

Summary of the *Oikonomikos* by Xenophon

Introduction

Not many people are aware that Socrates was interested in the government of the house. On this subject two dialogues of Socrates are still extant. Xenophon has connected them in the *Oikonomikos*. I will summarize these two dialogues that stand in a close relationship with each other. The second dialogue goes deeper and longer into the subjects that Xenophon introduces in the first one. At first sight, however, the *Oikonomikos* looks like a playwright for three actors which consists of four acts and an epilogue.

The actors are Socrates, Critoboulos, a rich young man, Ischomachus, a wealthy, experienced and much respected citizen of Athens and his young wife. In the first act (I-VI) Socrates questions Critoboulos, about his notions on the government of the house. According to Critoboulos the job of the governor of the house is to become rich and government of the house is the art of becoming richⁱ. Such a simplistic view is grist to Socrates' mill. Would morality not come into play in the government of the house? In this part Socrates is the principal speaker and Critoboulos figures as a stooge. At the end of the first act Socrates summarizes the points on economics about which Critoboulos and he agree:

1. *Economics is the name of some kind of knowledge.*
2. *This knowledge is the one by which people are able to make their houses prosper*
3. *A house (oikos) is the total property [that is: including the slaves DN].*
4. *Property is what is advantageous for everyone for the sustenance.*
5. *Advantageous are all things which a person knows how to use.*ⁱⁱ (--)
6. *For a morally good and physically fit man agriculture is the best work and the best knowledge* (IV 4-8))

After this, an older gentleman, Ischomachus, enters the scene. He is supposed to offer a more sophisticated view on the subject, because in Athens he is well-known for his morally good behavior. Critoboulos changes into a mere listener.

[Part I Act 1: a first exploration of the subject.]

I Socrates enters the stage, addresses Critoboulos and asks him what the job of house governing is. This young and rich Athenian answers, that it is *the job of the good governor of the house to good govern housely his own house* (I- 2) Socrates attacks only the presenceⁱⁱⁱ of *his own* in Critoboulos' definition, because according to him the government of a house may be done by somebody else than the governor. Then he forces Critoboulos to be more precise in his use of the terms *house*, *possessions* and *resources*. Socrates says: *You seem to be calling possessions whatever is advantageous to somebody.* (I-7) Critoboulos agrees, but in his answer switches terms. He talks about resources instead of possessions: *Sure, and I believe that that the harming things are a punishment rather than resources.*(I-7) [From now on is dealt with the theme of resources DN] Socrates indicates that for something to be useful to a governor, he has to know how to use it. Critoboulos now states that somebody who does not know how to play a flute but sells it, still has resources. Socrates: Yes, provided a person knows how to sell. But then again he has to know how to make use of what he gets back for the flute. Critoboulos says: *You appear to be saying that also silver money is not a resource, if somebody does not know how to use it.* (I-12) Socrates: *And you seem to agree with me here that resources consist of the things, that somebody is capable of getting advantages from. Anyhow, if anybody would use silver money to buy a bed partner and because of her becomes worse in body, worse in soul and worse in house, how would silver money be advantageous to him?*(I-13) Socrates asks if friends that one knows to use to one's advantage are called resources. Critoboulos: *Resources!!*(II-14) They agree that a good governor of the house even knows how to use enemies in

such a way that he gets advantage from them. Socrates: *For you see, how many houses of private persons have prospered by a war, how many of tyrants.* (I-15)

Critoboulos then asks how it is possible that *sometimes we observe people who have the knowledge and the means with which they are able to make their houses prosper, provided they work; yet we perceive that they do not want to do so, and we see that their knowledge brings them no advantage?* (I-16)

Socrates answer first that such governors of a house are led by idleness, weakness of mind and carelessness. Some of them have made themselves to be led by other wrong masters: gambling and useless company, pleasures disguised as pains and vices. Critoboulos says that there are still others, who do work and do try to make an income but *nevertheless they dissipate their houses and are tied up by being without means.* (I-21). Socrates: *They are slaves also, of very harsh masters,* (I-22) like gluttony, fornication, drunkenness or cruelty towards their slaves. We must constantly fight against them, even more than against armed men, who try to enslave us.

II Critoboulos pretends that he is pretty well in control of such pleasures and vices and now wants to learn from Socrates *what to do to make his house grow* (--) *or do you think, Socrates that we are rich enough and don't need additional resources?* (II-1) Socrates answers that he considers himself to be enough wealthy: *my property is enough to supply me with the things that are sufficient for me*^{iv}. (II-5)

But he claims that Critoboulos, although he is 100 times as rich, lives in precarious circumstances. Socrates' few possessions including a house, are enough to provide him with the things that are sufficient for him. Critoboulos however needs much more because of his rank and reputation, for these come with heavy obligations. He has to give feasts and pay great contributions to the state and extra ones in war time. He observes moreover, *that Critoboulos thinks he [Critoboulos DN] is wealthy and therefore does not take care of the production of resources and also busy with love affairs with boys, as if you can afford them* (II-7) Socrates still adds that he has friends who will help him in times of distress, while Critoboulos has friends who only want to benefit from him. He therefore hopes that nothing bad will happen to Critoboulos and he will not become poor.

Critoboulos still wants to learn from Socrates what he should do to become more rich. The philosopher refuses to teach him this for two reasons. First he does not have any personal experience in wealth making. Moreover he states that becoming rich is not difficult. Socrates has found out in Athens that becoming rich happens in all occupations in the same way. It is a matter of taking one's job seriously. *I saw that some who do these things without plan are the ones who are punished, while others who do them successfully, that is more quick, easy and profitable, are the ones that take care in line with their goal.* (II-18) He suggests Critoboulos to go and get the information he wants about how to become rich from the wealthy artisans in Athens.

