

Critias in Xenophons's Hellenica*

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Not so terribly long ago, Martin Ostwald made the following comment on Critias: 'Though the fragments show little originality, they reveal the extensive learning and interests of an enlightened belletristic gentleman. But it is difficult to extract systematic thought from them . . .'.¹ The scanty remains extant from his once-extensive *oeuvre*, dictated by the interests of their excerptors, do indeed make it difficult to determine whether or not Critias had any sort of coherent political program. Furthermore, Xenophon portrays Critias in the *Hellenica* as motivated solely by personal and emotional considerations rather than political ones. One of the most noteworthy features of his narrative is the lack of any positive political program of Critias; he is only shown reacting to criticisms voiced by Theramenes instead of initiating any political developments of his own leading to a government based on actual political doctrine. Xenophon's portrayal has been very influential upon most subsequent treatments of Critias, both ancient and modern. Recently, however, Critias' writings have undergone a reassessment, and it is becoming increasingly recognized that a systematic political viewpoint does in fact underpin his extant work.² Furthermore, Julia Shear has argued that, contrary to what she calls the 'traditional view' according to which the Thirty only paid lip service to constitutional reform in order to lull the Athenians into allowing them to maintain power, the evidence shows that they were in fact serious about the political process of creating an oligarchic city.³ In this nexus, I propose first to re-examine the portrayal of Critias in the *Hellenica*, and then to demonstrate that despite Xenophon the extant fragments make it clear that Critias did have a theoretical political ideology, which was not extreme, but espoused the principles of moderate oligarchy, as well as a concern for the social reform of the elite.

Xenophon's portrayal of Critias occurs in his elaborate and vivid narrative of the rule of the Thirty at *Hellenica* 2.3.11-2.4.43. John Dillery and Peter Krentz have convincingly demonstrated that the Thirty serve for Xenophon a paradigmatic function

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¹ Ostwald (1986), 463.

² See, e.g., Centanni (1997); Vanotti (1997); Bultrighini (1999); Notomi (2000); Iannucci (2002); Wilson (2003); Rotstein (2007).

³ Shear (2011), 166-87 (with earlier bibliography).

— as models of typical tyrants.⁴ While I agree with their general conclusions, my focus in this paper is on Xenophon's portrayal (or, more precisely, lack thereof) of Critias' political ideology. If we look closely at the structure of Xenophon's narrative of the Thirty, Critias is entirely absent from his account of their establishment in Athens and his presence is, as we shall see, mainly confined to his quarrel with, and eventual execution of, his erstwhile friend Theramenes, after which he all but disappears from the narrative once again. Even the framework of his narrative, therefore, suggests that Xenophon's portrayal of Critias is tendentious.

In what Christopher Tuplin terms 'a characteristically lacunose treatment',⁵ Xenophon briefly covers, in a few short chapters, the Thirty's election, their mandate to draw up and publish laws (which he claims they promptly proceeded to ignore, appointing the *Boulē* and other magistrates as they saw fit), their condemnation of the sycophants, their request to Lysander for a Spartan garrison so that they could manage the city as they wished (τῆ πόλει χρῆσθαι ὅπως βούλουιτο), and their obsequious cultivation (ἐθεράπευον πάσῃ θεραπείᾳ) of the Spartan *harmost*, which lent them the military backing to begin arresting those who could muster the greatest support against them, instead of sycophants and other undesirables (πονηροί) as before (2.3.11-14).⁶

Xenophon's extremely succinct narrative of the Thirty's entry into power may appear deceptively simple and straightforward, but closer examination reveals this narrative to be slanted, particularly by omission, in order to enhance his depiction of the Thirty as stereotypical tyrants. First of all, he does not deny that their first action was to continue the revision of the laws which had been begun by the democracy in 411/10,⁷ a task which suggests that a specific political program did in fact underlie their regime. Notably, however, although Xenophon does not disguise the fact that the Thirty did pass laws, the only specific law that appears in his narrative is one clearly directed *ad hominem* — against Theramenes (2.3.51), a fact which bolsters his portrayal of the Thirty as tyrants in that they wrote the laws to their own advantage. Furthermore, it is significant that no reference is made to Critias' authorship (along with Charicles) of a law prohibiting the teaching of the art of words, represented in the *Memorabilia* as a direct attack upon his former mentor Socrates (1.2.31),⁸ who is conspicuous by his absence from the *Hellenica*. Second, Xenophon's implication that the Thirty did not embark upon their reign of terror until significant political opposition had begun to manifest itself suggests also that the initial regime was a moderate one (cf. *Ath. Pol.* 35.2). Even Xenophon concedes that the

⁴ See, e.g., Dillery (1995), 138-63; Krentz (1982), 145, and (1995), 122-56; cf. Tuplin (1993), 43-4.

⁵ Tuplin (1993), 43. For lists of Xenophon's omissions, see Tuplin (1993), 43 n. 1, and Krentz (1995), 122.

⁶ I am not concerned here with the discrepancies between Xenophon and our other extant sources (the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*, Diodorus, and Justin); for useful tabulations of the differences between these four main accounts, see Rhodes (1981), 416-22, and Krentz (1982), 131-47.

⁷ Cf. *Ath. Pol.* 35.2 with Rhodes (1981), 434-5 (who believes that their government was to be provisional), and Krentz (1995), 123-4.

⁸ Whitehead (1982/83), 125-6, suggests that the impetus for this measure was not so much personal animus against Socrates, as Xenophon would have us believe, but a desire 'to stifle a questioning intellectual climate and its attendant dangers in a manner essentially Spartan'.

