

ABSTRACT

THE POSSIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN XENOPHON'S CYROPAEDIA

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One of the reasons that Xenophon's Cyropaedia deserves to be regarded as one of the classic and foundational texts of political philosophy is because it thoughtfully examines the extent to which politics and political life are amenable to reason, method, and knowledge. In the Cyropaedia, Xenophon explores the extent to which central problems of politics, including especially the problems of legitimizing authority and preventing revolution, can be mitigated by human reason. By thinking through Cyrus's life, his rule, and the massive Persian Empire that he founded, Xenophon claims to have unearthed a fundamental truth about politics. While his study of history and current events impressed on him that in almost all times and places political life precariously teeters on the brink of chaos, Xenophon saw in Cyrus a potentially wondrous alternative to the comparatively bleak view that political history is destined to be little more than one violent revolution followed by another, ad infinitum. This dissertation provides an analysis of the various facets of Cyrus's knowledge of rule.

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THE POSSIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN
XENOPHON'S CYROPAEDIA

BY

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DEDICATION

To my parents, to Rachel, Felicity, and Liberty, and to the late Morton J. Frisch,
with gratitude

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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation examines what I understand to be a perennial problem of politics through a close textual analysis of Xenophon's Cyropaedia. One problem inherent to political life would seem to be that politics of necessity divides human beings into two classes — rulers and ruled. As Xenophon endeavors to show in the prologue to the Cyropaedia, rulers typically have great difficulty and eventually prove unable to rule because often their subjects do not wish to be ruled, choosing instead to revolt against authority:

This reflection once occurred to us: How many democracies have been brought down by those who wished the governing to be done in some way other than under a democracy; how many monarchies and how many oligarchies have been overthrown by the people; and how many who have tried to establish tyrannies have, some of them, been at once brought down completely, while others, if they have continued ruling for any time at all, are admired as wise and fortunate men. (1.1.1)

In light of all the instability and revolution he studied and witnessed firsthand, and especially given the fact that “human beings unite against none more than against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them,” Xenophon was lead to question whether stable rule might be an impossibility (1.1.3). The Cyropaedia thus compels us wonder: Can rulers rule in such a way so as to make their authority legitimate in the eyes of their subjects? Or, given what Xenophon sees as humankind's inherent aversion to authority,

is rule destined to be always on the verge of collapse and chaos? Insofar as throughout much of the world political life is still replete with crises of authority and revolution, it would seem that the questions with which Xenophon wrestled are still very much our questions as well.

On my reading, the Cyropaedia recounts Xenophon's own intellectual odyssey. He once believed that stable rule was an impossibility (1.1.3), only to wonder after studying the life of Cyrus the Great whether perhaps stable rule need not be impossible, or even difficult, so long as one rules knowledgeably in the manner of Cyrus:

But when we reflected that there was Cyrus, a Persian, who acquired very many people, very many cities, and very many nations, all obedient to himself, we were thus compelled to change our mind to the view that ruling human beings does not belong among those tasks that are impossible, or even among those that are difficult, if one does it with knowledge. (1.1.3)

As Xenophon presents it, the Cyropaedia is first and foremost an exploration of how Cyrus's knowledge enabled him to solve the problem of rule. In one sentence, the thesis of this dissertation is that Cyrus draws upon his Persian, Median, and kingly educations in order to solve the problem of rule, which he does by deceiving his subjects at every turn, patterning his empire on the model of the household, and, in the end, reducing many of his subjects to animals.

Why Xenophon? The Relevance of the Cyropaedia to Contemporary Political Science

This dissertation proposes to explore the possibility that Xenophon's Cyropaedia presents an overlooked and in some ways distinctive form of ancient political realism that in several ways anticipates the modern political philosophies of both Niccolò

Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, respectively. As I hope to show, the Cyropaedia can potentially play a valuable and unique role in the conversation between the ancients and the moderns, insofar as while Xenophon anticipates some of Machiavelli and Hobbes's most important arguments, he also offers principled reasons for viewing them with skepticism and doubting their overall soundness. In this sense, Xenophon provides a critique of some of the most important arguments of early modern political philosophy.

I propose to provide a close textual analysis of the Cyropaedia as a classical critique of the Machiavellian and Hobbesian variants of early modern realism by focusing my analysis on the problem of rule, which Xenophon discusses in his opening reflections of the Cyropaedia. For Xenophon, the problem of political rule is that human beings naturally tend to resist being ruled by others, which leads to perpetual instability and revolution. One advantage of concentrating on the problem of rule is that it provides a lens through which a few key similarities between both Xenophon and Machiavelli and Xenophon and Hobbes come into focus. But if Xenophon merely anticipated some of Machiavelli and Hobbes's realist insights, he would hardly be deserving of serious attention from political theorists, other than perhaps by way of a footnote to the moderns. However, as I hope to show, Xenophon is not simply an anticipatory or embryonic realist moment on the way to the more "mature" modern realist visions of Machiavelli and Hobbes. Rather, this dissertation proposes to examine the sense in which Xenophon begins with premises that are very similar to theirs but arrives at very different conclusions from them regarding what is and is not possible in practice for princes and sovereigns, however knowledgeable, to accomplish.

Before turning to Xenophon's agreements and disagreements with Machiavelli and Hobbes, let us briefly examine the tradition of classical political realism and the sense in which Xenophon not only belongs to it, but even makes a unique contribution to it.

