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European Studies I

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October 8, 2007

*"For people do not obey, unless rulers know how to command..*

*a true leader himself creates the obedience of his own followers..*

*The Lacedaemonians inspired men not with a mere willingness, but*

*with an absolute desire, to be there subjects."*

From Plutarch, concerning Lycurgus in *The Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans Victory of Sparta and Defeat of Athens: The Lawgivers, Lycurgus and Solon*

The lives of Lycurgus and Solon, as told by Plutarch, parallel each other in that both became lawgivers of a polis and that their laws often concerned the same aspect of life, however, their similarities are few in number and their impact on their respective commonwealths extremely different. Solon is alive to see the ending of his government although his laws were still intact for a hundred years, while Lycurgus's influence on Sparta lasted for 500 years and not only survived but prospered. The one who best defends his ideals is Lycurgus, who sacrifices himself for his people, while Solon "reproached the Athenians" for "...'all the fault was ours' ".

The first difference that Plutarch mentions is that Lycurgus is nobility and Solon is a member of the middle-class. Initially, it seems questionable to follow the ideas

of someone from the upper-class who could not possibly make fair laws concerning the classes below him and it would seem more correct to follow a middle-class citizen who lives among and knows the ordinary people; this is disproved almost immediately by Plutarch by giving us examples of Lycurgus' and Solon's characters. The first story we are told concerning the lawgiver of Sparta is of his sister-in-law's proposal to kill her unborn child so Lycurgus would be king. Selfless as he is, Lycurgus steps down from the throne and acts on the child king's behalf until he is of age to rule. During the first pages regarding Solon's life, Plutarch tells a tale of how the Athenian lawgiver is fooled into believing his son is dead, succumbing to tears and lamentations and later the author articulates another story about Solon using trickery to win a battle against the Megarians. The Spartan acts brave and selfless while the Athenian behaves in a weak and conniving fashion. Even though it is usually unwise to judge a story by the first few pages, these men hold true to Plutarch's initial descriptions, connotating that Lycurgus is the better man for his people.

The main similarity shared by the two lawgivers is that they both go abroad and observe foreign government, and laws with the intent to return to their homes and create a better system of governing. The events of Solon's trip abroad indicate that he was helping other kingdoms and not observing the positive laws of the places he visited; this

is understandable since Plutarch makes it quite clear that he favors Lycurgus over Solon and that the author is trying to influence readers which he does successfully, if not intentionally. Lycurgus' experience abroad are much more to the point of what he learned which makes sense considering he left not only to escape threats from his life but "...with design, as is said, to examine the difference betwixt the manners and rules of life...". The lawgivers both encountered Thales on their travels but had contrasting experiences with the philosopher. Solon is tricked by Thales, who explains to the lawgiver that "...it is weakness, that brings men...into these endless pains and terrors". Solon takes from Thales the concepts of discussion and argument which will be relevant later when he is made Archon. Lycurgus' experience with Thales is more philosophical than Solon's was; this seems true because Thales does not use tricks with the Spartan but rather brings him to a wise lawgiver who sings songs. This event gave Lycurgus the ideas of music and poetry as part of the arche because the songs he heard "were exhortations to obedience and concord, and the very measure and cadence of verse" displayed "impressions of order and tranquility".

Returning to their respective commonwealths, the lawgivers began their reign of influence over the government. The actual laws of these men are not so similar that they are hard to distinguish; on the contrary, the idea behind the law is the same, the unity and prosperity of the

people now and in the future. Their laws cover incredibly personal areas of the home life while concentrating on the effect it will have on society; although Lycurgus make laws concerning the familial life, his laws seem much less superfluous than Solon's, the reason being that Lycurgus makes all citizens equal and Solon makes a social hierarchy. Beginning with the most important laws which are the basis of government structure in modern democracy, Lycurgus created a senate and Solon formed councils. Take note that the fundamental difference between Lycurgus' and Solon's governments, previously stated, is that in Sparta all men are equal and in Athens there is a financial and social pyramid. Solon has a good rationale to create a hierarchy because the wealthy hold office but the hired hands can be jurors, thus creating a system of checks and balances. On the other hand, Lycurgus' destruction of social classes and financial differences allows justice to prevail, therefore making Sparta more appealing than Athens; he redistributes the land equally and introduces the invaluable iron currency. This in turn allows all citizens of Sparta to be able to produce a suitable amount of grain, oil and wine, which then obliterates the luxury of over eating and the laziness of not doing work. In Athens, Solon divides the people into their classes in accordance with animals they owned and he also put into affect a currency that was worth little. When Lycurgus made citizens equal and made money worth little to outsiders, he got rid of traders and

