that of Dartmouth, do survive: I am grateful to Diane Kaplan of Yale's Sterling Library for sending a copy of the 1829-30 catalogue.

[88] *Analekta hellenika meizona sive, Collectanea graeca majora, ad usum academicae juventutis accommodata: cum notis philologicis, quas partim collegit, partim scripsit Andreas Dalzel.* The editor (1742-1806) was professor of Greek at St. Andrew's; his volumes enjoyed at least four editions, published at Harvard between 1808 and 1824.

[89] See, for example, Melissa Lane, *Plato's Progeny* (London 2001) 53-70, 118-128.

[90] Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich 1933) 288.

[91] H. K. Gunther, *Platon als Hueter des Lebens* [Plato as the Guardian of Life] (Munich 1928)

[92] *Hitlers Kampf und Platons Staat: Eine Studie ueber den ideologischen Aufbau der nazionalsozialistischen Freiheitsbewegung* (Berlin 1933) 10, 17.

[93] *Das Programm der NSDAP* (5th edition, Munich 1932) 26.

[94] See the references in W. Kaufman, "The Hegel Myth and its Method," *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951) 459-486 at 465-6, n.20.

[95] For the German view of Sparta, see Rawson (above, n.71) 306-343, with discussion of Guenther's *Racial History of the Greek and Roman People* (1929) on p. 337. See also Rosenberg (above, n. 90) on the Aryans 26-55, esp. 33ff. about the Nordic Greeks.

[96] For the historians and schools, see the useful essay of S. Rebenich, "From Thermopylae to Stalingrad: the myth of Leonidas in German historiography" in A. Powell and S. Hodkinson, edd., *Sparta Beyond the Mirage* (London 2002; a volume full of provocative insights into the ancient Spartans), 323-349, esp. 330-332

[97] See *Hitler Reden Schriften Anordnungen* (Munich 1992-2003) IIA.13 and III/1.164; cf. III/1.270, III/2.348 for similar sentiments. The term *voelkisch* (normally translated as "national") was a favorite of the Nazis, for whom it meant

something like "racial." For an expatiation on the term, with its connotations of the triumph of the "better and stronger" over the "inferior and weaker," see Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (tr. Ralph Manheim, Boston 1943) 382-384. For Hitler's admiration of Sparta as an exemplary racial state, see F.-L. Kroll, "Geschichte und Politik im Weltbild Hitlers," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 44 (1996) 337-353, especially 344.

[98] *Ibid.* IV/2.251, from the *New York Times* of 8 December 1931.

[99] Lothrop Stoddard, *Into the Darkness* (New York 1940) 146f.

[100] Roderick Watt, "'Wanderer kommst du nach Sparta': History through Propaganda into Literary Commonplace," *Modern Language Review* 80 (1985) 871-883.

[101] Quoted in *The Testament of Adolf Hitler, The Hitler-Bormann Documents February-April 1945*, ed. F. Genoud, trans. R. H. Stevens (London 1961), 40.

[102] *Mein Kampf* 403-441 *passim*; the quote below appears on p. 408.

[103] It has not been possible to determine what Hitler actually read before writing *Mein Kampf*. The courses he took in school are known, but their content has not been documented, nor is there any record of the reading the future Fuehrer did on his own, except that it was extensive. In any case, he attended (until he dropped out) a *Realschule*, or technical high school, rather than a *Gymnasium*, where he would have learned Latin and been exposed systematically to the Classics. For the problem, see W. Maser, *Adolf Hitler Mein Kampf* (Esslingen 1981) 86-92, and for his education, F. Jetzinger, *Hitler's Youth* (Westport CT 1958) 57-83.

[104] "Sparta, The First National Socialist State," by Reinhard N., at http://bks.ark11.net/sparta.htm

[105] See the previous note.

[106] Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (2nd edition, London 1949) 28f. I do not know who he imagined 'the better Bolsheviks' to be. This is a curious work, full of real perception, but also of predictions that almost inevitably turn out to be dead wrong.

[107] The point about Plato not being a communist at all was the subject of the first of Prof. Peter Garnsey's Carlyle Lectures at Oxford in February 2005, and will appear in his forthcoming publication.

[108] See Frances Nethercott, *Russia's Plato: Plato and the Platonic tradition in Russian education, science and ideology 1840-1930* (Aldershot 2000) 147f.

[109] For what follows, see Nethercott 150-152, 173-180

[110] Lenin himself would have been familiar with the *Republic*, since it was required reading for the law degree he took in 1891: see Nethercott 137f.

[111] In addition to Nethercott, see Novotny (above, n.74) 572f. for Soviet hostility to Plato

[112] W. Fite, *The Platonic Legend* (New York 1934) 218.

[113] *L'URSS en construction* (the magazine appeared in Russian, English, French and German), 1937, no. 9/10/11/12, p.2.

[114] For what follows, see the excellent study of Philip Carabott, "Monumental Visions: The Past in Metaxas' *Weltanschauung*" in *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*, ed. K. Brown and Y. Hamilakis (Lanham MD 2003) 23-37, with full reference to the dictator's works. For the broader context of Metaxas' social and educational policies, see J. Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece: The Metaxas Regime* (New York 1983) 52-97.

[115] Medieval Byzantium was seen as an enormously powerful state, completely loyal to the Christian ideal: see P. Gounarides, "To Vizantio kai i diktatoria tou Metaxa," *Ta Istorika* 20 (1994) 150-157.

[116] For the development of these ideas, see R. Clogg, "The

Greeks and Their Past," in *Idem, I Kath'imas Anatoli: Studies in Ottoman Greek History* (Istanbul 2004) 17-32.

[117] *Logos pros ton laon tes Spartes* in Ioannis Metaxas, *Logoi kai Skepseis* (Athens 1969) I.378-383 at 380; my translation.

[118] See the analysis of an unsympathetic observer, Richard Clogg: "The Ideology of the Revolution of 21 April 1967" in R. Clogg and G. Yannopoulos, edd., *Greece Under Military Rule* (New York 1972) 36-58.

[119] Quoted in T. D. Williams, *Malawi: The Politics of Despair* (Ithaca 1978). 205, 214.

[120] See the colorful account of Caroline Alexander, "Personal History: An Ideal State," in *The New Yorker* 67:43 (Dec. 16, 1991) 53-88.

[121] For medieval Arab knowledge of and interest in Plato, see the article "Aflatun" by R. Walzer in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Plato was also considered as an alchemist and wonder-worker, especially by the Seljuks of Konya in Turkey where his tomb was being revered in the thirteenth century and later: see F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford 1929) 363-369.

[122] For what follows, and especially for the intellectual origins of Khomeini's state see V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London 2000).

[123] *Islamic Government*, as translated by H. Algar in *Islam and Revolution* (London 2002) 62; cf. the fuller description of the ideal ruler's qualifications, 60-62, 83.

[124] Text and detailed commentary in *al-Farabi on the Perfect State*.

[125] *Ibid* 247.

[126] See Articles 107-112 in *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, trans. H. Algar (Berkeley 1980) 66-69.

[127] *Ibid*. Articles 91-99, pp. 60-62.

Cleopatra's Nose and the Shadow of Helen

Athanasios Moulakis

"Cleopatra's nose, had it been shorter, the whole face of the world would have changed."[1]

Contingencies that appear insignificant can often have momentous effects, and historical developments are linked to personalities and their passions. Pascal's phrase underscores the role of happenstance and the importance of human agency in the origins of significant global events. Events are not merely the effects of deeper impersonal powers, which are traditionally considered by many to be more real than people, such as the "relation of the means of production" or the "balance of power." Despite recent authoritative statements to the contrary, "stuff" does not just "happen." It is brought about by the actions of human beings, driven by their desires, and marked by their greatness, by their weakness, or by their folly.

> Cleopatra: Forgive my fearful sails, I little thought
> you would have followed.
> Antony: Egypt, thou knowst too well
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings
> And thou should tow me after
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act III.)

It is intriguing, though of course pointless for practical purposes, to speculate how the world would have been different had Cleopatra not fled the battle at Actium, and had Marc Antony not abandoned the battle to chase after her, thus giving Octavian his decisive victory.[2] It is impossible to know what would have emerged in place of

what we now recognize as the West, which grew out of the Roman world as structured by the victorious Octavian, who was to become Emperor Caesar Augustus. What we can know is that it would have been quite different, and the very distinction between "East" and "West" would have been cast differently.

This division goes back at least to Herodotus and the Persian wars. However, the conceptual and emotional juxtaposition was hardened by Octavian's propaganda in a way that still affects our language and our attitudes. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony's soldiers decry their captain's loss of nerve, his loss of manly self-control: "…the dotage of [their] general whose eyes [that used to] glow like plated Mars now turn their devotions of their views upon a tawny front / his heart a bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust."[3]

This self-identification of a "West" in terms of opposition to the "East" is gendered and racially colored. Augustus waged war ostensibly against Egypt and its Queen, not against Antony. The East was presented as alien, languorous, wily, effeminate, self-indulgent, tyrannical, incontinent, and lolling in passions. It was to be tamed by the sober reason and steadfast manly discipline of the would-be restorer of the Republic. The pediment of the temple that Augustus erected to commemorate his victory over Cleopatra displays a group of sculptures depicting the victory of Theseus, the man from the West, over the Amazons, women from the East: a clash of civilizations.

