

and statesmen. Perhaps the greatest indication of this loss was the execution of the philosopher Socrates. His penetrating questions demanded reflection on Athenian values and ideals. He considered himself a gadfly whose job it was to prod Athenians to self-awareness by challenging the very foundation of their beliefs. Socrates was condemned to death in 399 B.C.E. on rather nebulous charges. His death was symbolic of the rigid defensiveness of a decaying democracy.

The historical problem at issue here involves the compatibility of democracy and empire. From a moral standpoint, should a state that espouses freedom for all of its citizens control an empire that is maintained by fear and force? Is it even possible for a democratic government to rule an empire effectively? Finally, do the beauty and cultural worth of the monuments of a civilization justify the means of obtaining them? In other words, what price civilization?

The Greek Polis: Two Ways of Life

The City-State of Sparta: Reforms of Lycurgus

PLUTARCH

The city-state, or polis, evolved during the period 1200–500 B.C.E. and offered a unique organization for the Greeks. Each polis was independent in its particular form of government, provided for its own defensive arrangements, and conducted its own foreign policy. Thus one city-state might be a monarchy, another a democracy, and a third an oligarchy. One of the most fascinating city-states was Sparta. In the eighth century B.C.E., it had prospered in a rather open political and economic environment. But in the late seventh century, Sparta, under the leadership of Lycurgus, adopted a rigid military system that produced one of the most efficient and feared armies in antiquity. The Spartans enslaved some of the surrounding population (calling them helots) and used them to work the land while Spartan warriors honed their military skills. The following accounts describe the reforms of Lycurgus and the Spartan way of life. Though they never produced great literature or ideas, the Spartans were admired because they prevented chaos in their society.

Lycurgus commanded that all gold and silver coin should be called in, and that only a sort of money made of iron should be current, a great weight and quantity of which was but very little worth, so that to lay up twenty or thirty

"The City-State of Sparta" is from Plutarch, "Lycurgus," 9–12, in *Readings in Ancient History*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Davis (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1912), pp. 104–105. Translation modernized by the editor.

pounds there was required a pretty large closet, and, to remove it, nothing less than a yoke of oxen. With the distribution of this money, at once a number of services were banished from Sparta; for who would rob such a coin? Who would unjustly detain or take by force, or accept as a bribe, a thing which it was not easy to hide, nor a credit to have, nor indeed of any use to cut in pieces?

In the next place, he declared an outlawry of all needless and superfluous arts; . . . merchants sent no shiploads into Spartan ports; no rhetoric master, no itinerant fortune teller, or gold or silversmith, engraver, or jeweler set foot in a country which had no money; so that luxury, deprived little by little of that which fed and fomented it, wasted to nothing, and died away of itself. For the rich had no advantage here over the poor, as their wealth and abundance had no road to come abroad by, but were shut up at home doing nothing. And in this way they became excellent artists in common necessary things; beds, seats, chairs, and tables, and such life staple utensils in a family, were admirably well made there.

The Ordinances Against Luxury

The third and most masterly stroke of this great lawgiver, by which he struck a yet more effectual blow against luxury and the desire of riches, was the ordinance he made, that they should all eat in common, of the same bread and same meat, and of kinds that were specified, and should not spend their lives at home, laid on costly couches at splendid tables, delivering themselves up into the hands of their tradesmen and cooks, to fatten them in corners, like greedy brutes, and to ruin not their minds only, but their very bodies, which, enfeebled by indulgence and excess, would stand in need of long sleep, warm bathing, freedom from work, and, in a word, of as much care and attendance as if they were continually sick. . . . For the rich, being obliged to go to the same table with the poor, could not make use or enjoy their abundance, nor so much as please their vanity by looking at or displaying it. Nor were they allowed to take food at home first, and then attend the public tables, for every one had an eye upon those who did not eat and drink like the rest, and reproached them with being dainty and effeminate. . . .

Spartan Discipline

PLUTARCH

Nor was it in the power of the father to dispose of the child as he thought fit; he was obliged to carry it before certain officials at a place called Lesche; these were some of the elders of a tribe to which the child belonged; their

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business it was carefully to view the infant, and, if they found it strong and well formed, they gave order for its rearing, and allowed to it one of the nine thousand shares of land above mentioned for its maintenance, but if they found it puny and ill-shaped, ordered it to be taken to . . . a sort of chasm [and exposed to the elements]; as thinking it neither for the good of the child itself, nor for the public interest, that it should be brought up, if it did not, from the very outset, appear . . . healthy and vigorous. There was much care and art, too, used by the nurses; they had no swaddling bands; the children grew up free and unconstrained in limb and form, and not daintily and fanciful about their food; not afraid in the dark, or of being left alone; without any irritability or ill humor or crying. Upon this account, Spartan nurses were often . . . hired by people of other countries. . . .