III Socrates shows *on the jobs of those that are skilled in the government of the house this:* (III-1): About the dwelling: *that some build useless ones against great costs and others at much less costs with all things that one needs* (III-1),

About the implements: that some never can find them but others have arranged them in such a way that they are always at hand whenever needed. (III-3).

About the slaves: that in some houses they are chained but always run away but in other house they stay and work willingly, without being enchained (III-4)

About farmers who cultivate farms of about the same area : *that some say to be ruined by farming and are without means, while others by farming have so much of everything that they can give some away* (Gr.: ἀφθονῶς) and live beautifully (Gr.: καλῶς). (III-5).

About wives: *And I can show you men who deal with their wives so as to have fellow workers in making prosper their houses together, and other so that they [the wives DN] cause the most damage.* (III-10)

Critoboulos: *And should the husband or the wife more be blamed for this?*

Socrates.: (--) *If she does the good things badly, although she was taught what is right by her husband, it would be probably just to blame her. But if he does not teach her what is the good and beautiful [the morally good DN] and then discovers that she has no knowledge of it, wouldn't it be just to blame the husband?* (--). (III-11) *Is there anyone to whom you entrust a greater number of the important matters than to your wife?*

Cr.: *No one.*

S.: Is there anyone whom you consult less than your wife?

Cr.: No one, or at least not very many.

S.: And you married her when she was a very young child who had seen and heard virtually nothing of the world?

Cr.: Yes

S.: Wouldn't it be much more remarkable if she had any knowledge at all about what she ought to say or do than if she made mistakes?

Cr.: What about those who you say have good wives, did they educate them themselves?

*S.: There is nothing like investigation. I will introduce Aspasia^v to you; she, being much more knowledgeable than I am, will show you that. I think that a wife who is a good partner in the house carries just as much weight as her husband in attaining the good. **Goods** come into the house and **become much** through the acts of the husband, but is largely dispensed through the housekeeping of the wife. If these activities are performed well, houses prosper, but if they are done badly, houses decay. (--). (III-15)*

Socrates could also point out men who practice the other sciences in a valuable way

IV Critoboulos: *But why must you show all of them?*(IV-1) *For the arts I can take slaves. Just show me the most honorable ones, for which I have to take care. Help me to learn them!* Socrates agrees and denounces the so called 'banausic'^{vi} arts, *'for they utterly ruin the bodies of those who work at them and those of their supervisors, by forcing them to lead a sedentary life and stay indoors. Some sit even the whole day at the fire! When their bodies effeminate, their souls too become much weaker. (IV-2)* Moreover these arts leave no spare time for friends or for participation in the defense of the city-state. The governor of the house rather should imitate the king of the Persians. *For they say that he classifies farming and the warrior occupation among the most beautiful and most necessary concerns and he himself is enormously concerned about them. (IV-4)* From IV-4 – IV-25 Socrates delivers a long monologue about the king of Persia, Cyrus, and his personal concern as well about the troops as about the farming of the inhabitants. Their farming was a foremost concern of the monarch, while without good farming a region cannot pay its tributes. He was finally personally engaged in the foundation and tending of paradises (Gr. παραδεισοι: parks DN) and finding the most beautiful trees for them^{vii}. And he rewarded not only the best warriors but also those who cultivated their lands best and were the best in making them productive.

V *I am telling you this because even the very happy ones cannot refrain from agriculture. The care for it seems to be at the same time a kind of pleasurable experience, a contribution to the prosperity of the house and a training of the body.*(V-1). It is therefore very suitable for the free person, because it brings in food for living as well as for pleasure and materials for adornment of temples and to make sacrifices. *Although the earth offers her goods most generously, she does not allow men to take them with bodily weakness. (V-4)*

This is positive, because it makes men strong and bodily strength is important for defending the city. The earth offers food for the horses, which are necessary for the cavalry. Hunting with a horse is useful for the members of the cavalry. The animals that enjoy themselves in a hunt, do something in return. *The horse carries his master to his work of supervision early and makes it possible for him to return late, and the hounds prevent the wild beasts from damaging the crops and livestock (--). (V-6)* There is moreover a direct link between farming and warfare, because the governor has to defend his fields. What art is more suited, more enjoyable and more adequate than farming? Which place in summer is more agreeable than the farm? *What place slaves like to go more, or offers more pleasure to a wife, or is more desired by to children, or is more attractive to friends? (V-10)* A farm is pleasant and advantageous for the sustenance at the same time. *Moreover, because the earth is divine, she also teaches justice to those who have the ability to observe: she gives the most good things in return to those who cultivate her best. (V-12).* In times of war those engaged in farming may take back what is stolen from them by their enemies. On a farm people are trained in cooperation, what again is useful in warfare.

Therefore the man who wants to farm successfully, needs that his labourers are inclined to take up work and prepared to be obedient. Now he who leads his men against the enemy must contrive to produce this (inclination and willingness) by giving gifts to those who do what good soldiers should

do, and punishing those who are undisciplined. Often the farmer must also urge on workers no less than the general does his soldiers. Slaves need some good hope no less, in fact even more than free men to make that they want to stay. (V-15/16) Critoboulos suggests that this all may be true but that is often difficult to foresee what happens and when: hail, frosts, heavy rain and other catastrophes. Socrates thought that Critoboulos knew that the gods control farming matters no less than the matters of war, so he now explains that men of war do pray before a battle. *Do you think it is any less necessary to propitiate the gods for agricultural activities? Take my word for it, sound-minded men pay respect to the gods for their fruits and crops and cattle and horses and sheep and all their possessions indeed.* (V-20)

VI Critoboulos agrees. Socrates now sums up the points about which both have reached an agreement in their discussion. *Oikonomia is the name of some branch of knowledge. This knowledge is the one by which people are able to make their houses prosper. A house seemed to us the total property. We said that property is the thing that is advantageous for everyone for the sustenance. Advantageous are all things which a person knows how to use.*^{viii} (VI-4) (--) *For a morally good man agriculture is the best occupation and the best kind knowledge, by which people acquire the necessary victuals.* (VI- 9)

Socrates next introduces Ischomachus, a morally good man, and starts a discussion with him. We don't hear of Critoboulos anymore.

