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## The Socratics' Sparta And Rousseau's

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### Introduction

Were all democrats now, aren't we, and democracy was invented 2500 years ago in Greece, where it flourished until those nasty oligarchs and imperial monarchists from Rome came over to stamp it out; and stamped-out it remained thereafter, both as a fact and as an idea, until the eighteenth century, when Rousseau did as much as anyone, and much more than most, to reinvigorate the idea of democracy in preparation for its restoration in fact by the French Revolution. Well, in admittedly crude outline, that's one very popular modern story, or myth. But at least among us Classicists and ancient historians it's no secret that in antiquity democracy did *not* triumph altogether over oligarchy, aristocracy, kingship or tyranny, and that the *dominant* intellectual-political tradition both in antiquity and from antiquity to the modern era was not only *anti*-democratic, but also, and often because of that bias, pro-SPARTAN. As for Rousseau, he was not only of but also in crucial ways *against* the Enlightenment, and it was typical of the paradox of the man that he managed to be both pro(to)-democratic, *unlike* most Enlightened thinkers, and, *like* most of them, pro-Spartan. Quite a lot therefore of our western political-theoretical and practical-political heritage hangs on what Elizabeth Rawson called the 'Spartan tradition in European thought' in its political aspect, and on Rousseau's place within that tradition, and it's this perspective on Sparta that I'd like to revisit with you in the next 50 minutes or so.

The strategy of my paper (the military metaphor seems appropriate) will be as follows: I'll aim, first, to outline what's at stake in evaluating the tradition about ancient Sparta, and esp. in distinguishing within that tradition the various senses of 'laconism'; then, to ask who were 'the Socratics', and decide which of them will count as such for our purposes today; next, to ask who was this Rousseau fellow - or who did he like to *think* he was or present himself as?: which will lead into discussion of the various and varying laconism(s) of my chosen Socratics and of Rousseau. Finally, by way of a conclusion, if there's time, I'll try to open the paper out into a broader discussion of utopianism and utopiography.

### I. The Mirage/Myth

George Grote in the mid-19th century was not the first, nor the last, to marvel at what he called 'the astonishing ascendancy which the Spartans acquired over the Hellenic mind'. In our own century Francois Ollier coined the useful phrase 'le mirage spartiate' to describe that ascendancy's most striking effect. By 'mirage' he meant the series of more or less distorted, more or less invented images whereby Sparta has been reflected and refracted in the extant literature by non-Spartans, beginning in the late 5th century with Kritias of Athens, pupil of Socrates, relative of Plato, and leading light (or Prince of Darkness) of the 30 Tyrants (of whom more anon).

For historians of 'how it actually was' in Sparta and Spartan society, this 'astonishing ascendancy' creates a major historiographical problem. Since practically all our detailed evidence for what they were *really* like comes from within the mirage, how can we be sure that any one alleged detail, let alone the totality, is not just a figment of the writer's imaginative projection? Actually, the problem's worse even than that. The mirage in its written form began to take shape at just the same time as - and in part precisely because of - a mega crisis that was coming to a head in Spartan polity and society: to put it very simply, and paradoxically, Sparta's prolonged involvement and eventual victory in the Peloponnesian War during the last third of the fifth century brought about or at any rate hastened the downfall of the model military state.

However, for historians of ancient Greek political thought, and its post-Classical reception, the situation's not of course half so bad - at first sight, anyhow. The mirage or myth is precisely the evidence that's wanted by them, since it offers up Sparta as a political model or paradigm, an imaginative or imaginary representation of political virtue in living actuality.

On the other hand, for historians like myself who want to study not the mirage as such, but the possible links between it and the political-philosophical projects of the Socratics and Rousseau, the mirage effect is still just a bit of problem. For apart from the factual questions of whether or not, and if so how, the Socratics and Rousseau were directly influenced by Sparta, or rather what they took Sparta to be and to stand for, there's the further interpretative question of how historically authentic and therefore realistic any of their supposedly Sparta-based political prescriptions were intended to be.

### II. Laconism/Lacedaemonism

Before we get down to such issues in details, let's first distinguish 3 principal modes or forms of 'laconism' in Classical Greece: three different ways of appealing to or appropriating Sparta for different ends:

1. first, there's what I shall call social laconism or 'laconomania', a matter largely of outward show - in clothes, facial and other head hair, and an ostentatiously unwashed and/or emaciated style of life. This laconomania was largely confined, at Athens anyhow, to upper-class, but not seriously educated, characters, whose praise of Sparta was based essentially on snobbish social prejudice. As we'll see, Socrates was implicated with such people, in Aristophanic comedy, though whether fairly implicated or not is another matter.
2. secondly, there's pragmatic-political laconism - the sort espoused by those who, as Aristotle put it (Pol. 1288b39-40), want to 'get rid of existing politieiai, praising the Spartan or some other'. That is, by practical would-be revolutionary politicians who found Sparta a suitable alternative model either for Madison Avenue propaganda purposes or as a desirable practical goal in itself. The Thirty Tyrants, as we'll see, fit that bill very nicely.
3. then thirdly, there's political-theoretical laconism, including not only public attitudes held or struck (e.g. Cynic praise of Spartan austerity, Fisher n.46) but also theoretical expressions of political laconism addressed to private philosophical schools or cliques and not to mass audiences. This variety of laconism might or might not have a directly practical political aim, either - to use Michael Walzer's language - 'immanent' (reformist) or 'rejectionist' (revolutionary).