Classical Political Realism and Xenophon's Realism

The ancient political philosophers may be considered political realists to the extent that they believe that what is politically best by nature is unlikely to ever be attained in practice.¹ While Plato and Aristotle both held that the actualization of the best regime in practice was highly unlikely, their responses to this proposition were somewhat different. Plato's Socrates concluded that, given the unlikelihood that "philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize," the philosopher should cease trying to save the city and instead rest content "if somehow he himself can live...pure of injustice and unholy deeds."² Plato's Socrates is a realist to the extent that he resigns himself to the fact that the city cannot be saved. For him, political life is essentially tragic, insofar as the one person who could save the city is the last person it would ever listen to.³ Aristotle's realism is somewhat different. He accepts that the best city is unlikely, but in the face of this realist insight he perseveres in looking for ways to improve actual cities, even though they must inevitably fall short of perfection.⁴ As Arnhart puts it, for Aristotle,

¹ Larry Arnhart, Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 84.

² Republic, 473c-d, 496d-e.

³ Republic, 516e-517a.

⁴ Politics, 1288b21-1289a6.

“Sometimes a statesman must make the best of a bad situation.”⁵ Above all else, Aristotle’s statesman keeps the image of the best regime in his mind’s eye and prudently tries to make his city approximate the best city as closely as possible, cognizant all the while that perfection is unattainable. For Aristotle, perfection therefore serves as a guide in practice, whereas for Plato’s Socrates, the inability to achieve perfection means that political life is in essence tragic.

Xenophon’s realism differs from Plato and Aristotle’s in a distinctive way, one that more so than any of the ancients anticipates modern political philosophy, insofar as he and he alone among the ancients considers the following question: Given that the *polis* will almost certainly never fully adopt the advice of a philosopher, might it be more amenable to another kind of knowledge, one more in line with a lower but more realistic conception of human beings and human nature? Might the *polis* be more amenable to a kind of non-philosophic, less ambitious, and more realistic form of knowledge that, precisely because it does not ask too much of human beings, they would be more likely to listen to? As Socrates describes in Plato’s Republic, the philosophic attempt to purge the city of injustice would force many human beings to give up things such as family and property that most individuals hold near and dear. But what if, Xenophon compels us to wonder, a reformer came along who, rather than waging an unwinnable war against humankind’s desires, instead attempted to harness those desires in the service of political reform? By appealing to man’s “lower” desires for things such as gain, security, and glory—in other words, to some of the very facets of man’s nature Machiavelli and Hobbes would later appeal to and urge their princes

⁵ Arnhart, Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls 52.

and sovereigns to accentuate— Xenophon’s Cyrus discovers a method whereby the *polis* will be far more amenable to reform than Plato or Aristotle ever thought possible. Xenophon’s Cyrus conquers the world by accentuating and harnessing some of the passions Machiavelli and Hobbes would themselves later stress. Yet, as this dissertation will argue, for all of Cyrus’s reforms, the world he leaves behind after his death is in many ways worse than the pre-imperial world into which he was born. More so than any of the ancients, Xenophon anticipates and thinks through many of the methods and “effectual truths” favored by Machiavelli and Hobbes. But in the end, he illustrates why, in his judgment, even if these more effectual or efficacious methods will be more likely to be embraced by the *polis*, they will not likely benefit it in the long run. This is the sense in which Xenophon is a realist and the sense in which his realism, more so than any of the ancients, anticipates and challenges early modern political philosophy.

Xenophon and Machiavelli

Modern political philosophy self-consciously conceived of and presented itself as a rejection of and superior alternative to classical political philosophy.⁶ A central criticism shared by many modern political philosophers is that the ancients were too idealistic or unrealistic in their expectations of political life.⁷ For example, as the founder of modern political philosophy, one of Machiavelli’s chief criticisms of the ancients is that, as Strauss puts it, “there is something fundamentally wrong with an

⁶ Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 40.

⁷ Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* 40.

approach to politics which culminates in a utopia, in the description of a best regime whose actualization is highly improbable.”⁸ Since like Machiavelli many of the moderns believed that the classical political philosophers suggested standards that asked too much of human beings and that actual cities could at best only partially approximate, many of the moderns attempted to fashion what they understood as more realistic conceptions of political life, ones that were more consistent with a more realistic or pessimistic view of human nature and that cities and nations could actually attain.⁹ By lowering the goals or standards of politics by moving away from the pursuit of the comparatively high-minded classical virtues in favor of “lower” virtues such as safety and security, modern political philosophers like Machiavelli aimed to show that man’s dependence on chance can be reduced.¹⁰

As Strauss has argued, no philosopher in antiquity anticipated and sympathetically thought through as many of what would become the key principles of modernity as Xenophon.¹¹ In this sense, Xenophon may with some justice be said to be the most modern of the ancient philosophers.

The fact that Xenophon anticipated so many facets of Machiavelli’s own political philosophy helps account for why Machiavelli thought so highly of him, and especially of his *Cyrus*. In the chapter in the *Prince* where Machiavelli writes about founders, he includes *Cyrus* on a rather exclusive list that also includes *Moses*,

⁸ Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* 41.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 15.

¹⁰ Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* 41.

¹¹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1963) 24-25. Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) 203-04. Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972) 57.