According to the story spun by Augustus, told by ancient historians and retold by modern poets, Antony, in his infatuation with Cleopatra and the luxurious life she embodied, went "native," and in the process was unmanned. He lost his good sense, his power and ultimately his life. This motif is very ancient and, to my knowledge, was first linked with Helen of Troy. In

Euripides's *The Trojan Women*, the aging queen Hecuba, reduced to rags and on the verge of being carried into slavery after the fall of Troy, yet retaining the undaunted spirit of a great lady, taunts the victorious Menelaus, husband of Helen: "For all your posturing, will you be man enough to kill the wanton woman when you see her?" As Hecuba foretells, Menelaus prevaricates and postpones the execution of Helen, which will in fact never take place. This scene is depicted in a large number of vase paintings, in which we see Menelaus drop his sword as Helen coquettishly picks at her shirt.

In *The Trojan Women*, Hecuba treats Helen as some kind of Mme. Bovary, a bored provincial lady eager to follow the handsome foreign prince who will take her to his luxurious home city. Euripides's Helen corresponds, then, in her infatuation with a foreign "other" and her seductive femininity, to both Antony and Cleopatra.

In all these narratives, cool reason is juxtaposed with passionate infatuation. The object of this passion is the damnable cause of the cruelties and sufferings of war that, in the end, hurts the victors just as much as the losers.

The chorus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* sing of Helen, "who took death and destruction as her dowry to Troy…carrying lightly what could not be borne."

No one in his right mind would start a great war for the sake of a woman, would they? This is the opinion of the sensible Herodotus, reflecting on that archetypal war, the war of Troy. The version of the myth of Helen he heard from the Egyptian priests he met in his travels seemed intrinsically more plausible to him. In that version, the real Helen never went to Troy. The king of Egypt kept her safe until her proper husband came to collect her. Acting like reasonable people, the besieged Trojans would undoubtedly have given her back and spared themselves bloodshed and destruction. The reason they didn't yield her to the Greeks was that they didn't have her.

Such reasoning would be compelling if conflicts were in fact caused exclusively by material, tangible interests. It ignores or dismisses as folly immaterial, symbolic issues, matters of honor and recognition. If only the "realists" were right, mankind would be spared much violence, for differences over material interests are in principle amenable to mediation and compromise, but intangible values are much less negotiable and are, therefore, at the root of the bitterest conflicts. The most vehement battles are about ideas of the mind – fantasies, even – and whether in any particular case these intangible objects of contention confer meaning and worth or are simply vain illusions is often far from evident.

In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, brave, responsible, morally upright Hector argues regarding Helen:

> To guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us
> Had it our name, the value of one ten
> What merit's in the reason which denies
> The yielding of her up?

But, to Troilus's acute sense of honor, it is not about a woman, it is about what she stands for.

> Fie, fie my brother,
> Weigh you the worth and honour of a king
> So great as our dead father, in a scale of common ounces?
> …and buckle in a waist most fathomless
> With spans and inches so diminutive as fears and reasons?

Fighting for Helen may be mad, but it is not ignoble. Troilus makes an important leap that puts desire ahead of its object, making the value of the latter depend on the intensity of the former. Things are desirable because they are desired, not the other way around. To speak anachronistically, it is the autonomy of the will that creates value: "What's aught but 'tis valued?" asks Troilus pointedly. Hector, the ontological realist, will not have it:

"But value dwells not in particular will; / It holds its estimate and dignity as well wherein 'tis precious in itself as in the prizer…"

But if Hector is right, by what measure are we to know "wherein value is precious in itself?" Love may not exactly create, but it evokes value, beauty, and excellence. In this matter, Troilus would have had Sappho on his side:

> Some say a cavalry formation, some troops on foot
> Others say that a fleet is the fairest thing on the dark earth,
> But I say it is what one desires…

For Sappho, Helen, the legendary measure of human beauty, abandons kith and kin to follow her love to Troy, and in so doing provides an exemplary instance of value vouchsafed by desire. Her example shows that something is worthy of admiration *because* it is admired, like the beautiful Anactoria, now gone, whose charming step and shining face Sappho would rather see than gaze upon the grandest assembly of Lydian chariots.

Is the power of "the face that launched a thousand ships," in Marlow's famous line, to be measured by fears and reasons? Does not the love of Helen and Helen herself stand for the most exalted aspirations of men? Guillaume Apollinaire, summing up a powerful current of European sentiment and thought, evokes the vision of Helen: "*Quand te nomme un heros, tous les homes se lèvent, Hélène, ô liberté ô revolutions!*"

It is easy to get carried away. As we have seen, Hector, in *Troilus and Cressida*, neither a coward nor a cad, reminds his magnanimously impetuous brother that, generous impulses aside, "value is precious in itself," for it is "mad idolatry to make the service greater than the god." It is not enough to posit an ideal. The blood of martyrs is evidence of the strength of their conviction, not of the worthiness of their cause, even when all the victims are volunteers, which is rarely the case. The great ideological currents of

the twentieth century, with their bloody violence linked to the proclamation of purported absolute values, give abundant evidence of such mad idolatry, swept up in the inebriating performance of a service greater than a god set up precisely in order to justify the service. The burning Troy is the torch that celebrates the consummation of desire for Helen, bringing disaster to both parties in the conflict: "*Pestis exitium lues utriusque populi..tibi fluxit Asiae, fluxit Europae cruor…*" (Seneca, *Troades*).

Against such enthusiasm, one is tempted to invoke reason, but this too can go astray. Taking up the more playful paradoxes of Gorgias, Isocrates seeks to justify Helen by calculating her usefulness to the national cause. The beautiful queen may be accused of the immorality of a femme fatale, but her adventures led to the unification of Greece in a prefiguration of Isocrates's own national aspirations. Helen is not beyond good and evil. She is excused and even praised not as a transcending inspiration but as the catalyst of collective selfishness. The justification in its ignoble pettiness is worse than the supposed crime. Instrumentalizing desire does not purify it.

To fight for the shadow of Helen is, perhaps, not to know the value of things. The choice, however, is not between desire and its absence, but between different kinds of desire. The simplifying juxtaposition of reason and passion, in which the former is thought to operate in the silence of the latter, does not answer our problem any more than does the valuing of tangibles such as blood and treasure over intangibles such as honor and recognition. In Plato's *Republic*, fools – the incontinent, the greedy and the base – are likened to the Greeks fighting for the shadow of Helen in ignorance of truth. But what is true and has more true being is what is concerned with the invariable and the immortal, rather than the changeable and fleeting reality of material things – e.g., the idea of a sphere rather than any given ball. The shadow of Helen stands here for the illusive

quality of material things, compared with the consistent and constant reality of ideas. It is the material things that are the shadows, the images, or the copies; ideal things have true being. What, then, is worth pursing, worth fighting for?

In *Phaedrus*, Plato returns to the story of Helen in a different key. In an exercise of argumentation, Socrates makes a speech intending to show the advantages of the non-lover over the lover. But he does so having covered himself with his cloak to hide his shame. One does not accuse love with impunity. Similarly, Socrates reminds his friend that when the poet Stesichorus wrote a condemnation of Helen, he was struck blind for his blasphemy. Realizing his fault, he produced a palinode, a recantation: "That story is not true. You never sailed in the benched ships. / You never went to the city of Troy."

The real Helen is blameless. It was her idol, the murky imagining of besotted men, which caused the trouble. Having retracted the slanderous accusation, Stesichorus was healed. Similarly, Socrates makes a new speech that gives love its due, showing that some forms of passion are a gift from heaven and can be much better than mere good sense. What follows from this is the well-known myth of the voyage of the soul in the form of a winged chariot, which reveals, albeit imperfectly, the beauty, wisdom and goodness of the upper world. These revelations are later "remembered" as insights into the true and real. In this sense the evidence of what is desirable, though in one sense found, not arbitrarily posited, is inseparable from the visionary yearning of the loving soul, understood as a composite of mind, spirit and desire in precarious balance.

It is a movement analogous to the introspective search of St. Augustine, who sought the source of true meaning and found its intimations at the bottom of his heart, *in immo cordis*; not in what was distinct and particular to him,

but in what he took to be universal. But this is a perilous voyage, for Augustine himself writes of the torment of his search. How can we know what to seek unless it is announced, proclaimed, revealed, or already known to us? How, in other words, can one tell the difference between a genuine inner voice and an arbitrary or ideological infatuation?