The question we might want to consider at the outset therefore is whether the Socratics were merely 'social' laconizers, or did they rather take what they understood Sparta to be like as a model for political change, at the limit as the goal for counter-revolutionary change, in their own city or cities. But first let me introduce our cast of characters: who were the Socratics, and who was Rousseau - or who did he want us to think he was?

## Socratics

The adjective 'Sokratikos' makes its debut in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1447b11), though his Sokratikoi logoi are a broader literary genre than just the dialogues and other discourses composed by Plato and other associates of Socrates. But the idea of the Socratics as a recognised group of Socrates's followers goes back at least to the parade of homiletai or disciples of Soc. in Xen.'s *Memoirs of Socrates* (1.1-2, esp. 1.2.12, 48). (Though this listing manages to exclude the 2 major literary Socratics, Plato and Xen. himself. As does the standard modern edition of Giannantoni, containing the fragments of c. 70 Socratics.) Granted then that 'the Socratics' were a recognisable if ill-defined ancient intellectual group, which of them shall we select for consideration now? In our context of laconism just two of them, Plato and Xenophon, will I think do very nicely indeed - unless of course Socrates was from this point of view the original Socratic, an issue to which I'll return. But first

## IV. Rousseau, The Rogue Citizen Of Geneva...

Rousseau, it's been said, was eccentric or marginal in practically everything. He was also a bundle of paradoxes: a supporter of the Ancients vs the Moderns, yet also a master of modern sensibility; a philosophe who cast himself as a latterday Socrates in opposition to the Sophists and used 'philosophesque' as an insult; a theorist who denied the Enlightenment's fundamental commitment to the individual in favour of a communitarian, proto-democratic ideal while himself withdrawing as a solitary dreamer to an inner world of self-absorption, a pose that his erstwhile intellectual and political comrades-in-arms found contemptible.

Here surely is a case of the 'Do as I say, not as I do' syndrome, if ever there was. Which is one reason why Rousseau is so hard to read - even once, let alone the twice he recommends in the *Second Discourse* (SD 48). But it's by no means the only reason: the differences of occasion of Rousseau's publications (or non-publication), compounded by the evolutionary or otherwise development of his thought over time, resulted in the perpetration of several major inconsistencies. Against such a background of eccentricity and paradox, if not self-contradiction, those issues on which Rousseau did NOT change his mind stand out in high relief. And those issues signally included ancient Sparta. As un-Spartan himself in crucial ways as one could possibly imagine, yet Rousseau remained consistently a devoted laconizer. Perhaps the paradox to end all paradoxes?

## V. Socrates The Socratic?

Anyhow, let's move on to consider in turn the Socratics' and Rousseau's Spartas, recalling that what we're interested in is what they made of Sparta, i.e. not only what they thought Sparta was like but how they used their understandings or constructions of Sparta to further their own political theories, projects and (if such be the right word) programmes.

Marx is supposed once to have remarked, on reading his self-styled disciples' deformation of his thought, that at least *he* was not a 'Marxist'. In the same sense we might begin by asking whether Socrates was a Socratic; what DID Socrates himself think of Sparta? Speaking generally, it would be surprising, would it not, if any Athenian intellectuals really did love a people who were, as the 4th-c. rhetor Alkidamas put it, hekista philologoi, minimally or not at all devoted to written discourse? Yet Socrates notoriously didn't *write* his philosophy, and Spartan non-literacy, as Rousseau was to show, could be turned to Sparta's advantage (as exhibiting proper respect for substance over mere form).

More specifically, there are, first, Aristophanes's representations of Socrates and his followers. To his *Birds* (1281-1282) we owe the freshly minted verbs Sokratein 'to Socratize' and lakonomainein 'to go Sparta-crazy', thus = 'they aped the manners of Sparta, let their hair grow long, went hungry, refused to wash, "Socratized", and carried walking sticks'. At first blush that looks more like Aristophanic humour than Socratic reality: just as in *Clouds* Socrates could be deliberately confused with a tabloid version of the typical Sophist, so here in *Birds* (cf. *Wasps* 475-7; *Pl Prot.* 342bc; *Grg* 515e; *Dem* 54. 33-4 - Fisher 358 & n.40) Aristophanes appears deliberately to have confused Socrates with the laconomanes, the better to smear him. And yet, it was characteristic of Aristophanes' absurd humour to blend fantasy with fact, or rather to take off into fantasy from a basis of fact; so the factual basis of the joke here *may* be that in 414, a time of anti-oligarchic witchhunt, Socrates was associated in the Athenian democratic public's highly suspicious mind not with merely 'social', lifestyle laconism but with one or both of the other sorts, the 'pragmatic-political' or the 'political-theoretical'.