Romulus, and Theseus. Machiavelli states that these individuals are among “the most excellent,” and they are “those who have become princes by their own virtue and not by fortune.”¹² By exercising their virtue, Machiavelli argues, Cyrus and the other founders “ennobled” their fatherlands and made them “very happy.”¹³ For this reason, Machiavelli attributes “greatness of spirit” to Cyrus.¹⁴ Moreover, Machiavelli speaks highly not only of Cyrus, but also of Xenophon himself, suggesting that authors like Xenophon envisioned in their books the blueprint or pattern that would later be emulated by men such as Alexander, Caesar, and Scipio:

But, as to the exercise of the mind, a prince should read histories and consider in them the actions of excellent men, should see how they conducted themselves in wars, should examine the causes of their victories and losses, so as to be able to avoid the latter and imitate the former. Above all he should so as some excellent man has done in the past who found someone to imitate who had been praised and glorified before him, whose exploits and actions he always kept beside himself, as they say Alexander the Great imitated Achilles; Caesar, Alexander; Scipio, Cyrus. And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, how much in chastity, affability, humanity, and liberality Scipio conformed to what had been written of Cyrus by Xenophon.¹⁵

As all of this evidence suggests, clearly Machiavelli thought very highly of Xenophon and his Cyrus.

It is not surprising that Machiavelli thought so highly of Xenophon and his Cyrus when one considers how many similarities there are between the advice Machiavelli gives in the Prince and Discourses and Cyrus’s actions in the Cyropaedia. Let us consider six of the most important of these similarities.

¹² Prince, ch. 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Prince, ch. 26.

¹⁵ Prince, ch. 14.

First, both Machiavelli and Xenophon's Cyrus hold that human beings naturally possess the desire to acquire. Machiavelli writes:

It is a thing truly very natural and ordinary to desire to acquire; and when men who are able to do so do it, they are always praised or not blamed; but when they are not able and yet want to do so in every mode, here is the error and the blame.¹⁶

Cyrus agreed with Machiavelli's analysis that human beings by nature desire to acquire.

In his quest for empire, Cyrus enlists the services of citizens from a vast variety of nations by repeatedly appealing to their desires for material gain in order to motivate them to help enlarge his territory. While Cyrus's army is composed of soldiers from different nations and backgrounds, what they have in common and what unites them all is their desire for gain. In fact, in one of his most candid remarks in the Cyropaedia, Cyrus admits that he himself is not free of the natural desire for gain that, in his estimation, "the gods have put into the human soul" (8.2.20). By cutting through convention and tapping into man's natural longing for gain, Cyrus creates a multinational army whose common goal unites them in the shared quest for expansion.

Second, Machiavelli and Xenophon agree that princes who are victorious will always be praised, regardless of how unsavory their tactics. Machiavelli writes:

And with respect to all human actions, and especially those of princes where there is no judge to whom to appeal, one looks to the end. Let a prince then win and maintain the state — the means will always be judged honorable and will be praised by everyone; for the vulgar are always taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing, and in this world there is no one but the vulgar.¹⁷

¹⁶ Prince, ch. 3.

¹⁷ Prince, ch. 18.

Xenophon could not agree more. He notes at several points in the Cyropaedia that all of Cyrus's "softer" virtues were still celebrated into Xenophon's own time, yet the perceptive reader of the Cyropaedia cannot help but notice that all of Cyrus's "harder" or more Machiavellian virtues, such as using terror to strike fear into his subjects, were apparently forgotten by the barbarians (if they were ever noticed at all), because they were so mesmerized by Cyrus's successes:

As to his nature, even now Cyrus is still described in word and song by the barbarians as having been most beautiful in form and most benevolent in soul, most eager to learn, and most ambitious, with the result that he endured every labor and faced every risk for the sake of being praised. He is remembered, then, as having such a nature in body and soul. (1.2.1-1.2.2)

For Machiavelli and Xenophon, the actions of victors, however harsh, will always be praised, just as the actions of those who fail, however honorably, will always be blamed.

Third, Machiavelli and Xenophon agree that fraud is indispensable if the prince is to rule successfully. In the Prince, Machiavelli writes:

Nor does a prince ever lack legitimate causes to color his failure to observe faith. One could give infinite modern examples of this, and show how many peace treaties and promises have been rendered invalid and vain through the infidelity of princes; and the one who has known best how to use the fox has come out best. But it is necessary to know well how to color this nature, and to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are so simple and so obedient to present necessities that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived.¹⁸

Xenophon's Cyrus also recognizes the need to deceive his subjects, as I discuss at length in chapter four and as Machiavelli quite correctly observes in the Discourses:

¹⁸ Prince, ch. 18.

Xenophon in his life of Cyrus shows this necessity to deceive, considering that the first expedition that he has Cyrus make against the king of Armenia is full of fraud, and that he makes him seize his kingdom through deception and not through force. And he does not conclude otherwise from this action than that it is necessary for a prince who wishes to do great things to learn to deceive. Besides this, he makes him deceive Cyaxares, king of the Medes, his maternal uncle, in several modes; without which fraud he shows that Cyrus could not have attained that greatness he came to.¹⁹

Of all the princely virtues recommended by Machiavelli and Xenophon, honesty is nowhere to be found. To the contrary, both philosophers stress the need for princes to deceive their subjects.

Fourth, Machiavelli and Xenophon agree that while the prince can win the people's goodwill by providing for their security, his rule must always be backed by the threat of force. Machiavelli urges princes to secure their power by winning the goodwill of the people and providing for their security,²⁰ much like Cyrus rises to power based in part on his well-deserved reputation for benevolence and his ability to provide security for his subjects. Unlike Herodotus' far more unsavory and tyrannical depiction of Cyrus, Xenophon's Cyrus is in many ways a most generous and benevolent ruler.²¹ For example, aside from his own permanent honor, Cyrus is willing to share most everything with his subjects, including the spoil from his many victories. Throughout his life, when Cyrus saw that one of his companions desired something, he did his best to provide it. Not until the end of his life when Cyrus enslaves the Babylonians does he have to take a bodyguard to guard himself against possible

¹⁹ Discourses, II.13.