foreigners who would bring crime and negative ideas to Sparta but, since Solon divided his people, there was still conflict and crime so he had to make laws concerning punishment, adultery, rape, and theft.

Returning to the laws affecting the personal lives of the citizens, Solon composed superfluous rules about women's clothing, wills, planting trees and figs which were instituted to prevent conflict between people. Lycurgus did not have to make such laws because the people were equal and shared practically everything. It seems that Solon's laws make people individuals and Lycurgus' make people part of the whole; this leads to the most intricately designed laws, those concerning marriage, sex and children. In Athens, marriage is a product of love, as are children. In Sparta marriage is necessary to supply Sparta with healthy children. Even though husbands and wives might not see each other in day light until they have a child and that their child is not considered theirs but belongs to Sparta. Lycurgus' laws are more appealing than Solon's because they take into consideration the larger picture of posterity; every aspect of Spartan life is to ensure the well being of Sparta. He may try to put a safeguard on Athens as his Spartan alter ego does but he is not as successful as Lycurgus because Solon does make equality his first priority. After gathering information from Plutarch is feels as if Solon is scared to change Athens as drastically as Lycurgus changed Sparta. According to Plutarch, Phantias says

" [Solon] put a trick on both parties, and privately promised the poor a division of the lands, and the rich, security for their debts." One would never see such a trick played by Lycurgus who was so brave that he "showed his disfigured face and eye beat out to his countrymen" to teach them shame for causing this violent act. In Athens a father had to support and teach his child if he wanted to be supported in old age but in Sparta, all boys were trained in the same manner, as were the girls; all the men trained and advised the boys to be warriors and all the women trained the girls to be strong mothers of future Spartan warriors.

The epic of Gilgamesh acts as a prime example of why Sparta survived and the answer to this question is evident in Enkidu and Gilgamesh's relationship. After their fight when they first meet, it is said that Gilgamesh "looked into his [Enkidu's] eyes and saw himself in the other, just as Enkidu saw himself in Gilgamesh." This gives explanation to why the Athenian government did not remain stable under Solon's laws and that is because unlike Gilgamesh and Enkidu, who treated each other as brothers and equals, the Athenians were divided by their status therefore treated people differently. It also explains the success of Sparta because it implies everything that Lycurgus' laws are about: All Spartans are brothers and they work together, eat together, fight and die together. Through the law, Lycurgus made Sparta an individual entity with enormous power and a communal family, where one person represents the whole. This

idea is conveyed more thoroughly in Gilgamesh when Enkidu says "it is the journey that will take away our life". The "our" he is referring to is Gilgamesh and himself, who are now brothers and a single being at the same time. This metonymic phrase produces more pain and sadness to be felt by the reader (or listener before the story was written) when Enkidu dies. The same kind of metonymy can be observed in Lycurgus' laws: when Sparta acts so do all the Spartans.

What needs to be said now, for clarification's sake, is that within this essay when saying that Solon's laws failed or the Athenian government under Solon came to an end, it is only meant to be in comparison to Lycurgus' laws and the Spartan government under him. This is because Lycurgus' laws and government remained stable for 500 years according to Plutarch and Solon's only lasted 100 years. Although admiration should be shown to Solon for all his attempts at forming a just state, it is through Lycurgus' laws that we get complete equality and the first sense of nationalist pride. It is wise to follow Lycurgus because he was respected and obeyed by his people which allowed him to not make too many laws since, as King Charilaus said, "'Men of few words require but few laws.'" It would be honorable to follow Lycurgus into battle or in the senate where he worked for all Spartans and, as Plutarch says, "had spent his life in obtaining for them".