What Plato and Augustine have to offer are metaphors, not formulas. It is nonetheless difficult to do better. The figure of Helen, in its engaging ambiguity, evoked, painted and sung over the centuries, is an ever-recurring part of the world of representations, which we have inherited from antiquity and by means of which we make sense of the world around us. As Helen tells Hector in the *Iliad*, Zeus has condemned them to become a song for people of later days. Hers is not a tidy story with a moral. For human beings placed between an awareness of infinitude and the experience of limitation, Helen's specter can be seen as both an inspiration to transcend and a cautionary tale against transgressing. We may be compelled to chase shadows, but "all is dross that is not Helena." ■

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Notes

[1] For Pascal, to whom we owe this remark, a long nose such as Cleopatra had is reported to have indicated strength of character. The phrase, however, has been mostly understood as referring to Caesar and Marc Antony finding her cute button nose irresistible.

[2] Such, at any rate, is the story as handed down to us by the ancient writers. Some modern historians propose more intricate explanations for what happened at Actium.

[3] There was, of course, nothing "tawny" about Cleopatra, the product of three centuries of inbreeding among fair Macedonians.

How Christian Byzantium Preserved its Ancient Greek Inheritance

Judith Herrin

Although Byzantium was a staunchly Christian society, it incorporated many aspects of ancient Greek culture. This is not immediately obvious from the general perception of Byzantium today, which emphasizes the fundamental importance of the church and the overtly Christian ideology of the empire. Yet Byzantium was built, literally, on the debris of ancient cities, with their many temples dedicated to the ancient gods, monuments and, above all, statues. Although Byzantine hostility to this ancient world is often stressed, some medieval scholars tried to identify antique buildings and individuals, by reading inscriptions and recording their history. Medieval Greek had developed from the ancient language; it was written using the same alphabet and provided a direct link with the past. The key to accessing the ancient world lay in the Byzantine educational system, which was inherited from classical Greece and Rome. The classical curriculum made it possible for educated Byzantines to read and study the literature, philosophy, history, drama, poetry and sciences of antiquity. In this way, they preserved many features of ancient Greek culture and this will be the focus of my lecture.

The Byzantine Empire is most often identified by its icons, a characteristic emphasized by the recent exhibition "Faith and Power" at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and there can be no doubt that it was devoutly Christian. Its emperors considered themselves appointed

by God to do His will on earth. The imperial court was interpreted as a reflection of the heavenly one, with the throne placed directly under a mosaic of Christ Pantokrator, the ruler of all, from which the emperor issued laws regulated by a Christian concern for the weak and poor. Similarly, patriarchs maintained public morals, supported Christian marriage and prevented heresy; through the weekly liturgy, the church taught Gospel stories, Psalms and prayers to everyone, including the uneducated. Imperial and patriarchal government was totally integrated into a Christian system of medieval rule, which in turn is well represented by Christian art.

Yet Byzantium had another type of art that was not religious, a pre-Christian secular art that celebrated the emperor in larger than life-size statues, that decorated the magnificent reception halls in the imperial palace with images of military victory and courtly dancing and singing, and decorated the adjoining Hippodrome with images of horse racing, hunts of wild beasts, athletic displays and other forms of popular entertainment. This secular art also involved delicate fresco painting of gardens, birds and flowers that was inherited from the Roman tradition, secular portraits painted on wood such as those found on Egyptian mummies from the Fayyum region, and sculptures of mythical beasts and scenes from Homeric stories.

In trying to find out how Christian Byzantium preserved its ancient Greek inheritance, we can start with this physical environment. The medieval Byzantine inhabitants lived on top of centuries of ancient occupation, which left its visual marks. All cities had older structures such as temples and statues of the gods, as well as baths, gymnasia, theatres, hippodromes, circuses, senate houses and administrative buildings, often erected by local patrons who were identified by inscriptions. The Byzantine cities often preserved the main arteries of the Classical cities, marked by triumphal arches and *fora* and usually decorated

with sculpted ornament. Over the centuries, of course, many of these buildings were allowed to fall into ruin and others were plundered for building materials. But some continued to stand from the fourth century onwards as Christian influence in society expanded, and eventually the Christians had to decide what to do about them.

Many cult buildings were adapted to serve a Christian purpose, as we can see clearly in a city like Syracuse or Aphrodisias, where the spaces between the columns of the temple were filled in to form the cathedral. In the late fifth or sixth century A.D., the Parthenon of Athens was adapted to serve as a church dedicated to the Mother of God through the construction of a much smaller space within the temple structure. Theatres and stadia, on the other hand, were generally abandoned as the performance of ancient drama or athletic races declined. Despite ecclesiastical opposition to traditional chariot and horse racing, hippodromes continued to be used, and we know from Procopius's mid-sixth century writings that Theodora started her life as a circus artist. He says she was not even very gifted; she didn't play the flute or dance particularly well, but excelled in a rather coarse type of pantomime, which was what Justinian seems to have found attractive. At any rate, she was raised from this circus life to become the wife of the emperor, and since he had to change the laws in order to marry someone of such a low rank, he must have been serious about her.

Emperors also continued to put up statues of themselves, often on honorary columns such as the one erected by Justinian in the Senate House square in the centre of Constantinople. This equestrian statue is now lost, together with the column, but a seventeenth century sketch of it shows Justinian wearing captured Persian battle-dress including the special feathered helmet called a *toufa*, and holding in his hand a globe representing universal rule. Outside the city, in an area where people

used to go to walk beside the Marmara Sea, was a statue of Theodora which has also disappeared. But we learn that it was paid for by the city's inhabitants to express their gratitude to the empress, and the statue in porphyry was said to be very beautiful, though not half as beautiful as Theodora herself.

The life of the empress serves as a reminder of the vital importance of "bread and circuses" in the life of ancient cities. Christian emperors could not alter this basic element of public entertainment; indeed, they continued the policy of free bread distributions as long as possible (until the early seventh century when the Persians conquered Egypt). The sport of horse racing lasted even longer. Popular figures like Porphyrios, a particularly successful chariot driver, were commemorated by reliefs and inscriptions on square steles, which survive, and depict his numerous victories in the hippodrome with his quadriva of four horses. So monuments associated with the circus, like imperial statues, were always in the public eye and in ancient style, they were identified by carved inscriptions, which are part of a wealth of material that survives on city walls, fortification towers, public monuments like the Tower of the Winds in Athens and the Arch of Galerius in Thessalonike. From these inscribed statue bases, we can imagine the benefactors and patrons who paid for the markets, stoas and public squares and the ancient builders who erected them. Even in rural contexts, the temples and cult shrines of ancient gods reminded Christians of the past.

Some buildings and statues of ancient gods were positively preserved such as the great bronze Athena, which stood at the entrance to the Acropolis of Athens until it was moved to Constantinople to enhance the new imperial capital, or the statue of Apollo, said to come from Troy, which Constantine I reused as his own and put on top of his porphyry column in the major Forum of his city. Some works of ancient art commanded respect and admiration long into the medieval Christian era, like the

reclining Herakles made by Lysippos, which was displayed in the Hippodrome.

Christian attitudes to such works of ancient art were divided. But evidence that some Christian scholars were curious about them and the classical culture that produced them is provided by the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, an eighth century text. This records the activity of a group of scholars, self-styled "philosophers" who were also called "philosophers in the street" – men of little learning but great determination. With the encouragement of a patron, called Philokalos, two of them, Theodoros and Himerios, visited ancient monuments of Constantinople in order to identify statues. In the Kynegion, which had become a ruined area where criminals were buried, they strained to read the inscriptions and learn who had put up the statues. It was dangerous work, as they reported to Philokalos, for a heavy statue was dislodged and it fell and killed Himerios to the horror of his friend. When Emperor Philippikos was informed, he ordered the fallen statue to be broken up and buried so that it could not cause any further deaths. Fortunately, not all the statues they documented manifested the same threatening power. But the story illustrates the intellectual effort of medieval scholars in the context of a classical environment, which was often little understood.

Their example was followed by later generations who continued to collect epigrams and inscriptions on monuments in writings frequently full of fanciful etymologies, false authorities and ridiculous identifications. It is easy to criticize the scholarship of these anonymous authors of the *Patria*, but at the same time Constantine Kephalas, a priest attached to the imperial palace, followed in their steps with his edition of the Greek Anthology. This collection of about 3,700 epigrams was later copied in a manuscript, which is now divided between two separate libraries; it includes a very large number of epigrams preserved on monuments. Kephalas drew on ancient

collections as well as ninth century compositions by poets like Leo the Mathematician and his student, Constantine the Sicilian. He also copied metrical verses from earlier collections on a range of themes, several of them overtly erotic and in praise of homosexuality. Kephalas stresses that they are included only because it is necessary to acquire the stylistic skill essential for the composition of traditional literary forms. So he draws attention to the style rather than the content and gives precedence to the Christian epigrams. This important guide served in turn as a model for the late thirteenth century scholar Maximos Planoudes, who added a further 388 epigrams which he had collected.