²⁰ Discourses, III.6; Prince, ch. 7, 19.

²¹ Rubin has it right when she notes that "Cyrus is not Stalin." Leslie G. Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," Interpretation 16.3 (1989): 408. Similarly, Johnson notes that "Cyrus is no blood-thirsty tyrant." David M. Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," Transactions of the American Philological Association 135.1 (2005): 202.

assassination. Up to this point, nearly all of his followers are loyal and adoring subjects. Similarly, Machiavelli writes:

I conclude, therefore, that a prince should take little account of conspiracies if the people show good will to him; but if they are hostile and bear hatred for him, he should fear everything and everyone. And well-ordered states and wise princes have thought out with all diligence how not to make the great desperate and how to satisfy the people and keep them content, because this is one of the most important matters that concern a prince.²²

Machiavelli and Xenophon's Cyrus further agree that the natural human desire to acquire also creates the desire for security, so as to be able to enjoy what one has gained. For Machiavelli, because the people "only care to live in security," they

are easily satisfied by institutions and laws that confirm at the same time the general security of the people and the power of the prince. When a prince does this, and the people see that by no chance he infringes the laws, they will in a very little while be content, and live in tranquility.²³

Similarly, throughout his life Cyrus encounters many individuals whose primary motivation for following him and submitting to his rule is their unease and fear that, without Cyrus to look after them, their possessions will not be secure and they themselves may potentially meet a very bad end at the hands of one of Cyrus's rivals, such as the harsh Assyrian crown-prince, who murders the Assyrian Gobryas' son, castrates the neighboring prince Gادات, and tries to come between the beautiful Panthea and her husband. The latter act must have been particularly ill-advised in Machiavelli's estimation, given his view that princes should abstain from "the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women."²⁴ While the Assyrian tries to come between Panthea and her husband, Cyrus, much to his comrades' amazement,

²² *Prince*, ch. 19.

²³ *Discourses*, I.16.

²⁴ *Prince*, ch. 17. See also *Discourses*, III.6.

prudently abstains from going near her. Still, for all of their emphasis on winning the people's goodwill and providing for their security, both Xenophon and Machiavelli suggest that successful rulers must instill fear in their subjects. Machiavelli argues that, while having the people's goodwill on his side helps the prince guard against conspiracies,²⁵ the love of subjects for a prince is insufficient to preserve his rule and must be supplemented with the threat of violent force. In fact, if the prince should have to choose between being loved and feared, Machiavelli leaves little doubt about which is preferable:

And men have less hesitation to offend one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation, which, because men are wicked, is broken at every opportunity for their own utility, but fear is held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you.²⁶

Similarly, for all of Xenophon's emphasis on the ways in which Cyrus secured his subjects' goodwill, Xenophon also notes that the threat of force was an omnipotent and vital aspect of Cyrus's achievements as ruler:

He ruled over these nations, even though they did not speak the same language as he, nor one nation the same as another; for all that, he was able to cover so vast a region with the fear which he inspired, that he struck all men with terror and no one tried to withstand him; and he was able to awaken in all so lively a desire to please him, that they always wished to be guided by his will. (1.1.5)

For Xenophon and Machiavelli, absent the threat of terror, no amount of ingratiation with the prince's subjects and provision for their safety will ever be sufficient to secure his safety and success.

²⁵ Prince, ch. 19.

²⁶ Prince, ch. 17.

Xenophon's narrative shows that without Cyrus's prodigious and rather Machiavellian talents and wisdom, the Persian Empire he founded likely would never have come to fruition. Yet Xenophon also illustrates that under Cyrus's rule many of his subjects became less virtuous, a trend that accelerated ever-downward after Cyrus's death. For all of Xenophon and Machiavelli's shared agreement, and for all of Machiavelli's admiration for Xenophon's Cyropaedia and its protagonist, the bleak ending of the Cyropaedia suggests that Xenophon may have been somewhat more ambivalent about Cyrus than Machiavelli. If that is correct, then the figure of Cyrus may serve as a uniquely valuable lens for drawing attention to some of the more foundational differences between Xenophon and Machiavelli.

Xenophon vs. Machiavelli

For all of the ways in which Xenophon and Machiavelli agree, there are nonetheless a few key disagreements between them. Most importantly, Machiavelli's judgment of Cyrus was more favorable than that of Xenophon, who was more ambivalent. Read carefully, I believe that the Cyropaedia presents what is in some ways a different kind of realism to that put forth by Machiavelli, one that doubts whether politics and morality can or should be easily severed and that is more skeptical about the ability of knowledge to improve political life in practice. For all of Machiavelli's criticisms of the ancients' starry-eyed idealism, from Xenophon's perspective, we might begin to wonder whether Machiavelli's realism is not, in some ways, more idealistic in its expectations from political life than much of what the ancients, least of all Xenophon, thought possible.