[2. 2 Part two, act one: the responsibilities of the lady of the house (VII-X)]

VII Socrates greets Ischomachus, who sits on the marketplace, what surprises Socrates, because he knows him as a very busy man. He wants to know what Ischomachus does, because he is generally known as a morally good man. Ischomachus is pleased to be mentioned a morally good citizen, and then answers: *I certainly don't spend my time indoors, for my wife herself is completely able to take care alone also of my things inside the dwelling*^{ix}. (VII-3) Socrates wants Ischomachus to tell if he himself prepared his wife to become as she ought to be, or whether she already had received knowledge of her duties from her father and mother. Ischomachus tells she was only fifteen when he married her. *Do you think you should think it sufficient, if she came to you knowing only how to take wool to make a cloak, and had seen how spinning tasks are given to maid-slaves?* (VII-6). So Ischomachus taught himself his wife the rest of what would be enough to be able to take care of her duties, be it only after he had sacrificed to the gods and she with him, praying that he would be successful in teaching and she in learning these duties.

Now Ischomachus starts telling how and what he taught her at the beginning of her marriage: *Well, Socrates, as soon as she was so docile and so used to the house to make a conversation possible, I questioned her more or less this way: Tell me, wife, have you ever thought about why I married you and why your parents gave you to me?* (VII-10) (--) *We considered who was the best partner we could choose for house and children. And I choose you, and your parents choose me* (--). (VII-11) *If someday the gods will grant us that children are born to us, we will wish them to be educated in the best way. For to obtain the best helpers and supporters in old age, will also be a common good for us.* (VII-12) *But at present we two have just this house in common. For I declare that everything I have is in the common (fund) and you put into it everything you brought with you. And it needs not to be calculated which of us has contributed more, but it is necessary to be well aware of this: that the better of us is the one who will makes the most valuable contribution*^x. (VII-13)

His wife answered modestly that she doubted if she could contribute anything *but that her mother told her that her duty would be to be sound minded (σωφρονειν)*. (VII-14) Now his father said the same to Ischomachus and Ischomachus explained how valuable this contribution of her is: *Sound mindedness for both man and woman is acting so that one keeps the things very well, and also that most*^{xi} *will be added by beautiful and just means.* (VII-15) The wife wanted to know what she may contribute by her activities to the prosperity of the house and Ischomachus answered that she should do very good what the gods has made her capable of. She might compare the value of her commanding activities with those of the queen-bee^{xii}. *They are no trivial matters, unless of course, the activities that the queen bee presides over in the hive are trivial.* (VII-18). Ischomachus then explained that the gods have male and

female yoked together in such a way, *that the couple might constitute a partnership, that is most advantageous to each of them.* (VII-18)^{xiii} This partnership is effectuated in three areas: lying together to make children, building up the old-age care^{xiv} and living in a residence that is sheltered.

As soon as the necessary foodstuffs and wool, which are grown in the open air, are brought into the house by the husband, somebody else should have the responsibility to protect and process them.

Because both the indoor and outdoor jobs require work and care, I think the gods from the beginning designed the nature of women for the indoor jobs and responsibilities (and the nature of man for the outdoor ones). (VII-23) Because of her affective and anxious nature she is perfectly fitted for nurturing the babies and protecting what has been brought into the house, where the body and mind of the man can endure more cold, heat, travels and military campaigns and therefore is capable of outdoor work. So the god gave the wife more affection for children than the man and she got more anxiety, needed for preservation and the man more fearlessness, necessary for defense.

Because both have to give and take, the gods placed memory and care in both of them to the same extent (--) just as being powerful over the things one needs. And the god made a possibility that whoever of them does this better, whether the husband or the wife, also bring more of that good to the common fund. But because they are not equally endowed with the same natural aptitude for all these things, they need each other and the bond is advantageous to the couple, since the one is capable where the other is deficient. (VII-26/28).

Just as the gods made us partners in children, so the law has appointed us partners in the house.

Probably the gods will punish him who neglects his own job or performs his wife's work. *In which way does the work of the queen bee resemble that which I must perform?* had asked his wife.

Ischomachus had answered: *She, while she remains in the hive, does not allow the bees to be idle, but she dispatches those who ought to work outside to their job, and she knows what each of them brings in and receives it and preserves it until it is necessary to use it. And when the time comes to use it, she distributes to each what is fair. She also supervises the bees inside that are weaving the combs, so that they are woven beautifully and quickly, and she is makes sure that the offspring, when arrived, is reared. Once the young ones are reared and capable of working, she sends them from the hive with a leader of the descendants.* (VII-33/34).