In addition to classical monuments with their Greek and Latin inscriptions, Byzantium inherited customs and habits which dated back to pre-Christian times, often associated with the changing seasons, the moon's cycle and the movement of the stars. Although the church had condemned these activities, they were still observed in the late seventh century when Emperor Justinian II summoned a council. Over 200 bishops from all parts of the empire attended this gathering in the imperial palace, called the Council *in trullo* because it met under the dome, *troullos*, of one of the reception halls, in A.D. 692. Its purpose was to issue disciplinary canons, some of which clearly related to the difficult circumstances of the time, particularly the recent conquest of large areas of the empire by the Muslims. Reference to "barbarian invasions," which had forced Christian bishops and priests to leave their churches or encouraged them to adopt incorrect customs, emphasizes the extent of the disruption.

What the bishops at this council criticized most, however, were traditional activities, such as the celebration of Dionysus, involving the harvesting and pressing of grapes, or of the New Year, when people gave gifts but also dressed up in costume, danced in public and went out mumming (we can perhaps envisage this as "trick-or-treating"). They also stressed the danger of

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marking the summer equinox by lighting fires, trying to predict the future, or attending public entertainments in the Hippodrome such as horse and chariot racing, displays of dancing girls, gymnasts, acrobats, mimes and musical performance. All these were denounced as improper for Christians, perhaps because it was common to bet on the races and other illicit things like throwing dice, games of chance and fortune telling took place in the Hippodrome. Of course, such matters had been forbidden in the past but in A.D. 692, there is a novel insistence on ending Christian reliance on augury and prophecy, *ta hellenika epitedeumata*. New canons were passed against those who celebrate the birth of Jesus on the first Sunday after Christmas (canon 79), those who plait their hair (96), those who produce paintings that could corrupt the mind (100), and those who light fires at the new moon and jump over them (65).

In the twelfth century, when canon lawyers commented on the rulings, they found a continuing adaptation of these ancient customs. Theodoros Balsamon is particularly hostile to a midsummer ritual which involved dressing up a young girl, escorting her to the beach, and having her choose stones from a jar – all a complex form of prophesying. Similarly, John Zonaras complains about the custom of pouring wine into jars which was accompanied by oaths said to Dionysus and the ancient gods. Zonaras says the citizens didn't know what they were doing but they continued because these things had always been done. So the Byzantine church was aware of pre-Christian traditions that persisted, even into the twelfth century and later. If we wonder how this could have happened, I think it would be understandable to admit that some of these traditions were great fun. The chance to dress up in costume, disguise or just unusual clothes, to wear masks and dance in public may have been appreciated by those (women especially) who were not normally allowed to do so. Men also enjoyed plaiting their hair (and we know that they dyed and curled

it), and they assisted in baking special cakes to give to their friends after a child was successfully delivered, in memory of the Virgin's miraculous childbirth. Such customs were condemned by the bishops because, as they pointed out, the Virgin did not suffer in giving birth to Christ.

But there are other reasons why these customs persisted not only in rural areas (where the seasons were critical to survival) but also in the cities, where law students were criticized for celebrating the beginning and end of their studies with rowdy behavior. The underlying reason lay in the educational system of Byzantium which rested on a foundation of pre-Christian knowledge. This sustained knowledge of ancient myths and stories of the gods and heroes continued to fascinate Christian audiences, both readers and hearers.

Elementary education began with Homer. Many, many generations of students learned the text of the *Iliad* by heart. In the tenth century, they could manage to commit to memory 50 lines a week, together with an understanding of the different forms (Ionic, Aeolian, Doric, and outdated vocabulary as well as the dual form and so on), so it must have taken a long time to master all 11,000. Then there was the *Odyssey*, and we know that many Byzantines knew both poems intimately, quoted them and picked up references to them. In the course of learning Homer, they gained a deep familiarity with the ancient gods and goddesses, their adventures and influence on the behavior of the human actors in the mythic history of the Trojan War.

For those boys and fewer girls who were allowed to continue their education, grammar, logic and rhetoric, with a strong emphasis on how to craft a speech (using texts of Demosthenes and Libanios as models, followed. These three elementary subjects were followed by the four mathematical ones: arithmetic, geometry, harmonics and astronomy. Philosophy was reserved for those with advanced knowledge. At the same time, all Christian

children learnt Biblical stories, the Psalms and prayers by heart, from their parents and through the liturgy. But their Christian texts did not provide a systematic method of learning that could compete with the ancient curriculum.

Although some early Christian authorities regretted the use of ancient Greek texts in schools, they had no substitute. And the Christian attitude to the classics was laid down in the late fourth century by St. Basil of Caesarea, who knew from his own study at the feet of Prohaeresius in Athens (at the same time as the future emperor Julian), that Neo-Platonic philosophy provided an indispensable training in rational argument. In a letter to young men, perhaps his nephews, he wrote that it was necessary to read classical Greek works selectively. He advised them to master ancient wisdom in order to understand and combat their pagan opponents, and to counter heretical theological developments. They needed a mastery of ancient Greek logic, rhetoric and grammar to refute those who still clung to the old gods.

The seven liberal arts, as they were called, thus continued to form the basis of education, and provided the essential preparation for careers both in the church and the imperial administration long into the Christian era. In Byzantium, it was not surprising to find well educated clerics who could write epigrams in the correct meters of ancient Greek. Inspired by fifth-century Attic Greek models, Byzantine scholars emulated ancient styles of writing and composed according to ancient models. At the same time, they incorporated into their own culture an intimate knowledge of pre-Christian traditions. And since all children followed the same curriculum, this knowledge was shared by churchmen, courtiers, generals and bureaucrats alike.

To this ancient method of education, the Romans had added the study of law, and from the sixth century onwards, collections of Roman law in Latin were translated into

Greek. After the destruction of Berytus (Beirut) by an earthquake in A.D. 550, Constantinople became the major centre for legal training. Christianity had also added a great body of theology to the educational system: liturgical material, lives of the martyrs and saints and works of spiritual guidance that created a parallel world of Christian literature. In one respect the church triumphed over ancient Greek traditions – productions of Greek drama ceased and classical theatres and odeons were gradually abandoned and fell into ruins. Yet the works of all the great dramatists were read, studied and greatly enjoyed in Byzantium. Indeed, medieval scholars knew more plays by the great tragedians, Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus, than have survived to the present.

The shared basis of this ancient Greek education meant that in Byzantium talented young men might pursue either a civilian or ecclesiastical career, and might switch between the two. Many civilians were promoted to lead the church – notably Tarasios, Nikephoros and Photios in the eighth and ninth centuries. Other scholars agreed to accept a position in the church, for instance Leo the philosopher and mathematician, who was appointed archbishop of Thessalonike in the 840s. His role as church leader was brief and insignificant in comparison with his efforts to secure the transmission of ancient Greek mathematics in Byzantium. As a result of his study of Diophantos's *Arithmetika*, Euclid's *Elements*, Ptolemy's *Syntaxis*, the writings of Archimedes, and possibly Apollonios's *On Conics*, Leo preserved and wrote commentaries on a large body of ancient mathematical texts. From manuscript evidence it is clear that he owned a copy of Plato's *Laws* (which he corrected up to a point in Book V), and Porphyry (probably the introduction to Aristotle), as well as a copy of Achilles Tatius.

Because of his obvious brilliance, some time after the restoration of icons in A.D. 843 Leo was summoned to the

capital to teach in the school financed by Bardas, uncle of the reigning emperor Michael III. He was given rooms in the Magnaura Palace, attached to the imperial residence, where he taught the ancient quadrivium, the four advanced mathematical subjects, and philosophy with three assistants who covered grammar, geometry and astronomy. This official school, funded by the imperial family, set up a model for higher education in Constantinople, and provided a superior education for children of the imperial family and talented young men. Emperor Leo VI (886-912) had benefited from this school and is known as Leo the Wise from his own writings (military works, laws and sermons).

In addition to his role as teacher, Leo the Mathematician also composed epigrams in the correct ancient Greek meters, an art which had been revived in the late eighth century and became an integral part of higher education. In this capacity, Leo not only composed a series of poems as introductions to his study of ancient texts, but also identified himself as a "Hellene" (*ellenes*), a term which signified "pagan" in the late ninth century. Using such an epithet set Leo apart from the great mass of his contemporaries who knew themselves as Roman (*romaios*), and therefore Christian. Normally, it would have been enough to condemn him as an enemy of the established religion. Scholars have debated precisely what he intended by making this claim, which identified him as an adherent of the pre-Christian world of ancient Greece. It seems that as an established expert in the field of advanced education within the Great Palace complex, Leo was protected while others would not have been. There is no evidence that he was punished for his self-identification as a Hellene, except by one of his students, Constantine, who harshly criticized his master. Recently, Marc Lauxtermann has analyzed the dispute and concluded that after Leo's death "the legacy of Hellenism has to be Christianized in order to become acceptable."