Xenophon emphasizes the need for knowledgeable rulers and examines the costs that accrue to nations whose leaders are not wise. For example, the young and brash Assyrian crown-prince wages an unnecessary offensive war against Cyrus's uncle Cyaxares and the Medes, but winds up getting killed as his soldiers are routed by Cyrus's forces. To take the most important example, the ignorance and incompetence of Cyrus's sons who were the heirs to the throne helps account for why the Persian Empire became less virtuous and why it began to break apart after Cyrus died. But Xenophon does not seem to have thought that the entire responsibility for the decline of the Persian Empire should be laid at the feet of Cyrus's sons. Instead, by taking care to avoid introducing or even mentioning Cyrus's sons until Cyrus's deathbed scene, Xenophon deftly invites the reader to wonder whether Cyrus, who was busy night and day administering his empire, might have neglected to give them a proper education. Such was the view of Cyrus put forth by the Athenian Stranger in Plato's Laws:

Now I divine that Cyrus, though in other respects a good general and a friend to his city, failed completely to grasp what is a correct education...It's likely that he spent his whole life, from youth on, preoccupied with military matters, and turned his children over to the women to be brought up. They brought the children up as though they were happy from the moment they were born, lacking nothing. The women allowed no one to oppose them in anything, on the grounds that they were endowed with happiness, and compelled everyone else to praise whatever the children said or did: that was the sort of children they raised...and the sons turned out as one would expect, after having been brought up without any restraint. When his children took over from Cyrus after his death, they were bursting with luxury and lack of restraint. First one killed the other because he couldn't bear to share equally; after this the one who remained, maddened by drunkenness and lack of education, had his rule destroyed. (694c-695b)

As Plato's Athenian Stranger divined and as Xenophon's narrative confirms, perhaps the deepest reason of all for the Persian Empire's decline is that Cyrus in truth had little

to teach his sons. Even had he tried to educate his sons, it is doubtful that he would have had much in the way of positive and constructive advice to teach them. Xenophon suggests as much in his depiction of Cyrus's final instructions to his sons on his deathbed, where he spends as much time vehemently urging them to refrain from all manner of actions that will (and eventually do) cause the decline of the empire as he does teaching them what they are actually supposed to do to actively maintain it. For Xenophon, perhaps the deepest reason for the collapse of the empire after Cyrus's death would seem to be that while Cyrus was incredibly adept at acquiring and securing power, he had little positive idea of what to actually do with it once he had secured it. For most of the Cyropaedia, Cyrus glows with an almost superhuman passionate intensity as country after country falls in line and he skillfully founds the empire. But once the empire is in place, he becomes an almost pitiable figure, prancing around in Asian finery and all but indistinguishable from a conventional and rather run-of-the-mill oriental despot.

The troubling conclusion of the Cyropaedia suggests Xenophon and Machiavelli differ in their judgments about what true virtue consists of and about what kind of virtues are beneficial to political life and which are apt to harm it. One reason why Cyrus had little to teach his sons beyond the importance of securing power and gain is that for him, as for Machiavelli, princely virtue should not be limited by any "higher" moral virtues inculcated by alternate ways of life such as religion that imprudently and naively claim to transcend political life. For Xenophon, the fact that Cyrus does not seem to possess any longing that cannot be satisfied within the realm of politics helps account for why in the end he becomes a despot, however benevolent. For Cyrus,

everything goes back to politics defined as the quest for power and honor. Even prayer and would-be philosophic conversation are for him little more than ways to get what he wants and to prove stronger than others. For Xenophon, a Machiavellian conception of virtue like that possessed by Cyrus, one that is not guided by any higher or transpolitical standard beyond the universal and innate human desires for safety, gain, and glory, can have spectacular short-term results that are, nonetheless, apt to be quite problematic and even repugnant in the end. For Xenophon, the Machiavellian position that virtue is “nothing but civic virtue, patriotism or devotion to collective selfishness,”²⁷ when pushed to its extremes by someone like Cyrus, leads to an empire that is secure, prosperous, and known throughout the world, yet strangely hollow and perhaps even destined to fail insofar as it lacks the classical or non-Machiavellian virtues. Part of what enables Cyrus to found the empire is his willingness to do away with many of the comparatively high-minded classical virtues in favor of promoting others that more closely resemble those championed by Machiavelli centuries later. But for Xenophon, while “lowering the bar” in this Machiavellian fashion enables Cyrus to found the empire, it also entails that in the end the empire Cyrus worked so hard to found is, to borrow a phrase from Strauss, not truly “fit for human habitation.”²⁸

If Xenophon and Machiavelli differ in their judgments about what kinds of virtue will be politically beneficial, then their respective views of what genuine wisdom consists of also differ in an important way. Machiavelli seems to reject the contemplative life as such; that is, the theoretical life completely severed from any

²⁷ Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 42.

²⁸ Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 40.

direct connection or involvement in political affairs.²⁹ In contrast, Xenophon disagrees with Machiavelli's view that the theoretical life in order to have merit must be actively involved with or influential in political affairs. Like Machiavelli, Xenophon was involved not only in politics or the life of action, but also in philosophy or the life of the mind. But to a lesser extent than Machiavelli, Xenophon would seem to have no illusions that human knowledge could ever solve the problems of politics in any satisfactory or lasting way. In his view, human knowledge is in the end no match for the savage arena of politics. Xenophon's Cyrus brings to bear a tremendous amount of knowledge as to how to produce obedience, security, and prosperity, yet for all of the radical transformations he enacts, the world he bequeaths to posterity is in many ways worse than the one he himself inherited. For Xenophon, if widespread improvement of the human condition is beyond the powers even of the most knowledgeable of leaders, there is still an alternate way of life open to the wise that is inherently pleasurable and noble, one whereby they can at least benefit a small circle of friends. The model for this way of life in Xenophon's eyes was his teacher Socrates, whose description of his practice of reading with his friends with an eye toward becoming virtuous led Xenophon to conclude that Socrates was "blessed":