Thirty were elected, implying that they did not in fact usurp power in a tyrannical fashion.⁹ Third, Xenophon does not mention Lysias' claim (12.43-4; cf. 12.76 and *Ath. Pol.* 34.3) that Critias, along with Eratosthenes, was chosen by the *hetaireiai* in the immediate aftermath of the peace as one of the so-called ephors, an office clearly modeled upon the Spartan constitution.¹⁰ Nor does he offer any explanation or justification for the choice of the number thirty, a figure which is surely not arbitrary, but most logically interpreted as a figure motivated by ideological considerations, echoing either the Spartan *gerousia*,¹¹ or the thirty *syngrapheis* of 411, whose sweeping reforms were responsible for the replacement of the democratic government with oligarchic rule in Athens.¹² Finally, Critias does not appear by name in these introductory sections (the only individual members of the Thirty to be mentioned are Aeschines and Aristoteles, who were sent as envoys to Lysander), and Xenophon attributes all these actions to the Thirty as a unit; the section begins (2.3.11) with the statement that the Thirty were elected (οἱ δὲ τριάκοντα ἠρέθουσιν), and no further subject is expressed for the ensuing plural participles and third person plural verbs. It is striking then that, at the very moment where the Thirty enter into power in Athens, Xenophon not only omits any reference to any actual political or ideological bases for their government, but also leaves Critias out of the picture altogether.

It is only after this first phase of the rule of the Thirty, as Xenophon puts it (2.3.15: τῷ πρώτῳ χρόνῳ), that he mentions Critias explicitly in his narrative.¹³ Critias is introduced as a friend of Theramenes who shared his (political) views (ὁμογνώμων τε καὶ φίλος ἦν). But at this point (i.e., when the Thirty have begun to remove the political opponents who could potentially threaten their rule) a quarrel between the two men arises which Xenophon attributes to Critias' headlong desire (προπετής) to kill many

⁹ Cf. Notomi (2000), 239-40.

¹⁰ On this 'crypto-ephorate', see Whitehead (1982/83), 119-20. As he notes, there is no good reason to doubt its existence simply on the grounds that the source is Lysias rather than one of the historians.

¹¹ Whitehead (1982/83), 120-4, and Krentz (1982), 64; the objections of Cartledge (1987, 282) to this view, on the grounds that the government was not constructed literally upon the Spartan political model and that Critias was not 'so slavish in his Lakonism', can easily be countered by the observation that the Thirty do not in fact appear to have imported the Spartan constitution wholesale, but rather to have adapted various (idealized) aspects of it to suit their political and ideological purposes. For comprehensive discussions of 'le mirage spartiate', a term coined by Ollier (1933) to describe the idealized vision of Sparta, developed (if not outright invented) by non-Spartan admirers, see esp. Ollier (1933) and Tigerstedt (1965). Gianfrancesco (1974) argues that these resemblances to a moderate oligarchy on the Spartan model are mere propaganda.

¹² *Ath. Pol.* 29.2 with Androtion *FGrH* 324 F 3 and Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 136; cf. Thuc. 8.67.7, who gives the number of *syngrapheis* as ten. It is generally agreed that the number thirty provided by the *Ath. Pol.* and the Atthidographers is the correct one; see Rhodes (1981), 373-4, and Hornblower (2008), 948-9. I thank one of the anonymous referees for drawing my attention to this correspondence in number.

¹³ Assuming, as most modern scholars do, that the section in 2.3.2 in which Xenophon lists the members of the Thirty by name is interpolated; e.g., Rhodes (1981), 421 and 435; Krentz (1995), 123. Even if it is not, the presence of Critias' name in a list of the Thirty hardly constitutes any prominence in the narrative.

people, because he had been exiled by the *dēmos*.¹⁴ By attributing Critias' removal of potential opposition to a desire for revenge, Xenophon, in the voice of Theramenes, suggests that he has purely personal motives rather than any actual political motivations.¹⁵ In reply, the Xenophontic Critias does not offer any political motivation either, but instead adds another personal explanation, stating (in *oratio obliqua*) that it is impossible for those who wish to gain a personal advantage (πλεονεκτεῖν) not to remove those most capable of preventing them (2.3.16). Here, as elsewhere, Xenophon associates personal advantage (πλεονεξία) with absolute rule.¹⁶ Critias then adds, this time in direct discourse: 'And if, because we are thirty and not one, you think it is necessary to take any less care of this government just as if it were a tyranny (ὡςπερ τυραννίδος),¹⁷ you are simple-minded (εὐήθης)'. The Xenophontic Critias, then, is the first person in the narrative explicitly to equate the government of the Thirty with tyranny (echoing the Thucydidean Pericles and Cleon),¹⁸ thereby naming for the first time the form of government which best fits the arbitrariness of their actions to date. Xenophon's avoidance of the term until he can put it into the mouth of Critias, however, as well as the implication that not all of the Thirty agree with this assessment of their rule, leave the impression that Critias himself is the tyrant *par excellence*, despite his claim that thirty can exercise this type of regime just as well as one.

We are not told of the upshot of this alleged conversation but Xenophon then reports that when there was some public outcry because many people were dying, and unjustly to boot (καὶ ἀδίκως), Theramenes spoke up again, to the effect that the oligarchy (notice that it is not a 'tyranny' when it is not Critias who is speaking) would fall unless the Thirty associated more people in the government (2.3.17). In response, motivated by fear that the citizens would rally around Theramenes, the Xenophontic Critias and the rest of the Thirty select three thousand to participate in the government (2.3.18). Theramenes then objects to this proposal, on the grounds that the number 3,000 was arbitrary (as if *kaloi kagathoi* could not be found outside this number), and would still leave them numerically inferior to those they ruled (2.3.19). The Xenophontic Critias offers no reply, suggesting that Theramenes' objections are true and the number was simply an arbitrary one. Just as we have seen above in the case of the number thirty, however, Critias' limitation of the franchise to the number 3,000 was probably not arbitrary, but reflected genuine political doctrine, either because this was the approximate number of Spartan *homoioi* at the time,¹⁹ or because it represented a figure of some political

¹⁴ The circumstances of Critias' exile are unclear, particularly because his political activities prior to his involvement in the Thirty are obscure; for a synopsis of Critias' political career, see Németh (2006), 25-39.

¹⁵ Cf. Notomi (2000), 240.