At all events, whatever we think of Aristophanes's humour, Socrates - or 'Socrates' - was indeed consistently portrayed elsewhere as admiring Sparta's politeia, or more exactly its eunomia, which meant not the excellence of the Spartans' laws but their orderly obedience to their nomoi, unwritten in the twofold sense that they were not written down and were deemed to be universally and without exception binding. But was there more to Socrates's attitude to Sparta than vague and general admiration from afar? Let me spin you a yarn, a Platonic muthos, if you like.

Suppose that like his best pupil Plato - or at any rate the 'Plato' of the 7th Letter - Socrates too had looked forward to and welcomed the installation at Athens in 404 of the regime of the 30 Tyrants, led by another of his former pupils, Critias; and suppose further that the 30 - at any rate in their softening-up propaganda in 405/4 (cf. 411) - had said something like this: once the Peloponnesian War's over and we Athenians have unconditionally surrendered, the Spartans will certainly want a change of political regime, an end to the democracy here; but they won't necessarily want to rule us directly. At least, they won't if the regime we introduce in Athens is acceptable to them: so why not capitalise on that, and make the Athenian politeia at any rate seem a lot more like Sparta's (which for 'Critias' ap. Xen HG 2.3.34 was the kalliste politeia)?

As it turned out, the political element of the Spartan peace terms included nothing more specific than a restoration of the 'ancestral constitution', i.e. some sort of oligarchy. For internal Athenian consumption, the Thirty's own cant word was apparently epanorthosis, 'rectification', of the politeia (*Ath Pol* 35.2), i.e. not ex nihilo/tabula rasa construction from ground up, but 'reformist' remodelling (Schuette in Eder 1995: 273). For external, Spartan consumption, however, Critias gave that 'rectification' a decidedly laconizing aspect: 30 = Gerosia including the 2 kings; 5 Ephors = 5 Ephors; 3000 citizens = roughly the size of the Spartan citizen body (Krentz and even more Whitehead). It was, anyway, laconizing enough for Sparta to be willing to grant the 30 a Spartan garrison when the domestic opposition began to make itself seriously felt.

In light of this background, Socrates' conduct under the 30, not least his staying in the city, can be usefully reviewed. A plausible historical reconstruction might run as follows: Socrates' decision in 404 to stay in the city was not just a matter of geography: 'the men of the City' stood for the counter-revolutionary oligarchic Athens as opposed to 'the men in the Peiraeus', who represented what was left of Athenian democracy; so when he became enrolled as one of his former pupil Critias's 3000 citizens, he was knowingly throwing in his lot with a revolutionary - both anti-democratic and laconizing - oligarchy.

Thereafter, we can well imagine that Socrates, like Plato (or the author of the Seventh Letter), had been disgusted by the behaviour of the 30, as of course had others of the 3000, not to mention the wealthy metics like Lysias and Polemarchos, sons of the Kephalos in whose house the *Republic* is set. That wouldn't, however, affect the main point: which would be that Socrates had once valued Spartan eunomia as a potentially practicable model for a renewed, remade virtuous Athens - in other words, that he was a laconizer of both the pragmatic-political and the political-theoretical kinds. In short, Aeschines's rhetorical and of course strictly false claim half a century later, that the Athenians had killed Socrates the Sophist for teaching Critias, might be emended to read 'for teaching Critias - the laconizer'.

Most of that's admittedly highly speculative - but not, I submit, intrinsically implausible. What of his followers? Here we're on more solid ground, though not necessarily all that much more so.

## 1 Xenophon

The standard view of Xenophon, I suppose, is that he was a reflective man, with ambitions to write edifying literature, but not all that much cop as a thinker. The opposed view is championed by Bill Higgins, for whom Xen is not only heroic but subtle. Well, we might be tempted to say, he may seem subtle to *you* ... But let's suspend judgment on that for the moment. Higgins' case, in brief, is that rather than being a laconizer Xenophon was ever the 'simple and restrained Socratic' - though on one reading of the historical Socrates, of course, that might have come down to pretty much the same thing, especially to a disciple like Xenophon (if such he was).

That at any rate is how he presented himself, above all in the Apology (a very different sort of Apology from Plato's, in which he makes Soc respond to the impiety charge in a most unobvious and literalist way) and in the Memorabilia or Memoirs of Socrates. There are several references to Sparta in the Memorabilia: I select just two passages, since they lead in neatly to our discussion of the most obviously relevant of his works, the so-called Constitution of the Spartans or Lac. Pol.