"Accordingly...just as another is pleased by a good horse or a dog or a bird, so I myself am even more pleased by good friends, and if I possess something good I teach it, and I introduce them to others from whom, I believe, they will receive some benefit with a view to virtue. And reading collectively with my friends, I go through the treasures of the wise men of old which they wrote and left behind in their books; and if we see something good, we pick it out; and we hold that it is a great gain if we become friends with one another." When I heard those things, I formed the opinion that he himself was blessed and that he led those who

²⁹ Pangle and Ahrens Dorf, *Justice among Nations* 129.

heard him to gentlemanliness (nobility and goodness). (Memorabilia, 1.6.14)

Part of the debate between Machiavelli and Xenophon is that whereas Machiavelli has a good deal of admiration for Xenophon's Cyrus but wholly ignores his Socrates, Xenophon seems to have admired Socrates more than anyone else he wrote about,³⁰ including Cyrus, about whom, as this dissertation will argue, he is deeply ambivalent.

Whereas Machiavelli praises Cyrus insofar as through his deeds his "fatherland was ennobled and became most happy,"³¹ Xenophon's narrative suggests that there is more to the story than Machiavelli acknowledges. According to Machiavelli, Persia prospered under Cyrus and the Persians became truly happy. Machiavelli's judgment about Cyrus's successes should be seen in the larger context of his overall political philosophy:

As far as Machiavelli is concerned, whatever succeeds is to be praised, whatever fails blamed. He introduces no moral standards. Rather, he merely judges whether political leaders have selected the most efficient means for their chosen ends, and he assumes that the final end of political activity is acquiring and holding power.³²

Machiavelli apparently looked at the Persian Empire Cyrus created and marveled at his ability to acquire and hold power under his knowledgeable rule. To be sure, to some extent Xenophon also marveled at what Cyrus was able to accomplish. But perhaps the most important difference between the two philosophers' views of Cyrus is that Xenophon does not appear to have agreed with Machiavelli's assessment that under Cyrus's rule Persia was "ennobled" and "most happy." Rather, Xenophon's narrative

³⁰ Xenophon, Memorabilia, 4.8.11.

³¹ Prince, ch. 6.

³² Arnhart, Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls 135. See also Jürgen Habermas, Theory and Practice, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) 43.

suggests that many aspects of Cyrus's rule were quite ignoble and problematic. Furthermore, while some of Cyrus's subjects flourished and were happy under his rule, in Xenophon's estimation others felt a kind of sham contentment more in line with the pleasures experienced by children, slaves, and animals, rather than genuine human happiness on par with the "blessedness" Xenophon attributes to Socrates. Still others were positively unhappy, such as those Cyrus enslaved, those such as Araspas and Artabazus whose deepest longings were left unfulfilled, and those like Cyrus's uncle Cyaxares who begin to suspect that they were little more than pawns in Cyrus's game of worldwide domination.

What accounts for Xenophon and Machiavelli's different assessments of Cyrus would seem to be a fundamental difference of opinion about the relationship, if any, between politics and morality. As we have seen, Machiavelli denies that morality has any claim on political life. For him, politics and morality are separate spheres whose intersection is apt to be disastrous for the former. Success in gaining and securing power, irrespective of morality, is for him the name of the game, and in this Machiavellian sense there can be no doubt that Cyrus succeeds spectacularly. But for Xenophon, politics is not just about power. It is also inextricably and irrevocably tied to morality. Consider that Xenophon's teacher Socrates, who as we have seen he admires and even calls "blessed," distinguishes kingship from tyranny:

He believed that kingship and tyranny were both types of rule, but he held that they differed from each other. For he believed that rule over human beings who are willing and according to laws of the cities, was kingship, while rule over the unwilling and not according to laws, but however the ruler wished, was tyranny.³³

³³ Memorabilia, 4.6.12.

In contrast, in chapter one of the Prince Machiavelli classifies the different kinds of principalities in a wholly “value-neutral” way, stressing how they are acquired without any regard for morality. At perhaps the most foundational level, Xenophon and Machiavelli’s different views of Cyrus stem from the fact that on Machavelli’s decidedly amoral view of politics as the quest to gain and secure power, Cyrus is an unqualified success, whereas for Xenophon, while Cyrus is undoubtedly successful at securing power, his “successes” in the end prove somewhat hollow. For Xenophon, unlike Machiavelli, politics and morality are intimately connected. For him, the artificial attempt to sever them is apt to lead to a situation where political life is rendered stable, but bleak. Cyrus’s rule over the Persian Empire is nothing if not secure, but not in a way that could elicit anything more than ambivalence from an admirer of virtue like Xenophon. Life under Cyrus’s rule is stable, secure, and even prosperous, but for Xenophon it is in many ways hardly worth living.

One can also gauge the differences between Xenophon and Machiavelli regarding their divergent expectations about the extent to which knowledge can improve political life by comparing the respective conclusions of the Cyropaedia and the Prince. The latter ends with a chapter entitled “Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians,” which is in essence a passionate, rousing, and memorable call to arms, personally addressed to Lorenzo de’ Medici:

Thus, one should not let this opportunity pass, for Italy, after so much time, to see her redeemer. I cannot express with what love he would be received in all those provinces that have suffered from those floods from outside; with what thirst for revenge, with what obstinate faith, with what piety, with what tears. What doors would be closed to him? What peoples would deny him obedience? What envy would oppose him?