¹⁶ Cf. Seager (2001), 394-5, who observes in addition that Xenophon does not appear at ease with the consequences of the Athenian democracy's desire to harness πλεονεξία.

¹⁷ Various emendations have been proposed for this somewhat awkward sentence, although its general import is clear enough.

¹⁸ Thuc. 2.63.2 and 3.37.2; cf. Tuplin (1993), 44 and Dillery (1995), 149. Dillery suggests that Pericles and Cleon use the word 'tyranny' as a simile, whereas 'Critias . . . is not speaking in similes: "tyranny" fits the regime of the Thirty and it is only the number of rulers that Critias believes will obscure this fact'.

¹⁹ So Krentz (1982), 64-8, and Whitehead (1982/3), 127.

significance in Athens (lower than the previously unworkable 5,000, half of the number of jurors and of the number required for a quorum for ostracism, and a tenth of Athens' male citizen population), or some combination of these factors.²⁰ In any case, an unwillingness to share in the franchise and its privileges is typical of oligarchies in general, and is also mirrored by the Thirty's revocation of a number of proxenies,²¹ another political action not mentioned by Xenophon.

At this point, Critias does not respond to Theramenes' accusations of arbitrariness, but seemingly disappears from the narrative temporarily. We should note, however, that although Xenophon attributes the subsequent reactions to Theramenes' criticisms to the Thirty as a group, he does not cite them by name either (the change in subject after Theramenes' speech is expressed as οἱ δέ), and the narrative context, coming as it does immediately after the exchange between Critias and Theramenes, strongly implies that it is Critias who is responsible for their increasingly tyrannical behaviour. The Thirty now proceed to disarm the population (a standard device of tyrannies),²² apart from the Three Thousand (2.3.20), and, believing that it was now possible for them to do as they wished (ἐξὸν ἤδη ποιεῖν αὐτοῖς ὅ τι βούλονται), another indication of tyranny,²³ inaugurate a reign of terror (2.3.21). As Xenophon says, they kill many out of personal enmity (ἐχθρας ἔνεκα) and many for their money (particularly metics), so that they can continue to pay the Spartan garrison. Unlike Lysias (12.6), who explicitly attributes responsibility for the metic purge to Theognis and Peison, Xenophon does not attach a name to the proposal to target the metics, leaving the impression that Critias is solely responsible for it too.²⁴ When Theramenes objects to the proposal that each of the Thirty arrest and kill a metic for his money (2.3.22), the Thirty (once again, not cited by name, but indicated with a οἱ δέ), believing that he was an obstacle to their doing whatever they wished (ποιεῖν ὅ τι βούλονται),²⁵ decide to eliminate him (2.3.23).

In this section, as he does throughout his narrative of the Thirty, Xenophon implies that Critias is their leader, an assumption common in modern scholarship, but not borne

²⁰ Brock (1989), 163, canvasses these possibilities and concludes: 'Whatever the precise blend of reasons for the choice, it was almost entirely ideologically motivated'. Cf. Németh (2005), 182-7, who suggests that the choice of number was motivated by utopian political reasons.

²¹ Krentz (1982), 66-7.

²² Cf. Pl. *Rep.* 569b; Arist. *Pol.* 1311a 12-13 with Rhodes (1981), 210, and Krentz (1995), 128. In *Ath. Pol.* 37.2, the disarmament does not occur until after the death of Theramenes (probably to absolve him of responsibility); cf. Rhodes (1981), 454.

²³ This phrase echoes the wording of 2.3.12; on its tyrannical implications, see Tuplin (1993), 43 n. 5, and Dillery (1995), 149. Whereas in the earlier passage the Thirty were merely planning how they might obtain absolute control of the city, now they have that control, thanks to the arrival of the Spartan garrison (which functions as a bodyguard, another standard device of tyrants) and the disarming of the population. Notably, Xenophon does not hesitate to attribute the unchecked self-indulgence characteristic of tyrannies also to the Athenian democracy; cf. the Arginusae debate at 1.7.12 (ὁ ἄν βούληται). See Pownall (2000), 499-504, for Xenophon's criticism of democracy in the *Hellenica*, particularly in the Arginusae debate.

²⁴ As noted by Danzig (forthcoming).

²⁵ Yet another repetition of this phrase; cf. n. 23 above.

out by the other ancient sources.²⁶ Lysias (12.55) claims that Critias and Charicles were leaders of one faction of the Thirty, while Aristotle (*Pol.* 1305b26; cf. Isoc. 16.42) describes Charicles alone as the leader of a faction which gained power in the Thirty through demagogic methods; Critias does not appear at all in the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians*. While Critias' omission from Aristotle's narrative is usually attributed to efforts to avoid offending the Platonic school,²⁷ it may equally well suggest that Critias' role was not as dominant as is usually assumed due to Xenophon's vivid and powerful narrative,²⁸ and there is no firm evidence that the Thirty even had a leader at all.²⁹

Furthermore, it is striking that Xenophon does not offer in this section any political explanation for the purge of the Thirty, which he presents as motivated solely by personal and financial considerations. Any references to the elimination of political opposition are understated,³⁰ not least because they appear only in other contexts, both earlier, after the arrival of the Spartan garrison (2.4.14), and later, in Critias' denunciation of Theramenes as an enemy of the state whose opposition to the removal of 'demagogues' threatens the continued existence of the regime (2.3.26-27). Matthew Christ has observed that Xenophon's narrative of the victims of the Thirty is tripartite: first sycophants (at 2.3.12), second potential opponents (at 2.3.14), and third personal enemies and wealthy metics (at 2.3.21). As he notes, 'Xenophon's tripartite description of the purge obscures an important fact: in all cases the Thirty were acting against opponents to whom they might ascribe, because of their advocacy of democracy or opposition to the oligarchy, the characteristic vice of active democrats, "sycophancy"'.³¹ By laying particular emphasis upon the metic purge, Xenophon imputes to the Thirty purely financial motives, whereas our other sources suggest, to the contrary, that political considerations were equally paramount, in that the Thirty deliberately chose to target metics who were both wealthy and, more importantly perhaps, opposed to their government.³² By obscuring the essentially political basis of the Thirty's reign of terror, Xenophon implies that they in general, and Critias in particular, portrayed as their leader, were motivated solely by selfish personal and financial reasons.