The importance of Leo's role may also be observed in the manuscripts that date from his time. In the course of the ninth century, many ancient Greek texts were transferred from papyrus to parchment, a process that was much more complex than copying. Under Leo's direction, scribes learned to separate words which had been written in capitals joined together, to make paragraphs, and divide long texts into chapters or sections, by which they are now numbered. Frequently, they used the new form of joining up letters (minuscule) which is the forerunner of our modern writing. They also began to edit texts by inserting punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. In the case of mathematical texts, they copied diagrams for geometry such as those preserved in a manuscript of Euclid, which is dated A.D. 888. It was commissioned by Arethas, bishop of Caesarea, who paid the scribe Stephanos 14 gold coins for it. Authors, scribes and copyists also began to write their own notes in the margins of such texts, creating a body of commentary which came to form an integral part of the text. By the late thirteenth century, when Maximos Planoudes copied a text of Diophantos, he added the famous marginal note: "The Devil take you, Diophantos, for making this so difficult!" This was his comment on the theorem which came to be known as Fermat's last theorem. Andrew Wylie of Princeton University has now created a proof for it.

This process serves to remind us of how much material from ancient Greece we have lost. In Patriarch Photios' account of the 280 books he recommended to his brother, he gives an account of a long work by a seventh century historian, who tried to make all ancient history into a preparation for the Christian revelation. Photios could not discover his name, but today not only his name but also his work is lost. Nonetheless, from the ninth century onwards, imperial funding for higher education never ceased and Byzantium continued to maintain the highest standards of

editing and preserving ancient Greek texts. Throughout the centuries, teachers utilized this living link back to the classical world. At periods of creative intellectual development chains of teacher-pupil relations developed, stimulating a concentration of attention such as that generated by Leo the Philosopher and Mathematician. In the eleventh century, John Mauropous taught Michael Psellos and Theophylact of Ohrid, who in turn taught John Italos and Michael of Ephesos, and in every case, it was the combination of classical and Christian learning that passed down the chain. From the account of Anna Komnene, who wrote in the 1130s, it is clear that she had benefited from this intellectual activity. She organized a literary circle in which distinguished scholars like Michael of Ephesos expounded some of the most difficult philosophical Greek writings. Nor was she the only well educated woman to do so. The Georgian princess Maria "of Alania" and Irene the *sevastokratorissa* also presided over such groups.

Later in the twelfth century, Eustathios, archbishop of Thessalonike, wrote long commentaries on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, on Pindar and Aristophanes, as well as a large body of sermons and theological writings. He taught the brothers Michael and Niketas Choniates, who became archbishop of Athens and court historian respectively. Even after the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, these traditions were transplanted to the smaller imperial states which claimed to inherit Byzantium. Once restored to control of the capital, the educational system flourished as never before. One of the marked features of the last phase of Byzantine history, characterized by political weakness and diplomatic failure, is the resurgence of intellectual activity. For the first time Byzantine, scholars began to learn Latin so that they could translate classical and Christian works into Greek. Maximos Planoudes, who followed a monastic career and became a celebrated teacher, discovered the poetry of Ovid and the writings of

Cicero, Macrobius and Boethius. He also translated sections of St. Augustine's works, a task that was expanded later in the fourteenth century by the Kydones brothers, who also translated the relatively new writings of St Thomas Aquinas.

Under the impetus of Maximos Planoudes, not only mathematical Greek writings but also the epigrams collected in the Greek Anthology were once again copied, edited and added to. Theodore Metochites redecorated the monastery of St. Savior at Chora, and collected an enormous library of ancient Greek texts, on which he commented. Despite the poverty of the imperial family, who dined off ceramic dishes instead of gold and silver, Constantinople's famous teachers and libraries and the city's heightened awareness of the importance of intellectual activity continued to attract scholars. In the late fourteenth century, John Chortasmenos was trained as a notary in the patriarchal chancery and began to collect manuscripts of Euripides, Aristotle, Plutarch, Lucian and Libanios while he wrote a great variety of orations, poems, *scholia* and letters to his contemporaries. He attracted numerous students, including Bessarion, later Cardinal of Catholic Church, Markos Eugenikos, Gennadios Scholarios, and Gemistos Plethon, who became famous as the Hellene of Mistras.

Although it never developed into a major urban centre, being confined by its geographical setting to a small area of the slopes of Mt. Taygetos in the Peloponnesos, Mistras had become a rich and cosmopolitan centre in the fourteenth century. Manuel Kantakouzenos's long reign as despot from 1349 to 1380 brought greater stability and prosperity. In the early fifteenth century, Demetrios Kydones reported that Mistras served as a centre for scholars attracted to ancient Greek culture. He wrote to a certain philosopher named George: "In your excessive love of Hellenism you imagined

that the very soil of Sparta would enable you to see Lycurgus" (the lawgiver of ancient Sparta)! Use of the term *ellenes* (Hellene) had re-appeared in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a Greek way of claiming cultural superiority over the Latins. The *literati* at the court of Nicaea under Emperors Vatatzes and Laskaris incorporated ancient Hellenic wisdom, especially philosophy, into their Byzantine identity; John III spoke of his "Hellenic" descent. Of course, all scholars of Byzantium felt this affinity with the ancient world but at Mistras this strand of the Greek inheritance became more striking and obvious, in such close proximity to one very particular aspect of the ancient world, the civilisation of Sparta.

This was the context into which George Gemistos, also known as Plethon, stepped when he was exiled by Emperor Manuel II from Constantinople to Mistras, in about 1410. Gemistos was his family name and Plethon the pseudonym under which he wrote his greatest work of philosophy, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato*. Both names mean the same – "full" – but the second suggests a connection to the ancient philosopher Plato. While his enemies retorted that "he called himself Plethon as if insinuating a link with the soul of Plato," his supporters regularly described him as "a second Plato" or "second only to Plato." The court of the despots at Mistras had already attracted scholars and artists, who created a vibrant centre of Byzantine culture, where Plethon became a teacher and also served the despots as a judge.

To Manual Palaiologos, Plethon recommended very drastic changes: "all the land should be the common property of all its inhabitants...the produce of the labour of all...should be divided into three parts," which would be distributed to the labourers, the farmers and the exchequer. He thought that the military should be exempt from taxes and should be maintained by the state and the services of one taxpaying labourer, called a *helot*:

> Each infantry soldier should have one *helot*
> assigned to him, and each mounted man should
> have two; and thus each soldier…will be in
> a position to serve in the army with proper
> equipment and to remain permanently with
> the standards.

He also wished to reform the currency: "It is the height of folly to use these foreign – and bad – bronze coins which we now use: it only brings profit to others and much ridicule on ourselves." With additional recommendations for the control of trade and to encourage self-sufficiency, Plethon hoped to see the creation of an effective citizen army and the provision of a well-organized tax base, which would ensure better government and military success. Like other regions which aimed at independence, Plethon saw the need to make government more responsive, to incorporate popular demands for greater equality in local administration.

In association with these suggestions for a Spartan-style society, Plethon proposed a revival of ancient Greek social values and religion. His *Book of Laws* must have contained a complete liturgy for the worship of Zeus. Only 16 of the 100 chapters in three books, and some only in parts, survive. But the chapter headings, which include a prayer to the gods of learning, reflect the broad concerns of this work devoted to theology, ethics, politics, ceremonies and natural science:

> Come to us, O gods of learning, whoever and
> however many ye be; ye who are guardians of
> scientific knowledge and true belief; ye who
> distribute them to whomsoever you wish, in
> accordance with the dictates of the great
> father of all things, Zeus the King … Grant
> that this book may have all success, to be set as
> a possession for ever before those of mankind
> who wish to pass their lives, both in private and
> in public established in the best and noblest
> fashion.

Zeus is understood to be the absolute good; he is un-generated, everlasting, the father of himself, the pre-eminent creator of all other things. The Olympian gods are few and supra-celestial; they have no bodies and exist outside space. The lower, lesser gods are more numerous, as are the terrestrial daemons.

While many of the chapters must have been devoted to matters of religious observance (prayers for morning, afternoon and evening), priestly functions and the names of the gods, sections are also devoted to metaphysics (abstract questions concerning the eternity of the universe); ethics (against incest, polygamy), and practical matters of government (administrative, judicial, economic). In his final appendix to the *Book*, Plethon invokes the powers of the gods and the doctrines taught by Pythagoras, Plato, Kouretes and Zoroaster as superior to any other. He dismisses the teaching of certain sophists, who mislead people by promising greater happiness through a genuine immortality (a reference to Christian teachers), pointing out that their idea of eternity is only a future one, whereas he believes the philosophy outlined in his *Book* offers the soul an absolute eternity, both past and future (a reference to the doctrine of continued and repeated reincarnation of souls).

