

The Economist



Xenophon

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PUBLISHER NOTES:

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Translation by H. G. Dakyns

Xenophon the Athenian was born 431 B.C. He was a pupil of Socrates. He marched with the Spartans, and was exiled from Athens. Sparta gave him land and property in Scillus, where he lived for many years before having to move once more, to settle in Corinth. He died in 354 B.C.

The Economist records Socrates and Critobulus in a talk about profitable estate management, and a lengthy recollection by Socrates of Ischomachus' discussion of the same topic.

PREPARER'S NOTE

This was typed from Dakyns' series, "The Works of Xenophon," a four-volume set. The complete list of Xenophon's works (though there is doubt about some of these) is:

Work	Number of books
The Anabasis	7
The Hellenica	7
The Cyropaedia	8
The Memorabilia	4
The Symposium	1
The Economist	1
On Horsemanship	1
The Sportsman	1
The Cavalry General	1
The Apology	1
On Revenues	1
The Hiero	1
The Agesilaus	1
The Polity of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians	2

Text in brackets "{}" is my transliteration of Greek text into English using an Oxford English Dictionary alphabet table. The diacritical marks have been lost.

THE ECONOMIST (1)

A Treatise on the Science of the Household in the form of a Dialogue

INTERLOCUTORS

Socrates and Critobulus

At Chapter VII. a prior discussion held between Socrates and Ischomachus is introduced: On the life of a "beautiful and good" man.

In these chapters (vii.-xxi.) Socrates is represented by the author as repeating for the benefit of Critobulus and the rest certain conversations which he had once held with the beautiful and good Ischomachus on the essentials of economy. It was a tete-a-tete discussion, and in the original Greek the remarks of the two speakers are denoted by such phrases as {ephe o 'Iskhomakhos—ephen egio}—"said (he) Ischomachus," "said I." (Socrates) To save the repetition of expressions tedious in English, I have, whenever it seemed help to do so, ventured to throw parts of the reported conversations into dramatic form, inserting "Isch." "Soc." in the customary way to designate the speakers; but these, it must be borne in mind, are merely "asides" to the reader, who will not forget that Socrates is the narrator throughout—speaking of himself as "I," and of Ischomachus as "he," or by his name.—Translator's note, addressed to the English reader.

I

I once heard him (2) discuss the topic of economy (3) after the following manner. Addressing Critobulus, (4) he said: Tell me, Critobulus, is "economy," like the words "medicine," "carpentry," "building," "smithying," "metal-working," and so forth, the name of a particular kind of knowledge or science?

(1) By "economist" we now generally understand "political economist,"

but the use of the word as referring to domestic economy, the subject matter of the treatise, would seem to be legitimate.

(2) "The master."

(3) Lit. "the management of a household and estate." See Plat. "Rep."

407 B; Aristot. "Eth. N." v. 6; "Pol." i. 3.

(4) See "Mem." I. iii. 8; "Symp." p. 292.

Crit. Yes, I think so.

Soc. And as, in the case of the arts just named, we can state the proper work or function of each, can we (similarly) state the proper work and function of economy?

Crit. It must, I should think, be the business of the good economist (5) at any rate to manage his own house or estate well.

(5) Or, "manager of a house or estate."

Soc. And supposing another man's house to be entrusted to him, he would be able, if he chose, to manage it as skilfully as his own, would he not? since a man who is skilled in carpentry can work as well for another as for himself: and this ought to be equally true of the good economist?

Crit. Yes, I think so, Socrates.

Soc. Then there is no reason why a proficient in this art, even if he does not happen to possess wealth of his own, should not be paid a salary for managing a house, just as he might be paid for building one?

Crit. None at all: and a large salary he would be entitled to earn if, after paying the necessary expenses of the estate entrusted to him, he can create a surplus and improve the property.

Soc. Well! and this word "house," what are we to understand by it? the domicile merely? or are we to include all a man's possessions outside the actual dwelling-place? (6)

(6) Lit. "is it synonymous with dwelling-place, or is all that a man

possesses outside his dwelling-place part of his house or estate?"

Crit. Certainly, in my opinion at any rate, everything which a man has got, even though some portion of it may lie in another part of the world from that in which he lives, (7) forms part of his estate.

(7) Lit. "not even in the same state or city."

Soc. "Has got"? but he may have got enemies?

Crit. Yes, I am afraid some people have got a great many.

Soc. Then shall we say that a man's enemies form part of his possessions?

Crit. A comic notion indeed! that some one should be good enough to add to my stock of enemies, and that in addition he should be paid for his kind services.

Soc. Because, you know, we agreed that a man's estate was identical with his possessions?

Crit. Yes, certainly! the good part of his possessions; but the evil portion! no, I thank you, that I do not call part of a man's possessions.

Soc. As I understand, you would limit the term to what we may call a man's useful or advantageous possessions?

Crit. Precisely; if he has things that injure him, I should regard these rather as a loss than as wealth.

Soc. It follows apparently that if a man purchases a horse and does not know how to handle him, but each time he mounts he is thrown and sustains injuries, the horse is not part of his wealth?

Crit. Not, if wealth implies weal, certainly.