First, a mini-dialogue (3.5) between Socrates and the younger Pericles, on the relative merits of Athens and Sparta. 'I can't understand, Socrates, how it was that our country (Athens) ever deteriorated'. The explanation, Socrates responds, is that the Athenians abandoned 'their ancestors' way of life': suppose they were to rediscover it and follow it as well as the ancestors did, 'they would prove to be just as good men as they were'. Alternatively, Socrates suggests, the Athenians might choose to copy the way of life of the Spartans - which, if they applied themselves with even more assiduity than the Spartans, they might not merely emulate but surpass. Pericles junior is very far from convinced and (however implausibly) trots out what we may guess had become by the time of writing (possibly to be dated to the 370s) some of the standard Laconist tropes: in respect for their elders; in developing their bodies; in obedience to authority; in unanimity or concord; and in co-operation for the common good - in all these ways, Pericles thinks, the Athenians have no chance of equalling let alone surpassing the Spartans. Xenophon's Socrates is not to be gainsaid - 'do not despair of the Athenians as being disorderly'; with expert leadership, especially expert generalship, they can at the least do a whole lot better than they are doing at present.

That turn in the dialogue could be interpreted to mean that Xenophon was not himself a diehard laconist, less so than his 'Pericles' character anyhow; but it could also be read as part of the overall strategy of the Mem., which was to continue the Apology's defence of Soc. by removing any taint of disloyalty to his native city. So I move to my second passage, from a dialogue with Hippias of Elis (4.4), one of the 4 'ancient Sophists'; the leitmotif of this is Xenophon's introductory claim that Socrates 'chose to abide by the law of Athens and die, rather than break it and live'. In the longest utterance by far Socrates bombards Hippias with a whole battery of questions that are not meant to be merely rhetorical: the first two go like this: 'Are you aware ... that Lycurgus the Spartan would have made Sparta no better than any other city if he had not inculcated in it the greatest obedience to the laws? Don't you know that the best leaders are those who are the most efficient in making the people obey the laws, and that a city in which the people are most obedient to the laws has the best life in time of peace and is irresistible in war?' Socrates then turns to praise 'concord' and, using a specifically Spartan term (*gerousia*), rams home the necessity for a compact between the *gerousia* and aristocracy, on the one hand, and the ordinary citizens, on the other, so that the latter do obey the laws. The barrage concludes with a string of praises for the 'law-abiding man'.

The connection with the Pericles dialogue I quoted earlier is palpable - except that here 'Socrates' has made a crucial further move: whereas before he had patriotically held out for at least the possibility of a better Athens, better even than Sparta, indeed, now he presents Sparta, Lycurgan Sparta, as simply better than any other city, without demur from Hippias. There is, however, conspicuously no discussion of the merits of the laws themselves: what is praised is Sparta's Lycurgan-inspired law-abidingness, or *eunomia*. For an account of the laws on their own terms we have to turn to the Lac. Pol. attributed to Xenophon, and it is on our reading of this work above all else that our estimate of Xenophon's laconism must finally rest.

I stress that the Lac Pol is 'attributed to X': some fans of Xen have been keen to dissociate him from it because it seems to them to make such a botched job of its purported aim - of holding up Sparta, the ideal Sparta of Lycurgan virtue, as a model for imitation by other Greek cities. Nevertheless, the standard view holds that it is indeed Xenophon's and that, imperfect though it may be as such, it is fundamentally a pro-Spartan tract: the one dissonant chapter, which points out how and how far the contemporary reality of Sparta marks a declension from the high Lycurgan ideals, can on this view be read as confirming the essentially pro-Spartan, model-building message of the other 14.

Leo Strauss, however, and his follower Higgins have read the Lac. Pol. otherwise, very much so. I merely mention without discussion Strauss's judgement that the pamphlet is 'a higher type of comic speech than ... the classical comedy': that seems to me to be itself merely comic. To be taken more seriously is their claim - a standard sort of Straussian claim - that when read attentively the tract can be seen to mean the opposite of what it has usually been taken to mean. The rogue chapter of explicit criticism is thus for them 'only the most blunt and visible part of an integrated conception of the Spartan system', and the anomalies that they detect throughout suggest to them that the pamphlet as a whole was not designed as a 'sincere praise of the Spartan way of life' but rather as its contrary.

Sometimes in the annals of intellectual history I suppose there have been cases of a work's message being entirely missed or misprised, even for almost 2 and a half millennia, before an unusually acute reader comes along who spies the hidden agenda and then so persuasively demonstrates the accuracy of the new reading that it becomes the standard orthodoxy. But I'm bound to say that I do not believe the Strauss-Higgins reading of the Lac. Pol. to be such a case. Although Xenophon can be quite gently subtle, he's never in my view - and almost everyone else's - THAT devilishly subtle. The Lac Pol should therefore probably still be read on the WYSIWYG basis.

What Xenophon liked, admired and held up to other Greeks for imitation about 'Lycurgan' Sparta were the following five traits above all: a comprehensive state educational system; discipline, especially of a military kind; a refusal or even outright legal prohibition of *khrematismos*, or commercial moneymaking; a simple and austere *diaita* or way of life; and, fifthly and finally, obedience to the laws (now, where have we heard that one before??). If I were to choose the one sentence that captured the work's essence it might be this, from ch. 10: 'Sparta alone makes the development of moral excellence (*kalokagathia*) a public duty' (10.4). Which litany of praise is then confirmed in reverse by the opening of the discordantly negative chapter: 'Were anyone to ask me whether I think the laws of Lycurgus still remain in force unchanged even at the present time, by Zeus, no, I would not have the confidence to make that claim today'.