²⁶ D.S. 14.4.5 and 14.33.2, *Nep. Thr.* 2.7, and schol. to *Ar. Ran.* 541 do not constitute a separate tradition for Critias' leadership of the Thirty as these later accounts have evidently been influenced by Xenophon.

²⁷ See, e.g., Rhodes (1981), 430.

²⁸ Danzig (forthcoming).

²⁹ See the discussion of Pownall (2008b), 333 n. 5.

³⁰ Lysias is far less reticent on the number of prominent democrats murdered by the Thirty: see Rhodes (1981), 446 and Németh (2005), 179 (with references).

³¹ Christ (1992), 344.

³² *Lys.* 12.6, and *Ath. Pol.* 35.4. Christ (1992), 343-6, demonstrates that the inclusion of metics in the measure described by *Ath. Pol.* 43.5 was in response to the Thirty's use of the label 'sycophant' in their purge of political opposition among both the citizen and the metic population of Athens. As Whitehead 1982/83, 128-130 suggests, the metic purge can also be explained in terms of the Spartan customs of the *krypteia* and *xenēlasia*. It should be noted that these various explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Immediately following his description of the metic purge,³³ there ensues a vivid depiction of the showdown between Critias and Theramenes, a lengthy scene which forms the centrepiece of Xenophon's narrative of the Thirty.³⁴ It consists of a pair of speeches in direct discourse given by the two men who represent, for Xenophon, the face of the Thirty.³⁵ Critias speaks first, now re-entering the narrative by name, and denounces Theramenes to the *Boulē* (2.3.24-34). The main thrust of his speech is to brand Theramenes as a traitor, because of his willingness to change his political stripes based on his own personal advantage (it is here we find the notorious description of Theramenes as a *kothornos*), and to present himself as an opponent of democracy and a proponent of oligarchy on the Spartan model. Nevertheless, the Xenophontic Critias does not bolster his strong admiration of the Spartan constitution with any explicit theoretical ideology,³⁶ but uses it only as a justification for his proposed condemnation of Theramenes. Nor does he justify the Thirty's purge with any actual political doctrine, but refers to it in a series of vague but extreme statements which are intended to be shocking. He begins by claiming rather disingenuously that these things occur wherever constitutions are changed (2.3.24).³⁷ He elaborates upon this point slightly later on when he says (2.3.26): 'If we perceive that someone is opposed to the oligarchy, we remove him as best we can'. He is even blunter towards the end of his speech, when he says (2.3.32): 'All changes of constitution, of course, bring death'.

In response, Theramenes makes a speech of his own (2.3.35-49), in which he brands Critias himself a *kothornos*, claiming that he has been neither a consistent democrat nor a good oligarch. He accuses Critias of establishing democracy in Thessaly (2.3.37), a claim which appears suspect at best,³⁸ and reviews the actions of the Thirty (all of which

³³ Krentz (1995), 129, notes that Diodorus (14.5.6) places the metic purge after Theramenes' death; 'Xenophon may have telescoped events of many months into a few paragraphs, so Theramenes can speak for the opposition'.

³⁴ As is often noted, these speeches occupy a disproportionate amount of space in Xenophon's narrative; cf. Krentz (1982), 145, and Dillery (1995), 153. Pace Usher 1968, 128-35, it is unlikely that Xenophon based his narrative on the actual speeches given by Critias and Theramenes; see Gray (1989), 182-3.

³⁵ As noted by Dillery (1995), 144, Xenophon oversimplifies this scene into an account of 'goodies and baddies'; for this wording, see Ostwald (1986), 483. Cf. Notomi (2000), 240.

³⁶ 2.3.34: καλλίστη μὲν γὰρ δῆπου δοκεῖ πολιτεία εἶναι ἢ Λακεδαιμονίων ('for the Spartan constitution seems to me, at least, to be the best').

³⁷ Krentz (1995), 130, echoes the view of many modern scholars when he states: 'This coldhearted attitude, this nonchalant acceptance of political murders, goes far toward explaining why the Thirty failed and why the Athenians felt they made democracy look golden by comparison (Plato *Epist.* 7.324d)'. Cf. Tuplin (1993), 45.

³⁸ Not only is the Xenophontic Theramenes hardly a figure to inspire confidence in the truth of his words (see, e.g., Pownall [2000], 508-12), but his allegation that Critias was involved in democratic activity is suspect in that there is no other evidence for it, and it is particularly useful to his arguments during the showdown scene. In his only other reference to Critias' political activity in Thessaly, Xenophon is much vaguer, claiming that he associated with people during his exile who engaged in lawless behaviour rather than justice (*Mem.* 1.2.24). Philostratus (*VS* 1.16=DK 88 A 1), on the contrary, alleges that Critias established oligarchies there and attacked democracies, adding, in apparent refutation of Xenophon, that he corrupted the Thessalians rather than vice versa. Finally, Critias' known political

he alleges that he himself opposed) to demonstrate that their violence has created greater opposition. He does not credit Critias with any theoretical political ideology either, and the effect of this enumeration of the crimes of the Thirty (who are not named here either, but indicated with οὗτοι and a series of verbs in the third person plural) in this context is to suggest that it is Critias alone who is responsible for them. At the end of his speech, Theramenes explicitly equates the rule of the Thirty (that is, Critias) with tyranny (2.4.48 and 49), in an echo of the conclusion of their first exchange (2.3.16).