Lycurgus would not have tutors brought out of the market for his young Spartans; nor was it lawful, indeed, for the father himself to raise the children after his own fancy; but as soon as they were seven years old they were to be enrolled in certain companies and classes, where they lived under the same order and discipline, doing their exercises and playing together. Of these, he who showed the most conduct and courage was made captain; they had their eyes always upon him, obeyed his order and underwent patiently whatsoever punishment he inflicted; so that the whole course of their education was one continued exercise of a ready and perfect obedience. The old men, too, were spectators of their performances, and often raised quarrels and disputes among them, to have a good opportunity of finding out their different characters, and of seeing which would be valiant, which a coward, when they should come to more dangerous encounters. Reading and writing they gave them, just enough to serve their turn; their chief care was to make them good subjects, and to teach them to endure pain and conquer in battle. To this end, as they grew in years, their discipline was proportionably increased; their heads were close clipped, and they were accustomed to go barefoot, and for the most part to play naked.

The Second Stage of the Spartan Education

After they were twelve years old, they were no longer allowed to wear any undergarment; they had one coat to serve them a year; their bodies were hard and dry; with but little acquaintance of baths and unguents; these human indulgences they were allowed only on some few particular days in the year. They lodged together in little bands upon beds made of the reeds which grew by the banks of the river, which they were to break off with their hands without a knife; if it were winter, they mingled some thistle-down with their reeds, which it was thought had the property of giving warmth. . . . [Spartan youths were required to steal wood and herbs], which they did by creeping into the gardens, or conveying themselves cunningly and closely into the eating houses; if they were taken in the act, they were whipped without mercy; for thieving so poorly and awkwardly. They stole, too, all other meat they could lay their hands on, looking out and watching all opportunities, when people

were asleep or more careless than usual. If they were caught, they were not only punished with whipping, but hunger, too, being reduced to their ordinary allowance, which was very slender, and so contrived on purpose, that they might set about to help themselves, and be forced to exercise their energy and ingenuity.

So seriously did the Spartan children go about their stealing, that a youth, having stolen a young fox and hid it under his coat, allowed it to tear out his very guts with its teeth and claws, and died upon the place, rather than let it be seen. What is practiced to this very day in Sparta is enough to gain credit to this story, for I myself have seen several of the youths endure whipping to death. . . .

They taught them, also, to speak in a natural and graceful manner, and to express much in few words. . . . Children in Sparta, by a habit of long silence, came to give just and wise answers; for, indeed, as loose and incontinent livers are seldom fathers of many children, so loose and incontinent talkers seldom originate many sensible words. When some Athenian laughed at their short words, . . . King Agis answered him, "We find them long enough to reach our enemies"; and as their swords were short and sharp, so, it seems to me, were their sayings. They reach the point and arrest the attention of the hearers better than any other kind.

'Fix Your Eyes Every Day on the Greatness of Athens': The Funeral Oration of Pericles (430 B.C.E.)

THUCYDIDES

The Athenian polis was, in most respects, the opposite of Sparta. In 510 B.C.E., under the leadership of Cleisthenes, Athens adopted a democratic system in which all citizens were expected to vote, serve in public office, and offer themselves as jurors. Active participation in political affairs was demanded, and one who shunned such responsibility was called idiotic, or "private person"; the word has come down to us as "idiot," with all its pejorative connotations.

The leader of the Athenian democracy in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. was the great orator Pericles. After the first year of the Peloponnesian War (430 B.C.E.), Pericles spoke to the wives and parents of those who had died in the fighting in an attempt to justify their loss. The "Funeral Oration" that follows was recorded by the Athenian historian Thucydides; it is the quintessential expression of the structure and values of the Athenian democracy.

I have no wish to make a long speech on subjects familiar to you all: so I shall say nothing about the warlike deeds by which we acquired our power or the battles in which we or our fathers gallantly resisted our enemies, Greek or

"The Funeral Oration of Pericles" by Thucydides, *The History of The Peloponnesian War*, 2.35-2.45, trans. Rex Warner (Baltimore, Md., and Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1954), pp. 117-121. Copyright © Rex Warner, 1954, 1972. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books, Ltd.