Just exactly when 'today' was, is one of the many unresolved and unresolvable problems surrounding Xenophon's literary biography. But the circumstantial and other evidence that points to Xenophon's having been a participant observer of Spartan society, from a vantage point at the very top of the Spartan political elite, is compelling - Xenophon's laconism, in other words, was not just of the armchair variety. For much of his adult life his deeds seem to have been compatible with his words - he put his money where his mouth was. Living for many years as an exile from Athens on an estate near Olympia granted him by the Spartans, he repaid his benefactors in full, as good friends properly should, in words (Mem 4.4): not only in the Lac. Pol. and Memorabilia, but also in his encomiastic moral biography of the Spartan king Agesilaos, in several vignettes in his general history of Greece, and in certain, important details of his moral-political novel, the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon presented Spartans and Spartan institutions as models good not merely to think with but to emulate in deed.

It's been suggested that behind Xenophon's picture of the mythical Lycurgus there lay the historical Socrates. Maybe so. But then again - so what? For an altogether more zestful, complex, and influential ancient Athenian engagement with Sparta, we must turn next to the 'Socratic' par excellence.

## VI.2 Plato

Considering Plato's contribution to the Spartan tradition, we shall have 2 questions uppermost in our mind: (i) How deeply is Plato's political project imbued with a laconist dye (or how far was his Sparta a Platonist confection)? (ii) Did P intend his Platonist Sparta or his laconizing Kallipolis/Magnesia as a blueprint to be acted upon?

Ollier, respected begetter of the handy 'mirage spartiate' tag, was unfortunately not at his best on Plato. Rawson gives a characteristically elegant and erudite synopsis, but inevitably no more. Dawson, excellent in some ways, tends to rush to judgement. The essays in Powell and Hodkinson are useful and up-to-date but far from exhaustive. Hence, I think, the continuing indispensability of the massive and bottom-heavy first tome of the magificiently named Swede Eugene Napoleon Tigerstedt. It's hard, for example, to think of anyone other than ENT who could have made such profitable use of a 1794 German dissertation.

Tigerstedt's three main conclusions were these: (i) that Plato was not a laconizer in the sense of being an Athenian partisan of Sparta; (ii) that, although there are many important points of similarity or identity between his ideal state(s) and Sparta (254-62), there are more fundamental differences (262-76), and anyhow it can't be shown that on the important points of similarity or identity he was inspired by Sparta (274); and (iii) that he never let up on his practical endeavour to reshape the present and the future. These conclusions deserve suitably massive respect. I concur unreservedly with the first, as practically everyone does, and shall say no more on that score (though for the record it is perhaps just worth mentioning that a pupil of Aristotle, Dikaiarchos fr. 41, stressed Plato's sympathy for Sparta, and that Plutarch [Lyc. 31.2] stated flatly that he borrowed his ideal state from Lykourgos). I am much less certain about the third, though willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. But I shall hope to show you good reason to suspend judgement at least on Tigerstedt's second conclusion. Apart from simply recalling that in the Crito (52e) Plato makes Socrates praise Sparta - but also 'Crete' - for its eunomia, I'll concentrate on the Republic and the Laws, which may - or may not - be two sides of the same coin.

First, then, Tigerstedt's contention that in more fundamental ways Plato did NOT model his ideal state or states on Sparta. The cornerstone of his negative case is the radical unbridgeable gulf between Plato's ideal state(s) and ALL existing states. Plato had great contempt for all existing constitutions and was thus no oligarch (a relevant point, because Tigerstedt thinks, as I do, that the real Sparta was some form of oligarchy). Then there's the almost as yawningly wide gulf between Spartan lack of, or hostility to, intellectual culture (amouisia and apaideusis) and Plato's belief that the true muse was reason + philosophy or logos mousikei kekramenos. These two gulfs are reinforced, as Tigerstedt sees it, by the slashing attack in Republic book 8 on the timarchic character, competitive, ambitious, mercenary, which is explicitly identified as Spartan (545a), and by the only slightly less slashing attack in the Laws on Sparta's one-sided concentration on *military* virtue at the expense of a balanced approach. Both these attacks, moreover, are on the pristine 'Lykourgan' Sparta, not just some degenerate version of it. Finally, Tigerstedt adds in some important formal differences between the real Sparta and the ideal states of both the Republic (Sp's tripartite social stratification was NOT the prototype for the division of labour in Kallipolis) and (especially) the Laws (private property, written laws, the model being the Athenian patrios politeia rather than Spartan eunomia; use of the lot for appointing some officials; and a ban on active pederasty).