When his wife had asked him if she should do this too, Ischomachus had confirmed this and reiterated the basic duties of the wife:

- Send out the slaves who work outdoors & supervise the slaves that works indoors,
- Receive what is brought inside & take apart as much of it as is needed in direct consumption and plan ahead and guard whatever must remain in reserve,
- See to it that the cloths are produced, for those who need them,
- Keep dry the food supplies,
- (--) Nurse the people of the house that become ill. (VII-37)

His wife answered that she would like the nursing part and then said: *surely my guarding the things inside and my dispensing would seem something ridiculous, if you would not take care that something was brought in from outside.* (VII-39) On which Ischomachus answered that the opposite is the case also. That would be like *drawing water in a leaky jar.* (VII-40)

Ischomachus then discussed the degree of pleasure in the typical responsibilities of a wife. It is a pleasure to teach a female slave spinning and double her value to you; or to train one with potency into a housekeeper or assistant; or to do good to the slave that is sound-minded and advantageous to your house but to punish the one that causes damage. *The most agreeable task of all will be this: if you prove to be better than I am and make me your worshipper and don't need to fear that as your years increase you will be less valued in the house, but may trust that when you have grown older you will be valued in the house to the degree that you have become as well a partner of me as a guardian of the house for the children.* (VII-42)

For with people the morally good things do not increase by the beauties of the youth but by the virtues for the sustenance. (VII-43)

VIII. Ischomachus continues his story and tells that his wife listened to him and felt annoyed when she could not immediately give him one of the things he had asked for. He told her not to feel annoyed. *It is not your fault but I did not give through to you any orders (ταξας) where to put everything, so that you know where you have to lay it and from where you have to take it.* (VIII-2)

In VIII-3 – VIII-9: Ischomachus explained extensively to her that nothing is as important as order. In a choir not everybody can sing as he likes. How could an army march without order? How could they fight without order? Again a trireme makes only speed at sea and is a frightening site because the many men are seated and rowing in an order. [Not summarized DN] He said to his wife: *If you wish to know (1) how to precisely arrange the things there are; (2) to use whatever is needed of the present things by taking it effortless and (3) whenever I urgently ask you something, to give this to me with pleasure, let us decide on the appropriate place for each item and let us teach the maid, after we have approved of the appropriate place for everything, to get the things placed there and put them back there again.* (VII-10) This way we will know what is present and what is missing and what needs attention. *If we know where each thing is, we can take it in our hands quickly, so that we don't have trouble with going to use it.* (VIII-10)

Ischomachus tells Socrates that he saw the most beautiful and exact order in an inventory ever on a great Phoenician merchant ship. For he had noticed an enormous amount of equipment arranged in separate places in the smallest receptacle: many pieces of wooden equipment, ropes, rigging, devices against enemies and weapons, utensils for cooking and eating, *and all cargoes which a ship-owner carries for profits* (VII-12) Nothing was laid in the way of something; nobody needed to look for anything and everything could be used immediately. The assistant of the helms-man knew of everything where it was stored and in his free time personally inspected everything. When Ischomachus had asked him why, his answer had been: *I am checking, my friend, how the things in the ship are stored, if something accidentally has been added, or if something is missing, or if something has been impracticably mislaid,* (VIII-15) because in times of storm there is no time available for searching for the gods threaten and punish the lazy and spares those who do their work very good. So Ischomachus had asked his wife: *If this order can be maintained on a small moving ship, would not it be very stupid from our part, if we, who have a large dwelling on a firm foundation with large depositories in which we can keep things separated, do not find a beautiful space for each of them, where they can be easily found?* (VIII-17) *I have told you that it 'good' to be easily found and now I add that is 'beautiful' when for instance shoes are arranged in a row. Actually, all things appear more beautiful when they are in put in an order.* (VIII-20) This is the kind of beauty found in a group of dancers in a circle because of its form and their mutual distance. Moreover, finding the goods in the dwelling and putting them back where they belong will not be difficult if one knows that in a city-state thousand times more articles are easily found, because slaves know the order there. *There is no other reason for this than that each thing is put away in its proper place.* (XX-22) For the same reason people don't find each other in the city, unless they have arranged where to wait.

IX Socrates: *And do you think that your wife listened to any of what you taught her as best as you could?* Ischomachus: *Certainly! (--)* *She asked me even to arrange the things like I had said very fast.* (IX-1) Socrates: *And how did you arrange for her?* Ischomachus: *I thought I should show her the possibilities of the dwelling first.* (IX-3) Because every room has its own storage facilities, she might see with her own eyes, where everything is stored; the bedrooms with bedding and furniture; the dry storerooms for grain, the cool ones for wine. He explained the particularities of the outlay of the building. He led her to the woman's quarters, with a bolted door, *so that nothing be removed that should not be, and so that the slaves would not make children without our knowing. For generally useful slaves become much more benevolent when they have produced children, but when useless ones mate, they become more prone to malevolence.* (IX-5) After Ischomachus had shown his wife the use and storage capacities of the different rooms, he started with her to sort out the contents of every room: the things used for sacrifices, the clothing, the weapons, the implements for spinning, baking bread, bathing and dining. *And we divided all of them into two sets, those that are used daily and those that are needed only for feasts. Moreover we set aside the things that are consumed within a month, and stored separately what we calculated would last a year. That way we shall less likely forget how it will turn out at the end.* (IX-7/8) Having divided this way everything Ischomachus and his wife carried them to the proper place. The things for daily use they handed over to the slaves, those for feasts to the house keeper. *When we had shown the housekeeper where they belong, and counted and made an inventory of each thing, we told her to give every member of the household what he or she required, but to remember what she had given to each of them and when she got it back, to return it to the place from which she takes it.* (IX-10)

Then they appointed (from the female slaves in the house) the housekeeper. They found somebody who possessed the right character, that is somebody *who possessed a superior self-control in eating, drinking, sleeping and intercourse with men. Then she gave the impression to have a strong memory. Furthermore she seemed to be able to take precautionary measures that not by carelessness something bad would occur to us and finally she would appreciate how she, by doing us a favour, would be valued by us in return.* (IX-11) But once convinced of the right character, we, Critoboulos tells Socrates, still had to teach her how to do her best to make the house prosper with us, *which we did by giving her information about and made her share in the good results.* (IX-12) And we had to teach her justice, which we did *by giving more honor to the just than to the unjust and by showing that the just live more rich and more free lives than the unjust* (IX-13)

Finally Ischomachus told his wife, that *all these arrangements would in nothing be advantageous if she not personally would see to it how the order for everything would stay intact. I taught her that in well governed city-states the citizens do not believe that it is sufficient to write beautiful laws, but they also choose guardians of the laws who, as supervisors, praise the law-abiding person and punish somebody if he acts against the law.* (X-14) He therefore told his wife to *consider herself as the guardian of the laws in the dwelling and inspect the equipment whenever she sees fit, just as the garrison commander inspects the guard and to check whether each item is beautiful, as the Council checks horses and cavalry and to praise and honor like a queen the worthy to the best of her ability, and scold and punish the one who fails in these matters.* (IX-15).