What Italian would deny him homage? This barbarian domination stinks to everyone. Then may your illustrious house take up this task with the spirit and hope in which just enterprises are taken up, so that under its emblem this fatherland may be ennobled and under its auspices the saying of Petrarch's may come true:

Virtue will take up arms against fury,
and make the battle short,
because the ancient valor in Italian hearts
is not yet dead. (ch. 26)

Through his rousing exhortation and call to arms, Machiavelli wants to expel the French, Swiss, German, and other invaders from his fatherland of Florence, which he sees as a first step toward reunifying Italy and restoring her to her former power and glory. But while even today the conclusion of the Prince has the power to get one's heart and blood racing, reading the conclusion of the Cyropaedia is more like taking a cold shower. In the final pages of the Cyropaedia, Xenophon extinguishes all of the reader's hopes and expectations regarding whether Cyrus's rule will alter the human condition in any lasting and beneficial way. Cyrus takes the world by storm in the course of his meteoric rise to power, which at times he seems to achieve almost effortlessly because of his prodigious talents. Yet when he dies, he leaves behind an empire populated with subjects who Xenophon judges on balance to be in many ways worse than they were prior to Cyrus's rise to power.

Both Xenophon and Machiavelli begin by proposing to explore the question of whether knowledge can change political life for the better. Machiavelli answers this question with a rousing affirmation, whereas Xenophon concludes with a somber denial. This difference illustrates the sense in which for Machiavelli and the realists who followed in his wake there is an underlying current of optimism about the ability of knowledge to have a beneficial impact on political life, one that from the Xenophon's

more somber and resigned point of view looks somewhat idealistic. If chapter 15 of the Prince is Machiavelli's most pointed criticism of the ancients' idealism, then the conclusion of the Cyropaedia may be read as Xenophon's critique of Machiavelli's.

Xenophon and Hobbes

Written in the seventeenth century almost 150 years after Machiavelli's Prince, Hobbes's Leviathan sought to build on many of Machiavelli's realist insights, even as he modified and rejected others. Hobbes and Machiavelli agree that political analysis must take its bearings from the way human beings actually are, as opposed to how one might wish for them to be.³⁴ This is to say that Hobbes and Machiavelli agree that traditional political philosophy, which took its bearings from the 'ideal' rather than the 'actual,' aimed too high.³⁵ But the facets of human nature that they single out as having special significance for political life are different. Whereas Machiavelli appeals to the most spirited and ambitious among the younger generation who have the audacity and cunning to found what he calls "new modes and orders," Hobbes casts a wider net and stresses the universal and comparatively egalitarian fear of violent death inherent in all human beings.³⁶ For Machiavelli, ambition or the desire for glory is the passion that when isolated, accentuated, and enlightened has the power to transform the world, whereas for Hobbes man's desire for glory is apt to exacerbate the problem of war and the key passion is therefore instead the fear of violent death.³⁷ For Hobbes, "not

³⁴ Prince, ch. 15, 17; Hobbes, Leviathan, Introduction; On the Citizen, Epistle dedicatory.

³⁵ Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 48.

³⁶ On the Citizen, Epistle dedicatory. Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 48.

³⁷ Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 48.

heroes...but naked, shivering poor devils were the founders of civilization.”³⁸

Machiavelli’s founders of civilization possess the kind of grandeur of vision that only a select few world-historic individuals have possessed and might someday, with Machiavelli’s guidance, rediscover, whereas Hobbes’s founders come to sight as naked and shivering, the very picture of weakness and frailty.

Hobbes begins the Leviathan with a thought experiment. He asks his readers to “searcheth hearts” and “Read thy self,” as he himself claims to have done, to see whether fear of violent death is their strongest passion, as Hobbes believes it is.³⁹ Hobbes wagers that if his readers carry out their search in an intellectually honest and probing way, they will discover that their strongest passion is fear, the same thing Hobbes himself found when he searched within himself. One of Hobbes’s starting points or “absolutely certain postulates of human nature” is therefore that “each man strives to avoid violent death as the supreme evil in nature.”⁴⁰ For Hobbes, fear is the low but solid foundation upon which he erects his entire political system, which consists chiefly in deducing in a quasi-mathematical way nineteen “laws of nature” that, if carefully adopted in practice, will constitute “the royal road to peace.”⁴¹ The most important of these laws is that individuals must agree to give up all of their power to an absolute sovereign, who is charged with maintaining the peace. Somewhat paradoxically, for Hobbes only by transferring all power to an absolute sovereign can subjects thereby ensure peace and security.

³⁸ Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? 48.

³⁹ Leviathan, Introduction.

⁴⁰ On the Citizen, Epistle dedicatory.

⁴¹ On the Citizen, Preface; Leviathan ch. 15.

Part of Hobbes's method involves reducing the function of political life to the single goal of promoting peace. In contrast to the ancient political philosophers, who held that the *polis* was indispensable for enabling human beings to cultivate several of the virtues such as justice and moderation that were thought to be part of man's natural *telos*, for Hobbes, far from it being the commonwealth's business to promote virtue, it is enough if the commonwealth ensures that human beings live together peaceably without killing one another. In fact, in Hobbes's judgment "virtues" that claim to somehow fulfill man's nature are in practice little more than thinly disguised vanity that, far from fostering peace, are apt to lead to war when different conceptions of virtue come into conflict. While Hobbes agrees with the ancients that there is indeed such a thing as human nature that provides the foundational purposes and goals of political life, he does not believe that man's nature points in any way toward any sort of natural *telos*, completion, or satisfaction. Instead, for Hobbes human nature points only to that which man desires to avoid—namely, death—while remaining silent about what man is supposed to actively seek, apart from his continued existence.