On the other side - to which in all fairness Tigerstedt gives a very decent hearing - one might note for a start the relative un-decadence of timarchic Sparta in the Republic, only one stage down from Callipolis; and the Athenian Stranger's acknowledgement in the Laws (692c) that legislatively Sparta could serve as a paradigm *gegonos*, an historical ideal model of the past. Then, there are the dozen or more formal similarities to Sparta in the ideal states of both the Republic and the Laws, including some of unarguably great importance: the hierarchy of rulers over ruled; equality of lifestyle; freedoms for women; state education of the youth; moral and political order; and constant surveillance of the citizens. Finally, besides, and over and above, all those I would - pace Tigerstedt - want to adduce the Republic's notion or dogma of one person/one class/one function, *prattein ta heautou* or *oikeiopragia*, surely Kallipolis's governing idea, apart from the metaphysics of knowledge revealed only to the Philosopher Rulers.

Of course, the correspondence of Kallipolis' 3 classes or castes with Spartan society is not exact: the rulers of Sparta, the citizen elite, correspond not to the Philosopher Rulers but to the Warrior Guards of the Republic. Yet it was, I believe, the exemption and abstention of all Spartan citizens from productive labour that gave Plato the clue to the practical side of Callipolis's arrangements. Wilamowitz thought the idea was mediated to Plato via Kritias, but that's surely not a necessary hypothesis. How then would I explain or explain away Plato's slashing attacks on Sparta? Partly as a consequence of his irreconcilably different epistemology. But partly also as a smokescreen: precisely because Sparta HAD so deeply imbued Plato's ideals, he had to distance them from the real, contemporary Sparta that he knew enough about to know that it was in so many ways not - or perhaps more precisely no longer - an obvious ideal to imitate.

Finally, and briefly, the question of practicability: few today, or probably then, have thought that the ideal cities of either the *Republic* or the *Laws* were especially practicable, but that's no reason for supposing Plato himself did not believe them to be and intend them to be so taken. (Whether they were intended also as an activating charter for counter-revolution in democracy and status quo maintenance in oligarchy - as Wood & Wood have argued - is a rather different question.) But if we assume that Plato DID intend his ideals to be realized, then it is at any rate worth pondering that one reason why he might have believed they could be realized is the very same reason which, despite all the differences between them, I shall suggest animated the laconism of Rousseau. To that I now turn.

### VI.3 Rousseau

The self-styled 'citizen of Geneva' was by no means hostile to Plato, indeed was powerfully influenced by him, and he had a lot of time for divine authority. But Rousseau was also, as Plato never could be, a friend in principle to democracy - direct, participatory democracy, ancient-style, not newfangled representative democracy. Against Plato's objectively verifiable scientific truths, absolutes denoted by a transcendent natural or divine order, accessible only to the very very privileged and very very few, Rousseau pitted the virtues of mass opinion, the general will, involving democratic knowledge, a democratic regime of truth.

Not that we, like certain over-enthusiastic French Revolutionaries, should rush to co-opt Rousseau as a democrat *pur sang*. His fervent laconism, to be considered shortly, should be enough by itself to save us from making that error. But that he was so co-opted shortly after his death serves to remind us that, as Martin Thom has written, 'no writing on the ancient city has ever been innocent of the burning issues of the day' (Thom 89). Thus it was at any rate, and in spades, with Rousseau's Sparta - a weapon to be wielded in any number of battles, fought as much against those whom one might have thought Rousseau would have considered his friends as against his more obvious foes. But there's Rousseau for you. (Guerci 47)

Rousseau's own education had been very un-Spartan indeed: he was an autodidact, who read voraciously, not least in ancient history, from an early age. It may indeed be precisely because he was not well educated in a formal sense that his attitude to Sparta was, especially in contrast to that of the classically educated Voltaire, conservative, indeed reactionary. The main sources for his knowledge of - or beliefs about - how it actually was in ancient Sparta were, to begin with, the stirring moral biographies of Plutarch, which he read with passion (in Amyot's 16th c. trans) from the age of 7 (Pire, Viroli). His other main ancient Greek source, not only for his Sparta but for his political theory more generally, was Plato, whom he read in Latin as well as French (Silverthorne; new trans of Rep. 1762, Laws 1769) but not Greek (he himself confessed that he'd tried but failed to learn that language). No doubt (as Grell has insisted, 498-9), Rousseau's dominant historiographical method remained always and frankly speculative, or hypothetico-deductive, rather than empirical and inferential. But it's important not to underestimate the extensiveness and accuracy of Rousseau's familiarity with the primary sources - even if only in translation.

Rousseau's favourable view of Sparta was formed in the course of a raging polemic on luxury (Borghero 1969) during the years 1749-53; that was a period when he was 'entre Socrate et Caton', between the Greek sage, the better philosopher, and the Roman republican philosopher in arms, the better citizen. In the prizewinning 1st Discourse (on science and the arts, 1750), we get his celebrated description of Sparta as 'a city as famous for its "heureuse ignorance" as for the "sagesse de ses lois"; in short, 'a republic of demi-gods', a phrase which whether he knew it or not was a calque of Isocrates's 'the majority praise [the Spartans]

moderate terms, but some speak of them as if the demigods ran the state there' (HANDOUT Panath. 41: trs Fisher ap. Powell & Hodkinson 1994: 348). Then the fragments of 1751-3, which include not only a parallel between Sparta and the Roman Republic but also, more remarkably, the beginnings of a history of Sparta (in which, perhaps thankfully, he didn't get very far). Thereafter, in all the major works of his mature political philosophy, from the Second Discourse (on inequality) of 1755 onwards, Sparta and its legislator turn up for honourable, though rarely extended, mention.