Moreover he told her not to consider it unjust if she got more tasks in connection with the possessions than the slaves, because she may use all possessions as she likes while the slaves may use only those which she gives and for the rest only have to carry, work and guard them. After all, as owner, she is the person who derives the greatest benefit from their preservation and the greatest disadvantage from their destruction. The wife had no problem with this: *Just as it seems natural for a sound-minded (woman) to care for her children and not to neglect them, so too it gives the sound-minded one more happiness to care for the possessions, which are her own, than to neglect them.* (IX-19)

In X 1-13 Ischomachus confirms that his wife indeed is special and he has one more example of this: her avoidance of make-up.[Not summarized DN]

[2.3 Part two, act two: the critical success factors of the governor of the house (XI-XV)]

In XI Socrates asks Ischomachus, now they have dealt with the activities of his wife, after his own activities.[In XI-2 – XI-7 Socrates challenges Ischomachus to tell them these pursuits by suggesting that if the daily routines of Ischomachus are the right way to become a morally good person, he should follow him instead of wandering around in Athens and putting questions before everybody, like Socrates does now.[Not summarized DN] Ischomachus: *Because I think to have learned that the gods do not think it right for people to prosper unless they know what they have to do and make sure that these things are accomplished . Neither do the Gods grant to be happy to those who are sensible and caring, while denying it to those who are not. That's is why I start the day with winning the gods to my side. And I try to achieve that it is right for me when I pray for good health, physical strength, appreciation in the city-state, good will among my friends, survival with honor in war and wealth which increases in a morally acceptable way.* (XI-8)

Socrates: *Do you really think it important that you are rich and that you have many activities, because you possess many resources, for which you have to take care.* (XI-9) Ischomachus answers this question in the positive: *I think it pleasant to honor the gods magnificently and to help my friends if they need anything, and to see to it that, from my part, the city always is provided with resources.* (XI-9)

From XI-10– XI-18 Ischomachus gives a detailed description of his daily routines: Early rising, walking to the farm, inspecting and correcting the farming slaves, practising horse-man`s manoeuvres, jogging back home, showering with beech-twigs and finally enjoying a light lunch.} Socrates shows himself very enthusiast about this approach: *To employ methods which improve your health and physical strength, provide training for war, and show care for your wealth and all at the same time too, seems to me totally admirable.* (XI-19) From XI-19 –XI-25 Ischomachus explains how in the

afternoon he is occupied with legal affairs and political activities in the city-state. [Not summarized DN]

XII. Ischomachus does not yet need to take his leave, because he has overseers^{xv} in the fields. Socrates now wants to know if Ischomachus educates his foremen himself or, when he needs one, asks around for a skilled one. Ischomachus: *By Zeus, Socrates, I try to educate them myself. What else should somebody who is going to help, when I am away by taking care instead of me, know then what I know? If I am enough to supervise the activities, I certainly can teach another person, whatever I know,* (XII-4)

Socrates: *First of all he should be well-disposed towards you and what is yours,* (XII-5) for it has no use to train somebody, who is supposed to replace you but is not well disposed towards you.

Ischomachus confirms that this is the first thing to teach him. Socrates: *Now, how on earth can you teach well-disposed-ness towards you and what is yours?* (XII-6). Ischomachus answers that the trick is well-doing, whenever the gods grant the house an abundance of some good thing. Socrates: *Do you mean to say, that those who enjoy your good things, become well disposed towards you and are prepared to achieve some good for you?* (XII-7) Ischomachus confirms this. Socrates: *If he is well disposed towards you, will this be enough to make him an overseer. Don't you see that, although all men are well disposed towards themselves, many are not used to take care of the things they want for themselves. Are not the ones that do take care only the good^{xvi} ones?* (XII-8)

This is not a problem for Ischomachus, because he simply teaches his overseers to take care too. Socrates: *(--) I thought that this absolutely could not been taught, the making sure that care is taken?* (XII-10) Ischomachus agrees that cannot be taught to every candidate. Socrates: *Please give me a clear idea of the persons, who you can teach this [taking care DN]* (XII-11) Ischomachus explains that you cannot teach it to people, who drink or sleep too much or have their mind all day on sex with boys.^{xvii} If a potential foreman shows these soft spots it will not be worth the governor's while to educate such a person. Socrates: *Then what about those who passionately love profit making?* (XII-15). Ischomachus sees educating them as very easy: *You need to do nothing but show them that taking care is profitable.* (XII-15) The others, who are self-controlled and only normally love profit, Ischomachus praises and gives honor, if they care and harasses, if they don't.