Xenophon's subsequent narrative is carefully designed to confirm the accusations made by Theramenes. First of all, the favourable reaction of the *Boulē* to Theramenes' speech (a claim in itself suspect) reinforces the accusations that he makes against Critias.³⁹ Critias then reacts in a stereotypically tyrannical way, refusing to allow the *Boulē* to vote on Theramenes for fear that a vote would lead to his acquittal, and then intimidating them by bringing to their attention the youths he had stationed outside with concealed daggers (2.3.50),⁴⁰ whose role in this scene is clearly meant to be seen as that of the tyrant's bodyguard. The Xenophonic Critias now proclaims that one of the new laws states that no one in the Three Thousand can be killed without a vote of the *Boulē*, but that the Thirty have the authority to execute those not on the list. He then formally erases Theramenes from the list and condemns him to death (2.3.51).⁴¹

Critias' formal condemnation is followed in Xenophon's narrative by the dramatic scene where Theramenes leaps to the altar and denounces first the arbitrary (i.e., tyrannical) behaviour of Critias himself (2.4.52),⁴² and then both the injustice and the impiety (another characteristic of vice attributed to tyrants) of the Thirty,⁴³ who are again not named but referred to as οὗτοι, leaving Critias once more to serve as the face of the group (2.3.53). A second, shorter, confrontation ensues as Critias formally hands over Theramenes to the Eleven and Theramenes continues to protest loudly as he is being

activities show no evidence of any democratic leanings; see esp. Sordi (1999), 93-100, and Németh (2006): 34-9 (38: 'Kritias war nie ein Demokrat').

³⁹ Krentz (1995), 136, is skeptical of the *Boulē*'s loud endorsement of Theramenes' speech as 'a surprising and — to my mind — suspect claim, since at no other point do we hear of an unco-operative Council'.

⁴⁰ These 'youths' (cf. 2.3.23) are probably the ὑπηρέται of 2.3.54-55 and *Ath. Pol.* 35.1. Whitehead (1982/83), 124 suggests that these three hundred attendants were modeled upon the Spartan royal guard, which also numbered three hundred (*Lac.* 4.3).

⁴¹ In the *Ath. Pol.* (37.1), the Thirty, rather than Critias himself, introduce two laws, the first similar to the one recorded by Xenophon, and the second clearly directed *ad hominem* against Theramenes, excluding him from the Three Thousand based on his opposition to the Four Hundred in 411. While the author of the *Ath. Pol.* may well have had other reasons for attributing this tyrannical behaviour to the Thirty, rather than to Critias (cf. Rhodes [1981], 421 and 430), who is conspicuously absent from his narrative, Xenophon does appear to be protecting the *Boulē* from complicity in Theramenes' death (cf. Krentz [1995], 137).

⁴² Theramenes requests lawful treatment from the *Boulē*, namely 'that it not be up to Critias to erase either me or any of you whom he wishes (ὄν ἄν βούληται)'; on the significance of the repetition of this phrase, see n. 23 above.

⁴³ Note the role of impiety in the destruction of the two tyrants to whom Xenophon devotes special attention, Jason of Pherae and Euphron of Sicyon; see Pownall (2004), 99-105. On Xenophon's (perhaps idiosyncratic) view of tyranny, see Lewis (2004).

dragged away to drink the hemlock before a helpless *Boulē*, intimidated by the presence of the Spartan garrison and the dagger-bearing youths. Xenophon gives Theramenes, however, the last word, claiming that he tossed away the dregs of the hemlock as if it were a game of *kottabos*, with the salutation, ‘This to the noble Critias’ (2.3.56). Stephen Usher has argued that Xenophon intends Theramenes’ last words to stand as a final exposure of the hypocrisy of Critias, who should have stayed far away from *kottabos* with its connotations of the decadent and licentious Attic symposium in order to remain true to the idealization of the austere Spartan banquets that we find in his extant writings.⁴⁴ It is also possible, however, that the references to the *kottabos* game in Critias’ literary work do not actually constitute praise;⁴⁵ if so, the real Critias was not necessarily the hypocrite that the Xenophontic Theramenes alleges. I suggest here that Xenophon (through Theramenes), not only labels Critias as a hypocrite, but also implies that his philo-Laonian views have no political or ideological basis, but are confined to approval of Spartan social customs.⁴⁶

This is the impression of Critias’ political views (or more properly, lack thereof) with which we are left, for Xenophon’s attention shifts after this climactic scene to Thrasylbulus and the democratic resistance, and Critias henceforth becomes much less prominent in the narrative. Xenophon now attributes tyrannical behaviour to the Thirty (who are explicitly named here and subsequently instead of being subsumed into a οὐτοῖσι or third person plural verb form) as a group rather than to Critias alone as before.⁴⁷ Thus, he does not make Critias explicitly responsible for the Thirty’s decision to exclude from the city proper (τὸ ἄστυ) those who were not included in the catalogue of the Three Thousand so that they and their friends could have their land (2.4.1). Here too Xenophon presents the Thirty as acting tyrannically, for the removal of the poorer element of the population from the city was a standard device of tyrants,⁴⁸ and as motivated only by the selfish desire for personal gain.⁴⁹ But it is also possible that the Thirty had a specific political purpose behind this decision, that is, the creation of an Athenian version of the Spartan *perioikoi* whose expulsion from the city would not only impede any potential political opposition but would also serve to stimulate agricultural production.⁵⁰ Once again, when the Thirty’s actions appear to be explained by

⁴⁴ Usher (1979).

⁴⁵ Iannucci (2002), 69-77 and 141-57; Pownall (2008a).

⁴⁶ This implication has been influential on modern scholarship on Critias. See, e.g., Ostwald (1986), 464: ‘The fragments of his two works on the constitution of the Lacedaemonians . . . make it abundantly clear that his admiration was evoked first and foremost by Spartan social customs in drinking, moral maxims, clothing and the like; no discussion of their political institutions or organization has been preserved, and the tone of what survives makes it unlikely that there was any’.

⁴⁷ 2.4.1: οἱ δὲ τριάκοντα, ὡς ἔξοι ἤδη αὐτοῖσι τυραννεῖν ἀδεῶς (‘the Thirty, inasmuch it now seemed to them that they could act as tyrants without fear’).