Rousseau's ideal state, in brief, was a very small, compact entity along the lines of the Greek polis, a 'perfectly balanced republic where men were free because they ruled themselves', and in which every citizen should feel personally involved. There was no Big Brother State in Rousseau's ideal republic. In all respects except one Sparta matched up to the ideal. The exceptional respect was that Sparta represented men in society, not in the - intrinsically superior - state of nature. But then Sparta was hardly unique in doing that; and in any case the state of nature could not in Rousseau's view be recuperated. More importantly, so far as actually existing past or present human societies were concerned, Rousseau proclaimed himself emphatically an ancient not a modern, and among the ancients he was equally firmly in the camp of 'the partisans of Sparta' (Grell 1995: 785), not of Athens. For the following four main reasons:

1. Rousseau, obsessed with corruption and the necessity for moral regeneration or rebirth, and full of hope for a new innocence (Grell 785), resisted 'bourgeois' economic modernization in the luxury debate and always associated aesthetic cultivation with moral decadence. Sparta, though civilised, was not cultivated - as we saw, Rousseau lauded her 'happy ignorance', which he counterposed to the 'vain learning' of Athens; and he there, in the 1st Discourse, apostrophized Sparta, in the 'tu' mode, praising her for chasing away from her walls (oops) 'the Arts and Artists, the Scientists and the "Savans"' (the ancient philosophes); moreover, by reason of her austere, simple and uniform lifestyle Sparta was considered by R. nearer to the 'true/pure state of nature' (2nd Discourse) (Cranston 1984: 105)
2. Sparta symbolized 'civic morality, patriotism, and devotion to the collectivity' (Grell 783). Sparta realized 'the archaic dream of an integration of the individual and the collective' (Grell 1995: 783), displaying 'satisfying habits, a sturdy group spirit, an inclination to do right by one's fellows' (Miller 198). Here the *moi humain* was crushed with a vengeance in the *moi commun*, esp. through public education and within the framework of the citizen-army (Shklar 1969: 15).
3. Rousseau ideally wished to restrict the private arena in favour of the public (Viroli 1987: 173). Rousseau's Sparta had done likewise. Moreover, although Rousseau suspected a universal tendency for men to be governed by women, unnaturally, in the private realm, at least the women of Sparta had had the decency to govern their men chastely for the glory of the state and the happiness of the public (Dedication to 2nd Discourse, p. 65)!
4. Finally, and not least, Rousseau iconized Sparta because of Lycurgus 'the legislator' (cf. SC Bk II ch. 7). To such semi-divine beings he assigned a 'mission salvatrice' (Grell 500), endowing them with the capacity to restore desperate situations, and to bring about the division and equilibrium of powers, thereby ensuring stability, (political) 'order' (Viroli) and durability (Miller 196 - cf. Machiavelli). This Rousseauian fixation achieved one of its sharpest formulations in his *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* of c. 1771 (trs. pp. 5-9): against mere 'scribblers of laws' he set the 3 ancient 'legislators', ie Moses, Lycurgus, & Numa; and of Lycurgus he wrote, approvingly, that he fixed 'a yoke of iron' and tied the Spartans to it by 'filling up every moment of their lives' - 'this ceaseless constraint was made noble by the purpose it served', viz patriotism, which was 'constantly presented to the Spartans in laws, games, homes, mating, and feasts'. That recalls the earlier *Lettre à d'Alembert* of 1758 [cf. Vernes & Grell 569]: there, citing Plutarch, Rousseau had hailed Sparta's festivals for being conducted 'without pomp, without luxury, without show', and for exhibiting 'the secret charm of patriotism' and 'a certain national spirit', without 'sensuality or perversion'.

It would be wrong not to point out that Rousseau was also aware of Spartan failings - in a footnote to the *Social Contract* he even anticipated my opening remark that the mirage came into being just as the real Sparta hit serious internal crisis: 'A people becomes famous only once its legislation begins to decline. No one knows how many centuries the system of Lycurgus made for the Spartans' happiness before the rest of Greece took any notice of it' (213; Bk II ch. 7). But by and large it was very much the positive that he firmly accentuated.

## VI.4

So let me sum up so far in a thoroughly Plutarchan manner with a brief *sunkrisis* or *comparatio* of Xenophon, Plato and Rousseau. All 3 saw some bad as well as good in Sparta. BUT PI and even X, each for his own reasons (PI more metaphysical-philosophical, X more moral-political), saw far more bad than did R. Which is paradoxical. For whereas PI & X as anti-democrats needed to cling on to the aristocratic-oligarchic and consistently anti-democratic 'good' Sparta, Rousseau as a proto-democrat ('the democratic doctrine of the Sovereignty of the People, wh for the last 200 years has dominated world history' Thomson 105) did not. So why did he? At least 3 possible reasons...