Socrates: *Let us change the subject: (--) Is it possible for a person who lacks care, to make others take care?* (XII-17) Ischomachus: *No, by Zeus!* (XII-18) If a teacher demonstrates something badly, it is hard to learn it and *when a master by his examples shows carelessness, it is difficult for a servant to become caring.* (XII-18) A bad master with useful slaves does not occur in opposition to a useful master with bad slaves. *But the master who wants to achieve that some are going to take care, must be:*

- *in the habit of supervising the activities*
- *capable of inspecting the activities*
- *prepared to reward the activities that are beautifully finished, ,*
- *not afraid to pass the proper sentence to the one that lacks care.*(XII-19)

Both protagonists, agree, that it ultimately is 'his master's eye', *that produces most the morally good.* (XII-20)

XIII Socrates now asks if Ischomachus teaches his future overseer still something else than to take care. Ischomachus: *Of course, it still remains for him to learn what has to be done, and when, and how.* (XIII-2) Socrates asks if this then would be all. Ischomachus: *I think he must learn how to reign the workers* (XIII-4) Now Socrates wants to know how Ischomachus can teach people to be reigners and Ischomachus laughs that this is very simple. Socrates: *This is no laughing matter, Ischomachus, because whoever can make people reigners, also can teach people to be capable of reigning, and whoever can make them capable of this also can make them capable of being kings.* (XIII-5)

Ischomachus now explains seriously that other living creatures learn obedience by being punished when doing bad and being rewarded when doing good. *People, however, one can make also more obedient by talking to them, pointing out that is advantageous for them to obey.* (XIII-9) One promises the slaves food and the ambitious amongst them praise. *For some natures hunger for praise no less as others do for viands and drinks.* (XIII-9) Ischomachus teaches his future foremen these two ways of making promises and applies them himself to the more tractable people^{xviii}. There is more. He keeps

good and bad cloths and shoes. The best ones he distributes over the best workers and the inferior clothes he hands out to the worst slaves. *It seems to me that good ones become very unwilling when they see that they the jobs are done by them but the same things go to the pockets of those by those who don't exert themselves or don't want to run risks when necessary.* (XIII-11) Ischomachus praises the foremen who have distributed cloths and shoes according to this rule. When he, however, sees that some slave is honored more than others because of his flattery or bodily beauty, he does not let this go but reprimands the foreman concerned and teaches him *that these things are even not beneficial to himself.* (XIII-12).

XIV Socrates: *When he has become sufficiently capable of managing for you, so that he can make (slaves) obedient, do you think he is a perfect foreman (--)?* (XIV-1). Ischomachus answers that he also must stay away from the property of the lord and not steal. *For if the man who handles the crops has the nerve to make them disappear in a way that no redeeming^{xix} jobs are left, what would be the advantage of farming under the care of that fellow?* (XIV-2) Socrates: *So you undertake to teach this, that is justice, too?* (XIV-3) Ischomachus says that as a matter of fact he tried to do this, but to no effect. He therefore applies some prescripts from the laws of Draco^{xx} and Solon^{xxi}, that punish the unjust and even some of the kings of Persia, because the Persian laws *not only penalize those who commit injustice but also favor the just. So also many greedy stay very far away from committing injustice, because they see, that the just become more rich than the unjust.* (XIV-7) Ischomachus adds that he does not want to have to do anymore with those who continue to act unjust. On the other hand he treats those who are - because of the gain to be achieved or because of his praise- desiring justice as if they already are freemen: *not only by making them richer, but I also by honoring them as morally good men.* (XIV-9) Critoboulos states that an ambitious man differs from a greedy one *For the sake of praise and honor the ambitious is prepared to work hard wherever this should be done; to run risks and to abstain from ugly profits.* (XIV-10)

[2.4 Part two, act three: Farming (XVI-XIX)]

XV. In this act Socrates is led by Ischomachus' earlier remark, that *taking care is useless, if one does not know what to do and how the jobs should be done* (XV-2), which knowledge an overseer should have but which the governor of the house should teach him. He now invites Ischomachus to teach him the skill of farming, *because - he says - that is precisely what makes the men who know it rich but makes those who do not know it live without means, even though they work hard.* (XV-3) Ischomachus praises this skill too but wants to tell instead how friendly this art is. *It is a very agreeable skill for it is very advantageous; pleasant to perform and most beautiful and most dear to the gods and men. And where it is moreover very easy to learn, how could it not be noble?* (XV-4) Socrates insists that he wants to learn the how, what and where of farming. According to him this point is discussed somewhat superficially so far, *like you were saying that anybody who is going to write from dictation and to read what he has written must know the alphabet.* (XV-7) Having heard that, one would not yet know the alphabet. Likewise, having heard the need for taking care, one does not yet know how to farm. Ischomachus' first line of defence of his refusal to teach Socrates farming is that *'this skill is very easy to learn, because it is not necessary, as is in the case of other skills, for people to wear themselves out learning, before the student can produce his food .* (XV-10) Moreover the workers in the farming business are quite prepared to tell somebody else the tricks of the job. People whose occupation is melting gold, playing flute or painting prefer to keep their methods and techniques secret but people working in the field are different. With farming one only needs to watch some actions when the slaves are working and hear about others. But Socrates does not let off: *since farming is so easy to learn, that is all the more reason to tell it to me from beginning to end.* (XV-13)

XVI. The agronomists say that the knowledge how to use the soil- that is what to sow and what to plant where- is a difficult one but Ischomachus does not agree with them. According to him a man *can learn what it can produce and what it cannot by looking at the crops and the trees of another's man soil. Once he knows this, it is useless to struggle against the gods. He is not likely to obtain his necessities by sowing and planting what he wants rather than what the soil likes to grow and nurture.* (XVI-3). Socrates tells that he has experienced that even fisherman express themselves as adequate

about the qualities of the soil as the farmers themselves. He therefore feels confident that he will be able to understand the knowledge about farming. Ischomachus: *Well then, where do you want me to begin to refresh your memory about farming. For I know that I'm showing how farming must be done to someone who knows this to very large extent.* (XVI-8)

In XVI-9- XIX -13: Ischomachus leads Socrates through the principles of ploughing, sowing, weeding, reaping and threshing. The same happens with the planting of trees.[Not summarized DN] Socrates confirms that he now has gotten sufficient knowledge to be able to farm. He admits: *I am not ignorant about any of the things you have mentioned.* (XIX-14) He thought he would not be able to say anything about how planting should be done but Ischomachus asked him questions about it and Socrates could provide the answers.