⁴⁸ Arist. *Pol.* 5.1311a 13-15; cf. *Ath. Pol.* 16.3. Forsdyke (2005), 259-67, demonstrates that the *topos* of the mass expulsion of citizens represented the paradigm of tyrannical rule in Xenophon’s narrative of the Thirty.

⁴⁹ As Krentz (1982), 65, suggests, this explanation is probably extrapolated from other cases in which property was confiscated.

⁵⁰ Krentz (1982), 65-6.

ideological motivations, Xenophon puts a purely personal spin on them and removes Critias from the narrative altogether.

Xenophon does, however, make Critias personally responsible for the arrest of the Eleusinian citizens so that the Thirty could seize their city as a place of refuge after their defeat by Thrasybulus and the democratic exiles (2.4.8). Notably, Xenophon once more attributes to Critias a purely selfish motive rather than any kind of political one,⁵¹ whereas Diodorus (14.32.4) suggests that the Thirty either viewed Eleusis as a site of potential opposition, or at least justified their action by charging the Eleusinians with collaborating with Thrasybulus and the democratic exiles. In his final appearance, the Xenophonic Critias addresses the Three Thousand the next day and orders them to condemn the Eleusinians to death; as he puts it, in order to share in the rewards from the change in constitution, they must also share in the dangers (2.4.9). Or, more bluntly put, this argument allows the Thirty to implicate a much larger number in their crimes (cf. Pl. *Apol.* 32c), a sentiment completely in character with the coldheartedly manipulative portrait of Critias which emerged earlier in his speech denouncing Theramenes. Xenophon reinforces the earlier impression that Critias was motivated only by personal aggrandizement rather than political ideology with his subsequent comment (2.4.10) that the condemnation of the Eleusinians was pleasing to those who cared only for personal advantage (τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν, which echoes Critias' earlier use of this verb at 2.3.16).⁵² Critias now disappears altogether from Xenophon's narrative, which focuses on the efforts of Thrasybulus and his troops to regain control of Athens, and the only other explicit reference to him occurs at the report of his death at the Battle of Munychia (2.4.19).

As we have seen, Xenophon carefully portrays Critias as acting tyrannically through the desire for personal gain, and the exiguous nature of his once-extensive body of work makes it difficult to determine if any theoretical or ideological considerations underlie the political actions of the real Critias. Nevertheless, the extant fragments do offer some clues. Critias' own writings confirm Xenophon's portrayal of him as philo-Laconian, for he wrote the first known works on the Spartan constitution in both elegiac verse and prose (DK 88 B 6-9 and 32-37). Although the fragments extant from both works are limited to discussions of social and drinking customs, this emphasis on cultural features most likely reflects the interests of their excerptors (Athenaeus accounts for nearly half of the preserved citations) rather than a lack of concern for Spartan political institutions on the part of Critias himself. Furthermore, while admittedly this is an *argumentum ex silentio*, it seems unlikely that Critias' work on Sparta would have been so highly influential on Athenian dissidents such as his fellow Socratics,⁵³ Xenophon and Plato,⁵⁴ if it had been purely cultural in scope.

⁵¹ Krentz (1995), 142, suggests that we should see another echo of tyranny here, for Isagoras' supporters took refuge in Eleusis after Cleomenes' failed attempt to install him as tyrant (schol. Ar. *Lys.* 273).

⁵² Cf. Cleocritus' accusation that the purge of the Thirty was motivated by personal gain (ἰδίῳν κερδέων ἕνεκα) at 2.4.1, with Dillery (1995), 157-8.

⁵³ I have borrowed the term 'dissident' to refer to anti-democratic intellectuals of the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC from Ober (1998).

Turning now to Critias' own words, it is important to note that while he expresses admiration for the moderation (σωφροσύνη) of Spartan drinking customs (B 6), he applies it more generally to the whole Spartan way of life (ἡ Λακεδαιμονίων διαίτα), in a passage which is curiously reminiscent of his character's definition of this virtue in Plato's *Charmides* (164d-1655b).⁵⁵ By the late fifth century, the moral virtue of *sōphrosynē* carried specific political connotations of oligarchic, anti-democratic tendencies.⁵⁶ Even Xenophon does not deny Critias' aspirations to this virtue in either the *Hellenica*, when he exhorts the *Boulē*, perhaps ironically,⁵⁷ to condemn Theramenes (2.3.34: ἐὰν σωφρονῆτε) or in the *Memorabilia*, where it is claimed that he exercised *sōphrosynē* for as long as (and only so long as) he continued to associate with Socrates (1.2.17-18). And, it should be noted, Xenophon explicitly recognizes in the *Memorabilia* that Socrates' instruction of Critias was political,⁵⁸ and that his instruction consisted, in part, of using himself as the model of a *kalos kagathos* (1.2.18). Critias' conception of moderation, therefore, seems to have been imbued with the stereotypical oligarchic nuances of the conservative Athenian elite.⁵⁹

Critias' authorship of other constitutional works demonstrates that he was very definitely concerned with political institutions as well as cultural practices.⁶⁰ He is credited with the authorship of a *Constitution of the Thessalians* (B 31), and a work on unspecified constitutions (B 38), as well as (possibly) a *Constitution of the Athenians*. Although this last work is unattested,⁶¹ Diels suggested that a number of definitions by

⁵⁴ Critias' *Constitution of the Spartans* appears to have influenced the accounts of Spartan social practices in Xenophon's *Constitution of the Spartans* and Plato's *Laws* (esp. 637b-c); cf. Morison 2009, Commentary to F 4, F 8, and F 9. Unlike Critias (in what is extant, at least), however, Xenophon and Plato were both willing to offer (often cutting) criticism of Sparta; see, e.g., Cartledge (1999), 318-23.