1. Athens was not yet available as a model of democratic (as opposed to high cultural) virtue; and anyhow R didn't think Athens was a true democracy ('Pol Econ' p.134); besides, Rousseau is not as singlehandedly due the credit for the transvaluation of democracy as (e.g.) Miller 1984 has suggested (cf. Dawson 1995)
2. Rousseau was not in any case a radical egalitarian democrat - a note added to the Second Discourse shows that he was aware of, and approved, the ancient Greek oligarchic notion of Geometric or 'proportional' equality (for which he cites Isocrates, interestingly, not Plato or Aristotle). He's been dubbed 'the champion of a middle-class property owning democracy' (Thomson 105), and he advocated a community which knew neither great wealth nor deep poverty (Thomson 104), not one in which wealth was equally distributed - unlike the Chevalier de Jaucourt (author of 'Lacdmone' in the *Encyclopedie*), Rousseau did not buy the myth of equality of Spartan landholding (Grell 1995: 480). Concretely, freedom mattered more to him than equality; freedom of Rousseau's peculiar kind, in the sense of the dissolution of self by participation in the citizen community.
3. But above all Rousseau needed a really virtuous Sparta, not a virtual Sparta, because he insisted, sincerely I think, that he took men as they are (intro of SC) and that his projects were therefore practicable. Let me try to amplify and justify that claim.

There's no doubt that on one level Sparta for Rousseau (as Mably, Turpin) was 'un mythe historico-politique', which he used both as 'a critical model for judging the present situation' (Grell 500) and to demonstrate that morality MUST be the foundation of politics, that good moeurs are an essential condition of the greatness (and therefore prosperity) of states. (Miller 102 cites Laws 903b myths needed for 'enchantment of soul'; mythic cities of class ant enchanted R himself). Rousseau of course didn't invent the myth of Sparta, though he did refashion and refurbish it, thereby indeed restoring to it a power it had lost (Grell 1995: 468; citing Guerci 1979: chs 1-2); and a good deal of the success of his refashioned model Sparta lay no doubt in its 'inaccessible, oneiric, utopian character' (Grell 500).

BUT against Grell and others (such as Shklar) I'd like to protest that Rousseau's Sparta, not least as seen by him, was not ONLY a myth: even Grote and Mill, with all the benefit of 19th-century Quellenkritik behind them, could still view Lycurgus's legislation as the first major event in Grecian history to be reliably attested, and Rousseau himself was keen to the end to stress the realism of his own writing, distancing it sharply from 'the land of chimeras ... the Republic of Plato, Utopia, and the Sevinambes' (*Lettre de la Montagne VI*, cited Miller 234 n.52). Rousseau therefore needed Sparta - or rather his Sparta, as read through Plutarch (and Plato) rather than through Xenophon - as the most perfect instantiation of fundamental tenets of his own political philosophy, such as the general will (instantiated in Lycurgus's legislation) and republican citizenship (Mat-Hasquin 1981: 240). 'Let us judge of what *can* be done', he wrote in the *Social Contract*, 'by what *has been* done ... it is good logic to reason from the actual to the possible' (SC 261-2).

## VI. Conclusion: The Necessity Of Utopianism

Conclusion, very briefly, following up - and questioning - Rousseau's just quoted disavowal, I'd like to trespass once more on territory I ventured on tentatively in the final chapter of my Agesilaos book: the territory of Utopia. Oscar Wilde thought a map of the world without 'Utopia' marked on it to be not worth consulting. What I'd like to suggest is that a map of Utopianism without 'Sparta' would be the same. Sparta, by way of the mirage, was the fons et origo of the western tradition of political utopiography. Athenian theorists of a Socratic tendency found Sparta a suitably different and distant place on which to project their longings for radical political change at home, and many subsequent thinkers, including Rousseau, followed suit.

And in case you ask, so what? I'd answer that all political thought, all serious political thought, anyhow, seriously concerned with altering as well as understanding or explaining the world as it is, is necessarily, in some way or other, more or less utopian. As Dita Shklar once put it in her *After Utopia*, 'Unless we admit that the very notion is senseless, it demands at least an ounce of utopianism even to consider [political] justice...' (272). And utopians - we utopians, I should say - are bound to face backwards in order to go forwards. Since it seems appropriate to end with a quotation from the French, I give you this one from Yves Touchefeu, which I'd like to think has a quite general application: speaking of Rousseau, he writes that 'la référence antique, en effet, a pour fonction fondamentale de tourner la pensée vers l'avenir' (188n.50). It's the only way to go.

Isocrates 12 (Panath.) 41: 'the majority praise [the Spartans] in moderate terms, but some speak of them as if the demigods ran the state there' (trs Fisher ap. Powell & Hodkinson 1994: 348)

Tyrone: 'Where do you get your taste in authors? Voltaire, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen! Atheists, fools, and madmen!' (Eugene O'Neill Long Day's Journey into Night)

Humbert Humbert: 'I, Jean Jacques Humbert ...' (V. Nabokov Lolita)

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