When the negotiations for church union were initiated in 1437, Plethon traveled to Ferrara and on to Florence where he made contact with Italian scholars. His lectures on Platonism given to Italian scholars under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici made a great impression on contemporaries, who were enthusiastically trying to identify, translate and read every ancient text by Plato that they could find. Their relative ignorance stimulated his major work, *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato*, which attacks Aristotle and exalts Plato. His scholarship gave a major boost to the study of Platonic philosophy in the West, which later bore fruit in the foundation of the Florentine Academy by Cosimo in about 1460. Under the direction of Marsilio Ficino, who translated Plato's *Symposium* into Latin

and wrote an important introduction to it, the discovery and study of Platonic texts expanded greatly.

Until his death in 1452, Plethon continued to defend Plato against the Aristotelianism of George Trapezountios (of Trebizond) and Gennadios Scholarios, who became Patriarch after the fall of the city. Scholarios condemned as heretical Plethon's fervent enthusiasm for Hellenic religion and ordered all copies of his *Book of Laws* to be burned. He thus made sure that the rest of Plethon's output would also remain relatively unknown.

A few years after this forceful censorship, Sigismondo Malatesta led a campaign against the Turks, who had forced the Despot Demetrios and his wife Theodora to flee to Constantinople in 1460 when they captured Mistras. In 1464, Malatesta regained the lower town, where he found Plethon's grave. Years before, he had tried to persuade Plethon to head his court school at Rimini, to no avail. Now, however, he could ensure a more appropriate burial for his hero. He removed Plethon's bones from Mistras to inter them with due reverence in the wall of his Tempio Malatestiano, where the dedication inscription may still be read: "The remains of Gemistos the Byzantine, Prince of Philosophers in his time." I think this epitaph symbolizes what Byzantium had preserved of ancient Greek culture and what a significant impact it had in the West. It also brings this talk to a fitting close.

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Ancient Greek Conversation and Modern American Conversation: The View from Hume

Stephen Miller

Hume and the Quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns

David Hume is known in the philosophical world for his treatment of causality, and also for his criticism of standard Deist arguments for the existence of God. He is less well-known as the philosopher who thought deeply about all aspects of conversation. Donald Livingston, one of the leading Hume scholars, speaks of "the central place that conversation has in Hume's conception of true philosophy."

For Hume, conversation is essential for psychological well-being and intellectual growth. He also argues that the extent and quality of conversation in a society – not only its political conversation – is a rough index of its commitment to liberty, its interest in progress in the arts and sciences, and its political stability. Hume was fluent in Greek. His biographer says that much of Hume's thinking "originates" from his study of the ancients, and Hume himself said that he had "read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin."

Hume's interest in ancient Greece was not unusual in eighteenth-century Britain. An educated person was supposed to know Greek and Latin. In 1770, Edmund Burke writes that his 11-year-old son is progressing nicely in his reading of Homer and Lucian. Samuel Johnson's

diaries are laced with quotations from Greek writers, and when he couldn't sleep, he would translate Boethius, the early Christian philosopher, from Latin into Greek, or poems from the Greek Anthology into Latin.

Perhaps the best indication of the widespread knowledge of Greek among Britain's educated elites is that, in his essays, Hume often doesn't translate passages he quotes from Greek writers. In a footnote to the essay "Of Civil Liberty," he quotes in Greek a long sentence from Xenophon. The reader, he assumes, will know what it means.

Before looking at Hume's view of conversation in ancient Greece, I need to say something about an important eighteenth-century debate – the so-called Quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns, which began in France and spilled over into Britain. In France, the quarrel was mainly over literature but in Britain, the quarrel was mainly over politics.

In Britain, the writers on the side of the Ancients often said that they admired the ancient Greeks. Greek thinkers, they said, rightly warned of the dangers of commerce, which promoted avarice and spawned corruption. These writers often praised ancient Sparta, a city-state that paid no attention to commerce.

A key word in the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns was luxury, which roughly means commercial expansion. Those on the side of the Ancients attacked luxury. The playwright Oliver Goldsmith says, "I must remain a professed ancient on that head." Those on the side of the Moderns defended luxury.

What does the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns have to do with conversation? The defenders of the Ancients were suspicious of those who stressed the importance of the art of conversation. Adam Ferguson, a friend of Hume's who admired ancient Sparta, thought that too much emphasis was being placed on cultivating the art of conversation and not enough on cultivating the military

spirit. Rousseau, the most famous pro-Spartan eighteenth-century thinker, hated France's salon culture. He thought it was emasculating for men to attend salons run by women.

Hume was on the side of the Moderns; he defended luxury, attacked Sparta, and stressed the importance of conversation. However, this does not mean that Hume disliked ancient Greek society. He thought that anyone attempting to practice political philosophy had to read the ancient Greek historians. In his political essays, there are more references to Thucydides and Xenophon than to Plato and Aristotle.

According to Hume, a study of ancient Greek history is essential for formulating what he calls a "science of politics." By "science," Hume means general laws about the way human beings behave, which are useful for legislators to keep in mind in order to promote progress and reduce the likelihood of political instability.

Hume's notion of science is not the same as our current notion of science. By "science," he does not mean that one can predict the ways human beings will behave. Hume acknowledges that sometimes human beings behave in unaccountable ways. Sometimes people become infected with enthusiasm, which in the eighteenth-century was often used pejoratively to mean fanaticism. "Enthusiasm," Hume says, "produces the most cruel disorders in human society." When Hume speaks of enthusiasm, he is not only thinking of religious fanaticism. He was against political fanaticism – or the strong hatred of an established government – and he believed that revolutionary change was unjustified unless a government was a brutal despotism.

Hume thought the writers who admired the Ancients did not understand the science of politics. He also thought they took a very moralistic approach to politics by calling those who disagreed with them corrupt.

Hume, we should keep in mind, was an historian as well as a philosopher. His *History of England* was a best-seller and was considered required reading for educated Britons. In this

work, Hume outlines what I would call a political economy of conversation. He argues that the expansion of commerce leads to an increase in sociability and an improvement in conversation. It also leads to progress in the arts and sciences and it promotes political stability.

Hume and Ancient Greek Conversation

Now that I've broadly outlined the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, I can address the following question: What did Hume think of conversation in ancient Greece? In his political essays, Hume mainly discusses Sparta and Athens. Sparta, he says, was a rigid and unnatural state, and he implies that it paid no attention to the art of conversation.

Hume, however, acknowledges that Sparta was a formidable military power—and that its power "was owing entirely" to the lack of "commerce and luxury." According to Hume, the Spartan hostility to commerce and the general rigidity of its culture led to intellectual stagnation, which he believed in the long run inevitably weakened its military power.

Sparta, Hume also says, was an unnatural state because it expected its citizens to be totally dedicated to the public interest. Most people are driven by passion and self-interest, so it is foolish to expect people to be dedicated to the public interest. He writes:

> Sovereigns must take mankind as they find them, and cannot pretend to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking….And the less natural any set of principles are…the more difficulty will a legislator meet with in raising and cultivating them.

What did Hume think of conversation in ancient Athens? He implies that conversation in Athens was far superior to the conversation in any other Greek state. The

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Athenians, Hume says, "were remarkable for ingenuity, politeness, and gaiety." By contrast, the Thebans were dull rustics who had a phlegmatic temper. But the liveliness of Athenian conversation had its downside. Its politics were unruly. Hume speaks of the "tumultuous governments of Athens and Rome [meaning the Roman republic]" that "ended at last in the ruin of these two famous republics."

Athenian government, Hume says, was tumultuous because there were too many people involved in political decision-making. He says that only ten percent of the people in Athens were citizens, but he still thinks that Athens was too democratic. "The republic of Athens," Hume says, "was, I believe, the most extensive democracy, that we read of in history." (A recent scholar puts the number of citizens higher—saying that "perhaps 20 percent of the inhabitants of Athens were citizens.") Hume was suspicious of democracy. He thought it often bred violent factions.

Is Hume saying that Athens had too much conversation? Not exactly. He is saying that Athens would have been less unruly if fewer Athenians had been involved in political decision-making. Hume disliked popular assemblies: "Popular assemblies in that city were always full of license and disorder, notwithstanding the institutions and laws by which they were checked."

Were there other reasons why Athenian politics was so tumultuous? Hume implies that the political conversation in Athens was impolite—that the arts of conversation did not flourish among them so much as the arts of writing and composition. One reason for the lack of politeness was that women were not included in the conversation: "Among the ancients, the character of the fair-sex was considered as altogether domestic; nor were they regarded as part of the polite world or of good company."

Hume, then, is very critical of Sparta and somewhat critical of Athens. He is also critical of ancient Greek political thinkers. He says that they didn't understand the

significance of commerce. "Trade," he says, "was never esteemed an affair of state till the last century; and there scarcely is any ancient writer on politics who has made mention of it." In a footnote, he points out that Xenophon mentions commerce but doesn't recognize its importance. Plato, he says, "totally excludes it from his imaginary republic."