Soc. And by the same token land itself is no wealth to a man who so works it that his tillage only brings him loss?

Crit. True; mother earth herself is not a source of wealth to us if, instead of helping us to live, she helps us to starve.

Soc. And by a parity of reasoning, sheep and cattle may fail of being wealth if, through want of knowledge how to treat them, their owner loses by them; to him at any rate the sheep and the cattle are not wealth?

Crit. That is the conclusion I draw.

Soc. It appears, you hold to the position that wealth consists of things which benefit, while things which injure are not wealth?

Crit. Just so.

Soc. The same things, in fact, are wealth or not wealth, according as a man knows or does not know the use to make of them? To take an instance, a flute may be wealth to him who is sufficiently skilled to play upon it, but the same instrument is no better than the stones we tread under our feet to him who is not so skilled... unless indeed he chose to sell it?

Crit. That is precisely the conclusion we should come to. (8) To persons ignorant of their use (9) flutes are wealth as saleable, but as

possessions not for sale they are no wealth at all; and see, Socrates, how smoothly and consistently the argument proceeds, (10) since it is admitted that things which benefit are wealth. The flutes in question unsold are not wealth, being good for nothing: to become wealth they must be sold.

(8) Reading {tout auto}, or if {tout au} with Sauppe, transl. "Yes, that is another position we may fairly subscribe to."

(9) i.e. "without knowledge of how to use them."

(10) Or, "our discussion marches on all-fours, as it were."

Yes! (rejoined Socrates), presuming the owner knows how to sell them; since, supposing again he were to sell them for something which he does not know how to use, (11) the mere selling will not transform them into wealth, according to your argument.

(11) Reading {pros touto o}, or if {pros touton, os}, transl. "to a man who did not know how to use them."

Crit. You seem to say, Socrates, that money itself in the pockets of a man who does not know how to use it is not wealth?

Soc. And I understand you to concur in the truth of our proposition so far: wealth is that, and that only, whereby a man may be benefited. Obviously, if a man used his money to buy himself a mistress, to the grave detriment of his body and soul and whole estate, how is that particular money going to benefit him now? What good will he extract from it?

Crit. None whatever, unless we are prepared to admit that hyoscyamus, (12) as they call it, is wealth, a poison the property of which is to drive those who take it mad.

(12) "A dose of henbane, 'hogs'-bean,' so called." Diosc. 4. 69; 6. 15; Plut. "Demetr." xx. (Clough, v. 114).

Soc. Let money then, Critobulus, if a man does not know how to use it aright—let money, I say, be banished to the remote corners of the earth rather than be reckoned as wealth. (13) But now, what shall we say of friends? If a man knows how to use his friends so as to be benefited by them, what of these?

(13) Or, "then let it be relegated... and there let it lie in the category of non-wealth."

Crit. They are wealth indisputably, and in a deeper sense than cattle are, if, as may be supposed, they are likely to prove of more benefit to a man than wealth of cattle.

Soc. It would seem, according to your argument, that the foes of a man's own household after all may be wealth to him, if he knows how to turn them to good account? (14)

(14) Vide supra.

Crit. That is my opinion, at any rate.

Soc. It would seem, it is the part of a good economist (15) to know how to deal with his own or his employer's foes so as to get profit out of them?

(15) "A good administrator of an estate."

Crit. Most emphatically so.

Soc. In fact, you need but use your eyes to see how many private persons, not to say crowned heads, do owe the increase of their estates to war.

Crit. Well, Socrates, I do not think, so far, the argument could be improved on; (16) but now comes a puzzle. What of people who have got the knowledge and the capital (17) required to enhance their fortunes, if only they will put their shoulders to the wheel; and yet, if we are to believe our senses, that is just the one thing they will not do, and so their knowledge and accomplishments are of no profit to them? Surely in their case also there is but one conclusion to be drawn, which is, that neither their knowledge nor their possessions are wealth.

(16) Or, "Thanks, Socrates. Thus far the statement of the case would

seem to be conclusive—but what are we to make of this? Some people..."

(17) Lit. "the right kinds of knowledge and the right starting-points."

Soc. Ah! I see, Critobulus, you wish to direct the discussion to the topic of slaves?

Crit. No indeed, I have no such intention—quite the reverse. I want to talk about persons of high degree, of right noble family (18) some of them, to do them justice. These are the people I have in my mind's eye, gifted with, it may be, martial or, it may be, civil accomplishments, which, however, they refuse to exercise, for the very reason, as I take it, that they have no masters over them.

(18) "Eupatrids."

Soc. No masters over them! but how can that be if, in spite of their prayers for prosperity and their desire to do what will bring them good, they are still so sorely hindered in the exercise of their wills by those that lord it over them?

Crit. And who, pray, are these lords that rule them and yet remain unseen?

Soc. Nay, not unseen; on the contrary, they are very visible. And what is more, they are the basest of the base, as you can hardly fail to note, if at least you believe idleness and effeminacy and reckless negligence to be baseness. Then, too, there are other treacherous beldames giving themselves out to be innocent pleasures, to wit, dicings and profitless associations among men. (19) These in the fulness of time appear in all their nakedness even to them that are deceived, showing themselves