⁵⁵ Cf. Morison (2009), commentary to F 4-7. Critias' definition of *sōphrosynē* in the *Charmides* expresses his oligarchic ideology, as noted by Notomi (2000), 247. On the importance of *sōphrosynē* to Plato's characterization of Critias in this dialogue, see Dušanić (2000), who observes that the Platonic Critias implicitly warns his fellow-citizens that they disregard this aristocratic virtue at their peril. Dorion (2000), 85-86, and (2004), esp. 46, suggests that Plato's portrait of Critias as excessively ready to change his opinion in response to Socrates is not always necessarily flattering; as Notomi (2000), 245-9, observes, however, Plato's point was precisely that Critias' lack of true knowledge of *sōphrosynē* entailed that his attempt at political rule was bound to fail.

⁵⁶ Cf. North (1966), and Rademaker (2005), 216-18. North adds (122) that *sōphrosynē* was considered 'the characteristic virtue of Sparta'; Humble (1999) is skeptical of this further claim, and demonstrates that Xenophon, at least, did not think so.

⁵⁷ Cf. Dillery (1995), 154.

⁵⁸ 1.2.16 and 17; cf. 1.6.15; see Dorion (2000), 88.

⁵⁹ On Critias' typically aristocratic ideology of measure, cf. Wilson (2003), 206 n. 107: 'This language and ideology of measure has as its political correlative a discourse critical of democracy as a thing of excess, violence, and uncontrollability (as also in Plato)'.

⁶⁰ Cf. Wilson (2003), 196: 'His interest in the practical operation of alternatives to democracy is evident from the fact that he wrote a number of *Politeiai*'.

⁶¹ Its existence is not universally accepted; cf. Dillon and Gergel (2003), 258: 'the *Constitution of the Athenians* postulated by Diels would appear to be a mirage'. No less a scholar than Jacoby, however, accepted its existence, although he listed it only by title (*FGrH* 338E).

Pollux derive from this work (DK 88 B 53-73). What is striking is that even the fragments from Pollux reveal an interest in political and legal matters (B 53, 54, 61, 63, 71, and 72) as well as strictly cultural ones,⁶² and a distinctly oligarchic viewpoint.⁶³ Furthermore, it is possible that some of the unattributed prose fragments on Athenian politicians belong to his lost *Constitution of the Athenians* (B 45).⁶⁴ In one fragment (B 45),⁶⁵ he charges both Themistocles, the architect of Athenian naval power (cf. Thuc. 1.93.4), and Cleon, the most demagogic of the so-called New Politicians,⁶⁶ with the misuse of political office for personal financial gain. He also appears to have accused Cimon of demagoguery,⁶⁷ and it is very likely, as has recently been argued, that Critias' criticism of Archilochus (B 44), who apparently offended his aristocratic ethos by highlighting his humble origins, serves as a front for ironic invective either against the demagogue as a type or a specific political figure (perhaps Alcibiades).⁶⁸ Like many of his contemporaries and successors in oligarchic circles, Critias appears to have lambasted some of the most prominent democratic politicians of fifth-century Athens.⁶⁹

In any case, upon further examination, even Critias' comments on the drinking habits of the Spartans are not free from political import. In both his elegiac and prose works on the Spartan constitution (B 6 and 33), Critias expresses approval of the moderation of Spartan drinking customs, especially in comparison with the decadent practices of other cities, voicing criticisms which appear pointedly directed at the typical (decadent) sympotic practice of contemporary Athens.⁷⁰ Recent scholarship on Critias has emphasized both the sympotic context and the political engagement of his elegiac poetry in general, and has suggested that he advocates an elite "counterculture" which would inject the conservative virtues of moderation and good order, associated with both Sparta and the traditional aristocracy in Athens, into the dissipated and enervating contemporary

⁶² As noted by Morison (2009), commentary to F 20-36.

⁶³ E.g., Critias' use of the evaluative term 'the good/useful people' (χρηστοί) (B 63) with its social and political implications; cf. the use of the term to refer to the elite in the "Old Oligarch" [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* (passages listed by Marr and Rhodes [2008], 172).

⁶⁴ Battezzatore (1967), 346; Centanni (1997), 119; Morison (2009), commentary to F 18-36.

⁶⁵ Bultrighini (1999), 92, believes (correctly, in my opinion) that this fragment is central to Critias' political views.

⁶⁶ The term is that of Connor (1971).

⁶⁷ See Pownall (2009), 252-4.

⁶⁸ Rotstein (2007).

⁶⁹ It is unclear what relation Critias' denunciation of Athenian demagogues may have had to the shadowy pamphlet of Stesimbrotus of Thasos *On Themistocles, Thucydides and Pericles* (*FGrH* 107 F 1-11), published in the last quarter of the fifth century; on the differing interpretations of this work, see Carawan (1989) and Tsakmakis (1995), both with earlier bibliography. It is very tempting, however, to view Critias as the inspiration for the famous denunciations by both Plato and Theopompus of the great fifth-century Athenian politicians as demagogues; Pl. *Grg.* 503c and 515b-519b; Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 85-100. On Theopompus' digression on the demagogues, Connor (1968), 19-76, is still valuable.

⁷⁰ Cf. Fisher (1989), 30; Davidson (1997), 61; Dillon and Gergel (2003), 237.

Athenian symposia.⁷¹ I do not believe that it is going too far to suggest that Critias' elegiac work was intended, at least in part, as a call to action to the so-called Quiet Athenians,⁷² who continued to recline at their decadent symposia while corrupt democratic demagogues proceeded to steer the city onto a headlong path to destruction (cf. Thuc. 2.65.10-13).⁷³

In what can be discerned of his political views, therefore, Critias does not come across as the extreme radical of Xenophon's portrayal, but rather as a man of ideological seriousness, on the one hand, searching for a viable alternative to the radical (and to his mind, ineffective) democracy through a modification of the (idealized) political structure of Sparta, and, on the other hand, attempting to reform the contemporary elite along more socially and politically responsible lines.