Socrates: *Is teaching then a matter of questioning? A minute ago I learned profoundly by way of you asking me questions about everything. For you lead me through the things I know, showing me that they are similar to the things I thought I did not know, in order to persuade me, I believe, that I know these things also.* (XIX-15) Ischomachus asks if he could do the same to make Socrates distinguish good coins from bad ones or make him an artist. Socrates: *Perhaps, you could.* (XIX-16)

Ischomachus: *That is not possible, Socrates, but I said to you farming is so human-friendly and such a soft skill that those who see and hear it immediately know how to do it.* (XIX-17) Moreover nature gives many lessons herself about how one might treat her best, like the vine teaches us by the spreading of its leaves when the bunches of grapes are tender, to provide shade to the parts that are exposed to the sun in that period .

[2.5 Epilogue]

XX. *If it is so easy to learn the things about agriculture and all know to the same degree what should be done, how come that not all act the same, but some live generously and have too much, whereas others cannot acquire the necessities for themselves but also still have debts?* (XX-1) According to Ischomachus being a farmer with more than enough means is not in the first place a question of knowledge, because knowledge about farming comes easy to men. He proves this with some examples of how people talk. For instance rumors will not go that somebody failed because he did not know that he should fertilize his soil, but people will gossip that he has become poor because he did not take care. Ischomachus compares it with the attitudes generals. They all know that it is better to march through enemy territory in the fighting formation, still some do and others don't. All farmers know they need fertilizer, which is available in nature, still some collect it and others don't. Everybody knows how the salinity of water is corrected by mixing it with salt-free substances, *yet some do take care for this matters and others don't.* (XX-12) Nature makes clear and tells the truth about what she can and cannot not do. *By providing all as easy to know and learn, I think the earth records the best the evil and lazy men.* (XX-14) For in other skills ignorance is an excuse for not working but in agriculture this is not the case, because the earth responds well to work while *laziness in the fields gives clearly an evil soul away. For no one can convince himself that a man could live without the necessities. He, who knows no other resource-bringing skills and refuses to farm, must obviously be determined to live by stealing, or robbery, or begging, or else be totally without any common sense.* (XX-15) Again, taking care or not makes a large difference when one has ten men working. *Working slowly during the whole day by the men easily makes a difference of half the amount of work.* (XX-17) One might compare this outcome with the difference in speed between two healthy young men, walking the same distance, but the one walking steadily and the other one stopping at every beautiful sight and at every water source. *Indeed to work beautifully and to care badly differ as totally from each other as to work totally and to do totally nothing.* (XX-20) Where hoeing is done in order that the vines may be better and more beautiful, how can one deny that it is pure neglect to hoe so that the weeds grow. *It is these things then – Ischomachus continues - that wear away houses to a much larger degree than the strong ignorance's. For when the expenses for the houses are made completely but the jobs in the end don't bring in enough to cover the expense, one should not be surprised if instead of the surplus a shortage is caused.*^{xvii} (XX-21) On the other hand, *for them who are capable of taking care and strenuously farm, a most effective enterprise from farming my father practiced and taught me.* (XX-22) The father of Ischomachus systematically bought plots of owners who did not care,

because he said that plots of land that are well cultivated costs much money and cannot be improved (XX-23). He took pleasure in improvement, as well of land as of people. *Believe me, Socrates, we have already made the original value of many estates many times higher.* (XX-24) He says that Socrates can do it himself, now he has heard this and even teach it others. His father did not avail of some special knowledge either but just loved working on a farm. That is why he said that *he wanted an estate which made him have something to do but at the same time would make him spend his time in a pleasurable way, because of the advantages, he took from it* (XX- 25).

Socrates: *Did your father keep all the estates he cultivated, or did he sell them too, if he could acquire much money? He would sell them, by Zeus, - replied Ischomachus-, and he would buy another one immediately in its place, an uncultivated, because of his love for work.* (XX-26)

Socrates: *Are you telling me that your father by nature is a lover of farms as merchants are lovers of grain?*^{xxiii} (XX-27) Merchants buy grain and load it wherever there is an abundance of it and transport it to places where it is valued most and the people pay the highest price for it. *And your father appears to be a lover of farms in much the same way.* (XX- 28). Ischomachus answers that according to him people who build a house, sell it and then build another one are lovers of building. Socrates: *I go along with you when you are saying that men by nature love all those things which they think will bring them advantages.* (XX-29)

XXI. Socrates agrees that Ischomachus has convinced him that of all skills the agricultural one is the most easy to learn. Ischomachus then says: *All occupations, be them agriculture, politics, economics or warfare, have in common that one must be able to command, but I agree with you that some [commanders DN] differ strongly from others in disposition.* (XXI-2) Ischomachus explains that some captains have to ability to speak and act in a way that their rowers work hard but others ship commanders are not able to do that. Divine, brave and knowledgeable generals succeed in arising in individual soldiers so that it arises in the army as whole too *both a love of work and an ambition to be seen by their commander when they are doing something beautiful.* (XXI-6) According to Ischomachus those soldiers become the best commanders who inspire in their soldiers the notion that they must follow them through every danger, not those with the best physique or the most capable with javelin and bow. *Truly great is the man who can accomplish great deeds by disposition rather than muscle.* (XXI-8) This goes also for the own jobs, Ischomachus says, *if an overseer –whether one inside or one outside the house - can make his men enthusiast and energetically working and persevering; these are the ones who are most effectively directed at the good things and make the surplus a large one* (XXI-9) The proof of the pudding is the arrival of the master himself. If nothing happens, one should not envy him, but if the workers do make a conspicuous effort, when he arrives then this master possesses something of the character of a king. *I think that this [monarchical character DN] is of utmost importance in every occupation that men perform, and in farming too.* (XXI-11) Ischomachus now emphasizes that he does not want so to say that it is possible to learn it by seeing it or by hearing it once like farming. *I am saying that the person who wants to go to possess these abilities needs education; a good nature must be at his disposal, and-, most importantly-: he must be divine.* (XXI-11) For Ischomachus is of the opinion that *commanding willing ones is a good that is not wholly human but divine, because it is gift of the gods; and one that is clearly given to those who truly are full of sound-mindedness.* (XXI-12) And tyrannize unwilling ones is according to him bestowed on those who deserve a life like Tantalus in Hades.