Thus, Hume in effect says to those writers who looked back in nostalgia to ancient Greek city-states: "You are foolish to think that ancient Sparta or ancient Athens can provide a prescription to cure the ills of modern Britain."

Hume thought Britons could learn a lot from eighteenth-century France. In his opinion, France had "in a great measure, perfected…the art of society and conversation." He lived in Paris for several years as secretary to the British ambassador, and in his short autobiography, he writes that:

> …there is a great Satisfaction in living at Paris,
> from the great number of sensible,
> knowing, and polite Company with which that
> city abounds above all places in the Universe. I
> thought once of settling there for Life.

Although Hume is critical of ancient Greek city-states and ancient Greek philosophers, he is far more positive about ancient Greece than negative. Hume admired the intellectual energy of ancient Athens. And he thought that their non-political conversation was generally polite. In a letter, he praises ancient Greek writers for generally remaining sociable and civil regardless of their disagreements.

Speaking about ancient Greece in general, Hume says:

> There concurred a happy climate, a soil
> not unfertile, and a most harmonious and
> comprehensive language; so that every
> circumstance among that people seemed to

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favour the rise of the arts and sciences.
Each city produced its several artists and
philosophers, who refused to yield the
preference to those of the neighbouring
republics. *Their contention and debates
sharpened the wits of men* [italics mine].

Hume and Modern American Conversation

Let us jump now to contemporary America. What
would Hume think of conversation in contemporary
America? Evaluating contemporary American conversation
is not easy. I don't have a conversation meter. I can't
measure conversation. So I have to make some
generalizations based to some degree on anecdotal
evidence but also on the work of other writers who have
written about the subject.

To evaluate conversation, let's first look at what Hume
says are the main ingredients of good conversation. Hume
discusses these requirements in his political essays but also
in other works, mainly in his *Enquiry concerning the
Principles of Morals*.

1- Conversation does not have an ulterior purpose. It is
a pleasure in itself. Hume means that the participants in
the conversation are not trying to further their career and
are not trying to get professional advice about something.
There may be a loose purpose in the sense that they are
trying to find out how to live the good life or trying to
clarify certain ideas. Conversation is its own reward.

2- The participants must be equal in standing. No one
is in a position of power with regard to anyone else. No one
is in a position of dependency.

3- Conversation requires politeness on the part of
participants. Politeness was a much stronger word in the
eighteenth century than it is now. It meant the ability to
curb one's strong feelings and to avoid extreme ideas. To

regulate passions requires effort. Conversation is an art. We are not naturally good conversationalists.

4- Conversation is best when there is good-humored disagreement. Hume and other eighteenth-century writers often praised raillery—i.e. good-humored banter or repartee.

Using the four criteria how would Hume rate contemporary American conversation? I think he would give it bad grades.

Let's look at the first criterion: that conversation should not have a purpose. Alas, 98 percent of the books on conversation see conversation as purposeful. Americans, it seems, want to use conversation to get ahead in life. In Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which has been a bestseller for six decades, conversation is instrumental—a way to further your career. The book's title is misleading; it is about influencing people—not winning friends.

Two recent books on conversation that are selling very well are simply variants of Carnegie's book. One is *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when the Stakes are High*. The other is *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and In Life, One Conversation at a Time*. If I wanted to make a lot of money, I would write a book entitled: *How Learning the Art of Conversation Will Improve Your Sex Life, Help You Lose Weight, and Make You Rich*.

Of course many Americans are not so one-dimensionally set on becoming successful or improving themselves, and many have friends whose conversation they enjoy for its own sake, so it would be wrong to say that most people see conversation as a means toward an end. Perhaps they read books Dale Carnegie-type books but pay little or no attention to them.

The second criterion is that the participants must be equal. You cannot have a conversation with your boss because he or she is in a position of power over you. And you cannot have a conversation with a psychiatrist or social

worker because you are paying this person for your services.

Of course, if you see conversation mainly as a means for furthering your career, you will always be seeking out those who do have power over you because they are in position to help you. When trying to influence people, you will always be engaged in flattering the other person or being ingratiating towards them. Everyone has met a person at a party who is only interested in talking to those people who can help his career. The Dale Carnegies of this world—always smiling, always positive, always upbeat, always making believe they are listening to you intently— are irritating.

If some people hope to flatter those more powerful than them, others try to suggest that people who disagree with them are inferior. If I disagree with, say, a Freudian, he might say that I take such a position because I'm repressed, neurotic, up-tight, etc. The biggest put-down, which was popular in the Sixties, was to say that you suffer from "false consciousness." These instant analyses of your psyche are conversation-stoppers, for the person is saying to you: "I am superior to you. I know more about you than you know about yourself."

What about the last two criteria for conversation: being polite and welcoming good-humored disagreement?

Are Americans polite? Every sales clerk says "Have a nice day" or "Have a great weekend," or "Enjoy," but this manic cheerfulness has nothing to do with conversation. Many Americans are poor conversationalists because they lack the ability to listen. Americans seem to want mainly to hold forth rather than converse. Many appear to be listening to you, but they really are waiting to talk about themselves.

How many times have you felt that when a person asks you a question, he or she doesn't pay attention to your answer? How many times have you asked a question but not really listened to the answer?

Narcissism is not only an American problem. There always have been people who love the sound of their own voice. In *Northanger Abby*, Jane Austen describes a young man in the following way: "And all the rest of his conversation, or rather talk, began and ended with himself and his own concerns."

There is an amusing story in a recent memoir by the Israeli novelist Amos Oz. When Oz was a young man in his early twenties, something he wrote about Spinoza caught the attention of the Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion. He was summoned to Ben Gurion's office. After being with the Prime Minister for several minutes, the door half-opened and an aide peeked in. "Get out of here!" Ben Gurion shouted to the aide. "Can't you see that I'm having one of the most interesting conversations I've had in a long time?" The aide vanished.

Oz then points out: "So far I had not uttered a single word."

Oz was not on an equal level with the Prime Minister, so he could not criticize what Ben Gurion said—or even interrupt Ben Gurion's monologue.

In the United States, disagreement is often considered rude—even among people who are friends and equals. Many people assume that all opinions are autobiographical, so that whatever one says is part of one's life story. Thus if you disagree with what someone is saying, you are not being supportive. You are being judgmental.

The nonjudgmentalist doesn't converse. He or she "shares" an opinion with you. Sharing implies a generous act—as if one were giving someone food. Just as it would be rude to criticize the food someone shared with you, so it would be rude to criticize thoughts that are shared. Sharing puts a damper on conversation.

Hume would have found this kind of suffocating politeness puzzling. He and other eighteenth-century

writers admired raillery. Joseph Surface, in Sheridan's play *School for Scandal*, says: "Conversation, where the spirit of raillery is suppressed, will ever appear tedious and insipid."

Suffocating politeness is one problem. Another problem is anger. Many people think it is healthy and authentic to be angry. Many people seem to change their personality when a political question comes up. Their voice becomes tense, shrill. It goes without saying that anger is the enemy of conversation.

The Future of Conversation

It would be wrong to suggest that conversation used to be wonderful in the U.S. Many visitors in the nineteenth century deplored the low level of conversation in America. After all, it was settled in part by Puritans, who strongly disapproved of idle conversation. It was also settled by self-reliant men who were doers, not talkers. They thought conversation was a waste of time. Laconic males have been heroes in American novels and movies.

The brusque John Adams despised the loquacious Ben Franklin. Franklin is often considered the quintessential American, but he was not. He enjoyed the art of conversation; he even wrote an essay about it. When he lived in London, he was a member of many clubs. He knew Hume and praised his conversation. When he lived in Paris, he was invited to many salons.

In a number of works of American literature, the man who likes to talk a lot is either a con man or effeminate—or simply weak. Nowadays popular culture implies that women like to talk a lot. So do gay men, but non-gay men are laconic, except if the subject is sports, cars, or home improvement. There are some differences in the way men and women approach conversation, but I think they are greatly exaggerated by advertisers, songwriters, talk show hosts, and popular novelists.

Perhaps the biggest threat to conversation in America—and indeed everywhere—is modern technology. I am talking about the growing number of ways of avoiding face-to-face interaction. Modern technology is helpful in many ways, but virtual conversation is a pale imitation of face-to-face conversation. Good-humored disagreement is possible on a phone, but very difficult in e-mails and text-messages. You lack the tools to make raillery effective—tone of voice, gesture. There are only words on a screen (and those stupid smiley faces).

In *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore* (1998), John L. Locke argues that modern technology has had a negative effect on sociability. A number of studies, he says, make it clear that many people use e-mail to avoid face-to-face interaction. This trend is disturbing because we learn many things from a person's voice and gestures: "With no access to our species' social feedback and control mechanisms, there will be nothing to keep misunderstanding, incivility, and dishonesty from creeping into our daily life at unprecedented levels." Locke also argues that simply being with other people improves our sociability.