We are left then with the question of why Xenophon chose to obscure the ideological basis of the government of the Thirty, instead depicting Critias as the bloodthirsty leader of tyrants on the rampage. Partly, of course, he was anxious (as in the *Memorabilia*) to defend Socrates (and thereby himself as a member of the Socratic Circle) from any taint of responsibility for the Thirty's reign of terror through his known association with Critias.⁷⁴ Xenophon dissociates Socrates from Critias in the *Hellenica* by removing him entirely from his narrative of the Thirty, choosing instead to mount a long defense of Socrates from the accusation that he was responsible for the evils wrought by Critias in the *Memorabilia* (1.2.12-48).⁷⁵

Furthermore, Xenophon, as a probable member of the Three Thousand or the cavalry who supported the Thirty, was motivated to scapegoat Critias in order to absolve himself and other members of the compromised elite from any association with the crimes of the Thirty.⁷⁶ Critias was a logical choice, not only because he was conveniently dead (killed at the Battle of Munychia), but also because he was well known in intellectual circles in particular, thanks to his extensive literary oeuvre and his connection with Plato, both as a relative and as an interlocutor in a number of dialogues, in which he plays a benign role

⁷¹ Cf. Bultrighini (1999); Iannucci (2002); Wilson (2003); Pownall (2008b). Wilson (2003), 182, applies the term 'counterculture' to a politically engaged cultural resistance to the Athenian democracy.

⁷² On the withdrawal from politics of the 'quietists', members of the elite disaffected from the democracy, see Connor (1971), 175-98 and Carter (1986).

⁷³ See Pownall 2008b.

⁷⁴ On Xenophon's apologist treatment of Socrates, see, e.g., Dillery (1995), 142, and Notomi (2000), 241-2. On the differences between the efforts of Plato and Xenophon to defend Socrates from responsibility for the evils that Alcibiades and Critias brought upon the city, see Dorion (2000), 85-86, and (2004), 19-22.

⁷⁵ This suggestion that the silence on the relationship between Critias and Socrates in the *Hellenica* dovetails with Xenophon's lengthy defense of Socrates on this point in the *Memorabilia* does not depend on the problematic composition question for either work, for presumably he had the earlier work in mind as he composed the later; on the dating of the *Hellenica*, see the sensible remarks of Dillery (1995), 12-15, and Badian (2004), 43-52; on the *Memorabilia*, see Dorion (2000), ccxI-cclii.

⁷⁶ See Krentz (1982), 145-6; Dillery (1995), 144-6; and Notomi (2000), 241. Note how careful Xenophon's language is at 2.3.12, when he refers to the positive support the Thirty enjoyed at first from the elite, especially in comparison with *Ath. Pol.* 35.3 and D.S. 14.4.2.

as a member of the intellectual elite of Athens. Gabriel Danzig has suggested that the choice of Critias (instead of, say, Charmides) as scapegoat for the Thirty can perhaps be explained by Xenophon's rivalry with Plato; by blackening Critias' name, he simultaneously blackens Plato's.⁷⁷ But it seems more likely that Critias' very seriousness of ideological purpose is precisely why Xenophon chose to present him as the leader and spokesman of the Thirty. Thanks to his intellectual reputation, Critias was not a figure whom the opponents of the Thirty could dismiss lightly. But portraying Critias as a hypocritical opportunist and making him personally responsible for all the excesses of the Thirty allowed Xenophon to discredit the most philosophically weighty member of the group.⁷⁸ By attributing the actions of the Thirty as a whole to the violence and desire for personal aggrandizement of its best-known and most intellectually serious member, Xenophon effectively removes any theoretical or ideological underpinnings from its government, turning it instead into a stereotypical tyranny.

Finally, Xenophon's portrayal of Critias as a stereotypical tyrant allowed him to disconnect the rule of the Thirty, its policies, and most importantly its brutality from any actual moderate oligarchic government (symbolically represented in his narrative of the Thirty by the figure of Theramenes, whose apologetic tradition in Athens was in full force by this time).⁷⁹ Although he does not discuss the *Hellenica* explicitly, Steven Johnstone has identified Xenophon's concern to legitimize the position of the elite within the Athenian polis by reforming their culture, and reaches the following conclusion:

Through practices which denied pleasure and asserted self-control, elites would not only distinguish themselves from the populace, but (so Xenophon hoped) moderate their own desires as to control their competitive urges. Xenophon sought to guarantee the superiority of elites by reforming their culture.⁸⁰

Whatever the date of the *Hellenica*'s composition,⁸¹ Xenophon's political views remained aligned with the oligarchic elite throughout his life,⁸² as indicated by the underlying messages in two of his later works, his concern to increase the prestige of the aristocratic minority in the *Hipparchicus*, and his attempt to spare the wealthy from supporting the democracy out of their own resources in the *Poroi*.⁸³ I suggest that his attempt to distance moderate oligarchy from the brutality of the regime of the Thirty as portrayed in the *Hellenica* is part of the same process of the rehabilitation of aristocratic

⁷⁷ Danzig (forthcoming); cf. Danzig (2005).

⁷⁸ I thank one of the anonymous referees for focusing my thinking along these lines.

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive treatment of the "Theramenes Myth", see Engels (1993).

⁸⁰ Johnstone (1994), 240. On Xenophon's concern to rehabilitate aristocratic ideology, see also Balot (2001), 230-33 and Pownall (2004), 110-12. Roscalla (2004) examines Xenophon's notion of the *kalos kagathos* in political terms, suggesting that his aim is to recuperate for the restored democracy the ideology of oligarchy in a less extreme form.

⁸¹ On this thorny question, see the references cited in n. 75 above.

⁸² Although the *communis opinio* that Xenophon's ideology was oligarchic and elitist has been called into question (see, e.g., Dobski [2009], Kroeker [2009] and Gray [2011]), I have found no compelling evidence to depart from it, particularly in view of Xenophon's own political career (including his exile) and intended audience.

⁸³ For the interpretation of these works as hostile to the democracy and sympathetic to the "best", see Gauthier (1984/2010), esp. 135.

ideology. Paradoxically, in their concern to reform the Athenian elite along more socially and politically responsible lines, both Xenophon and Critias were in fact cut out of the same ideological cloth.

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