ⁱ This discussion has been analyzed by Sandra Taragna Novo in *Economia ed etica nell'Economico di Senofonte* Torino (G. Giappichelli) 1968.

ⁱⁱ In the chapter Economics in the anthology of Stobaeus this defining fragment (VII-4) is the final one, together with VII-5: *We thought that it was impossible to learn all branches of knowledge. And we agreed with the cities in rejecting the so-called 'basaunic' occupations on the grounds that we thought that they ruin men's bodies and weaken their minds.*

ⁱⁱⁱ This paragraph about the hired governor of the house (Oik.I-4) may easily be translated in a much too modern vein, if one takes αὐξεῖν to mean profit making. `αὐξεῖν`, auksein`, which is a pivot term in this dialogue, means having thrive, flourish, prosper, having grow, increase, ameliorate, and might be translated with `have an oikos prosper`, the first meaning of the term. Αὐξησις the result of this activity means growth. If one translates αὐξεῖν with `to have an oikos make a profit` one neglects that the Greek has words for profit making: κερδαίνειν or λυσιτελεῖν, which the author does not use here. It is possible to make a profit with farming, just like traders do, if a governor of an oikos wants to do that. Ischomachus, the morally impeccable governor of the house, shows how pure profit making is actually and respectfully accomplished with farming: one has to systematically buy neglected plots, cultivate them and make them productive and then sell them to the highest bidder. With the yield of this transaction one buys a new piece of uncultivated or neglected land, after which the cycle repeats itself. Profit is made with farming by trading in plots of originally neglected land not by trading in corn or whatever products. By Socrates and Ischomachus **this** is not considered normal behaviour of the average oikos owner. Profit making by farming is rather exceptional.

^{iv} It is interesting to note, that in this short sentence two times the word *enough* is used: ἰκανοὺς (sufficient) and ἀρκεῶ (to be sufficient)

^v This is Aspasia of Milete, mentioned by different philosophers. It is not his own wife, Xanthippe.

^{vi} It cannot be held that technical knowledge in the fourth century before Christ was considered down to earth (Gr. βασαννικός, basaunikos), because many honourable activities, like house-governing, military leadership and political functions could be regarded as skills. Critoboulos for instance looks at house government as a technique of becoming rich. Some specimens of technical knowledge, especially the acquiring ones, be them friendly as sales and trading or forceful, like piracy, were considered as banalities too.

^{vii} In Chapter 10 we will see that during the Renaissance one of the Alberti's is also engaged in a 'paradise' and finding and planting beautiful, exotic trees.

^{viii} This defining fragment (VII-4) is the final one in the chapter *Economics* in the anthology of Stobaeus, together with VII-5: *We thought that it was impossible to learn all branches of knowledge. And we agreed with the cities in rejecting the so-called `banausic` occupations on the grounds that we thought that they ruin men's bodies and weaken their minds.* Both citations are shown in the introductory part of Chapter 4 *Pythagorean economics*

^{ix} Ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.

^x Τα ἀξία πλεονοῦς (lett.: The values, the honorable things of the more) leaves space for a double-interpretation of 'good' and 'morally good'.

^{xi} Curiously Critoboulos says here 'most' and not 'all'.

^{xii} *They [the activities of the wife DN] are no trivial matters, unless of course, the activities that the queen bee presides over in the hive are trivial.* (VII-18). The metaphor of the queen bee duties for wifely duties comes back in humanistic economics. The metaphor of the beehive is used a metaphor for the economy, e.g. John of Salisbury (1120-1180) in his *Policraticus* and Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) in his *Fables of the Bees*.

^{xiii} From *Oeconomicus* the fragment VII-18 up until VII-28 is reproduced by Columella in *De re rustica* XII, Preface 1-6. See Chapter 5.

^{xiv} No savings have to be made for the old age (nor an insurance policy to be bought), because of customs are in force during the whole period under consideration, which ensure that the children take care of their parents, when in old age. This custom is always at the background of classical economics. In this paragraph this custom is mentioned two times. (VII-12, VII-19).

^{xv} Plural! Ischomachus has several overseers. He is very rich indeed.

^{xvi} Mind that Socrates here talks about natural interest and links this to the material good and not to the moral good. He states here that many people don't know what is their material interest.

^{xvii} There are two differences with the housekeeper mentioned in the part before. Eating is not mentioned as a threatening danger for the foreman. When it comes to the preoccupation with sex, the danger for men is sex with boys, for women sex with men. The housekeeper is moreover supposed to have a strong memory, to be concerned and sensitive to rewards. These character traits are not mentioned for the foreman.

^{xviii} The less tractable slaves, of course, are beaten into obedience.

^{xix} For my translation of this word λυσιτελοῦντας see justification.

^{xx} Draco (7th century BC), the first recorded lawgiver of Athens. His laws date from 622 or 621 BC.

^{xxi} Solon (c. 638-558 BC) reformed the laws of Athens into a democratic direction.

^{xxii} This interesting phrase has some strange aspects. For instance the plural 'houses', where 'house' would be expected; one time 'expenses' the other one 'expense', 'the surplus' versus 'shortage', apart from the artificial construction of the sentence. Ischomachus thinks of course in terms of a farmer's year.

^{xxiii} The point is that trading is not done, according to the philosophers, be it in grain or in farm land.