The virtual world is like alcohol: a modest amount may be good for you (or harmless) but an excessive amount is probably bad for you. What constitutes an excessive amount? It is hard to say, but in the *Washington Post* Catie Getches, a 20-something freelance writer, describes her 11-year-old niece who has a computer, a cell phone, and an iPod. "At any given time, late at night, far or near, messages filled with such eloquence as 'RUOK,' 'CUL8R' and 'DEGT' ('Don't Even Go There'), are zapped back and forth and then lost forever." Getches says that "it's so common now to correspond by e-mail alone; it's easy to go for days without actually interacting with a real live human being."

In July 2003, the *Post* described a family that is awash in conversation avoidance devices. The family of six (there are two children from the mother's previous marriage and two from the father's previous marriage) possesses nine television sets, six computers, six VCRs, six cell phones, three stereos, three digital music players, and two DVD players. Family members spend very little time together. They eat dinner quickly and retire to their electronic cocoons. Sometimes a family member exchanges instant messages with another family member even though both are at home.

Modern technology undermines our ability to converse in other ways. We can't concentrate because we are bombarded with sounds. There have been many times when I have had trouble being a good listener because someone's cell phone rang and for a second I wondered if it was mine.

Steven Pearlstein, who writes a business column for the *Post,* grumbles:

> In the past, the conversation at my monthly poker game would turn to politics or sports or real estate or...well, you know. But now no longer. These days, my card-playing pals are so busy showing off their new BlackBerrys or boasting about the newest features on the Palm Pilot that we can hardly get in a decent game of Follow the Queen.

The proliferation of these electronic devices tempts many people to multitask, which undermines our ability to listen carefully or think clearly. In *The New Brain* (2003) Richard Restak, a neurologist and neuropsychiatrist, argues that conversation avoidance devices are actually affecting our brain:

> Our brain literally changes its organization and function to accommodate the abundance of stimulation forced on it by the modern

> world….One consequence of this change is that
> we face constant challenges to our ability to
> focus our attention.

Attention deficit disorder, he says, is becoming an epidemic among children and adults. Evan Schwarz, a writer for *Wired* magazine, says that America could be on the way to becoming "the first *society* with Attention Deficit Disorder…the official brain syndrome for the information age."

The rise of the virtual world is also impoverishing our language. Recently, I had my house rewired for fiber optic cable. Verizon, which now supplies my phone service, Internet service, and television service, sent me a guide. It includes a three-page dictionary of text-messaging phrases. These gimmicky phrases are now used frequently by teenagers. Are the limited vocabularies of young people going to become even more limited?

I remain somewhat gloomy about the future of conversation because I think the forces that nourish conversation are weaker than the forces undermining it. Simon Jenkins, a leading British journalist, thinks I'm too pessimistic. He notes that people love to get together with other people. Look at all the crowded restaurants and bars. He also thinks the interactive devices are a step up from the passive act of watching television. "We seem," he says, "to be in perpetual conversation. The zombie army wandering London's streets mouthing into space is conversing…..And what is a blog but a digital coffee house…?"

Jenkins is right of course about crowded restaurants and bars. Conversation is not going to die. Hume said that "the propensity to company and society is strong in all rational creatures." But the rapid-fire chatter on cell phones is to my mind a less rewarding form of conversation than a face-to-face encounter at, say, a dinner party. Secondly, does venting on a blog qualify as conversation? I don't think so.

To be sure, the Internet to some degree brings us together. In recent weeks, I have exchanged e-mails with a writer in Tasmania, a librarian in South Carolina, a radio host in Vancouver, and a retired rare books dealer in Chicago. Moreover, cell phones and e-mails and even text-message have helped pro-democratic forces in several countries to organize and combat tyranny. But the Internet also promotes hatred and violence. Radical Islam gets converts by e-mailing pictures of the victims of American (or Israeli or British) military power.

Will the proliferation of what I call conversation avoidance devices weaken our interest in face-to-face conversation? L. Gordon Crovitz, who is in charge of Dow-Jones's electronic-publishing operations, says that "we live in the early days of an Information Revolution that will change our lives just as the Industrial Revolution changed our forefathers.'" Jules Urbach, one of the leading developers of hyper-functional instant messaging software, told the *New York Times*: "I love picking a character and going into a [chat] room and leading a virtual life." Urbach, one assumes, doesn't want to live in the virtual world all the time. No one does except for people who suffer from social anxiety disorder. But there probably is a correlation between the number of electronic devices we have and the amount of time we spend in the virtual world.

We do not know what the long-term effect will be of teenage years spent cocooned in the electronic world. I recently met a sociologist from Turkey who said that young people in Turkey are addicted to cell phones and have difficulty concentrating on anything. She wonders if young people are ever going to be able to focus on tasks that require lengthy periods of concentration. On the other hand, the *Washington Post* recently quoted a high school student who said he disliked the virtual world: "Over time, people are going to get sick of talking to people on the

computer. I just think people will spend more time with each other—without the wall of technology."

I hope the student is right, but even if people spend more time in face-to-face conversation, they may still be poor conversationalists because of their addiction to electronic devices. I can envision a modern-day *Symposium*. Socrates is making a point about the nature of *eros*, but no one is really paying attention. One guest looks down at his Blackberry, reading a text message. Another hears his cell phone vibrate, and gets up, mumbling: "I have to take this call." Socrates is no dope. He sees that his listeners are nodding, but not really listening to what he is saying. He decides to play a joke: he says something totally illogical and absurd. The guests still nod. Two listeners say in unison: "How interesting!"

Let's hope I am wrong and that the art of conversation will remain an art that many people cultivate because good conversation, as Hume and others said, is one of the great pleasures of life. Let's hope that sociability is a strong force because liberty cannot flourish if the art of conversation disappears. ■

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About SPGH

The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage (SPGH) is a non-profit organization founded in 1974. Our original goal was to assist in the restoration of Byzantine monasteries and churches in Greece and of the historic Plaka House in Athens, which now serves as the headquarters for our Greek affiliate, Elliniki Etairia.

Our present programs are dedicated to increasing awareness of and appreciation for ancient and modern Greek culture and philosophy, and to the exploration of the interrelationship between classical Greek heritage and contemporary society worldwide. Our activities in the U.S. are generously supported by donations from our members and friends. For more information about SPGH, contact us at: 5125 MacArthurBlvd. NW, Suite 11B, Washington, D.C. 20016. Tel: 202/363-4337; Fax: 202/363-4658

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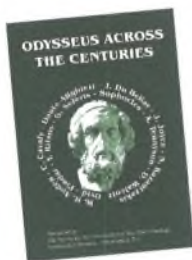
Odysseus Across The Centuries

2002, 28pp. A lecture sponsored by The Society of the Preservation of the Greek Heritage. Held at the Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2000.

Lecture by: **Peter Bien**, Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College and President of the Modern Greek Studies Association.

The Destiny of the Parthenon Marbles

1999, 114pp. Proceedings from a Seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage. Held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., February 13, 1999.

Presentations by: **Karl E. Meyer**, Author of *The Plundered Past*, has written extensively on the issues of cultural plunder and restitution; **William St. Clair,** Senior Research Fellow, Trinity College, Cambridge and author of *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*; **David A. Walden**, Secretary to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, **John H. Merryman**, Sweitzer Professor of Law and Cooperating Professor of Art Emeritus at Stanford University, **Stephen G. Miller**, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley and Director of the Nemea Excavations in Greece since 1973; **Alexandros Mantis**, Senior Archaeologist of the Acropolis Division in Greece's Ministry of Culture.
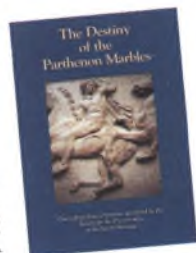
The Iliad, the Odyssey and the Real World

1998, 120pp. Proceedings from a seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage and held on March 6-7, 1998.

Presentations by: **Deborah Boedeker** , Professor of Classics, Brown University, and Co-Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D. C.; **Stanley Lombardo**, classicist and poet teaching at the University of Kansas; **Ahuvia Kahane**, teacher of the classics at Northwestern University and expert on ancient epic; **Erwin Cook**, teacher of classics at the University of Texas at Austin and a specialist in Homer, mythology, and religion; **Jonathan Shay**, faculty member of Tufts University Medical School and a psychiatrist practicing in the Boston area, whose patients are combat veterans.

Where the Achievements of Ancient Greece Borrowed from Africa?

1997, 80pp. Proceedings from a Seminar sponsored by The Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage and held on November 16, 1996.

Presentations by: **Erich Martel**, Teacher of Advanced Placement U.S. and Modern World History, Wilson High School, Washington, D.C.; **Stanley Burstein**, Chair, Department of History, California State University, Los Angeles; **Dr. S.O.Y. Keita**, Biological Anthropologist, Research Associate, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois; **James D. Muhly**, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern History, University of Pennsylvania; **Jay Jasonoff**, Professor of Linguistics, Cornell University; **Dr. Frank Yurko**, Egyptologist, Research Associate, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.