The absence of man's natural *telos* to which Hobbes points forms the connection between his conception of human nature and his political system. If human nature inclines man to avoid death but does not incline him to pursue any particular goal or set of goals, then the proper political order is one that secures life and provides for the peaceful pursuit of whatever goals an individual happens to want to pursue, provided that those goals do not disturb the peace or harm others in their pursuit of their own goals. This is one sense in which Hobbes can lay claim to being one of the founders of modern liberalism. While under Hobbes's sovereign individuals must give up a good

deal of their natural freedom in order to gain protection within civil society from other human beings, they also secure the freedom and right to decide for themselves what ends to peaceably pursue. Hobbes's conception of human nature and his political system thereby form a seamless combination, one that emphasized perhaps more strongly than any previous political philosopher what is today called 'the private sphere.'

More closely than any of the other ancients, Xenophon anticipates several key facets of Hobbes's realist political system. Like Hobbes, Xenophon focuses his attention on the problem of violent revolution, attempts to orient political life around man as he is rather than as he ought to be, and considers constructing political life on the proposition that life is nothing but the perpetual quest for power. Most importantly, Xenophon is the only ancient political philosopher to consider the possibility of world government, a recommendation that Hobbes does not stress explicitly but to which I shall argue his political philosophy seems to lead.

The common concern addressed by Xenophon's Cyropaedia and many of Hobbes's major writings is the problem of revolution. For both philosophers, violent rebellions and revolutions against authority are perhaps the most pernicious of all political problems. In the opening lines of the Cyropaedia, Xenophon writes:

This reflection once occurred to us: How many democracies have been brought down by those who wished the governing to be done in some way other than under a democracy; how many monarchies and how many oligarchies have been overthrown by the people; and how many who have tried to establish tyrannies have, some of them, been at once brought down completely, while others, if they have continued ruling for any time at all, are admired as wise and fortunate men. (1.1.1)

Whereas Plato and Aristotle carefully distinguish between democracy, monarchy, oligarchy, and tyranny, Xenophon stresses what these regimes have in common. In each case, the regime is not able to preserve itself against those who wish to overthrow it. Similarly, the propensity for human beings to rebel against authority deeply troubled Hobbes, who wrote that “the relations of citizens with each other” are such that “Man is a wolf to Man.”⁴² For Xenophon and Hobbes, conflict between human beings and violent struggles for authority are the normal state of affairs. On this shared view, history is almost destined to be an ongoing series of violent revolutions, interspersed with fleeing and fragile moments of tranquility.

Despite this bleak state of affairs, both Xenophon and Hobbes were led to consider whether human knowledge might be able to devise a way to overcome the problem of revolution. For Xenophon, the figure of Cyrus and especially the knowledge he possessed impressed on him that the problem of revolution might not be hopeless after all:

But when we reflected that there was Cyrus, a Persian, who acquired very many people, very many cities, and very many nations, all obedient to himself, we were thus compelled to change our mind to the view that ruling human beings does not belong among those tasks that are impossible, or even among those that are difficult, if one does it with knowledge. (1.1.3)

If for Xenophon the figure of Cyrus potentially represents the solution to the problem of revolution, for Hobbes, the solution is to be found in his own writings:

If the moral Philosophers had done their job with equal success, I do not know what greater contribution human industry could have made to human happiness. For if the patterns of human action were known with the same certainty as the relations of magnitude in figures, ambition and

⁴² On the Citizen, Epistle dedicatory.

greed, whose power rests on the false opinions of the common people about right and wrong would be disarmed, and the human race would enjoy such secure peace that (apart from conflicts over space as the population grew) it seems unlikely that it would ever have to fight again.⁴³

He continues:

For were the nature of human actions as distinctly known as the nature of *quantity* in geometrical figures, the strength of *avarice* and ambition, *which is sustained by the erroneous opinions of the vulgar touching the nature of RIGHT and WRONG*, would presently faint and languish; and mankind would enjoy such an immortal peace, that...there would hardly be left any pretence for war.⁴⁴

If for Xenophon Cyrus represents the promise of man's earthly salvation, then for Hobbes he himself has geometrically deduced the way to lasting peace. For both philosophers, the natural and seemingly insurmountable problem of revolution can be potentially be overcome by one who possesses the right kind of knowledge.

Along with their shared concern about revolution, Xenophon and Hobbes (like Machiavelli) attempt to orient political life around man as he is rather than as he ought to be. Indeed, this is one of the most characteristically early modern aspects of Hobbes's political philosophy and one of the ways that Xenophon's thought presciently anticipates modernity. For both philosophers, beginning from man as he is rather than as he ought to be means, above all else, harnessing and utilizing man's passions, rather than trying to fight against them or somehow overcome them. As Xenophon's narrative illustrates, Cyrus owed much of his success to his recognition that by appealing to and accentuating his subjects' deepest desires, rather than suppressing their passions, he could have them as loyal subjects and thereby avoid the problem of revolution that

⁴³ *On the Citizen*, Epistle dedicatory.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, author's emphasis.

haunted so many other rulers. Whereas the austere Persian republic of Cyrus's childhood and youth sought to educate and suppress the Persians' bodily passions and their desire for wealth, Cyrus accepts man as he is and repeatedly appeals to his subjects' appetitive and acquisitive desires in the course of rising to power and founding the empire. He also appeals to their desire for security, centralizing his power by exploiting the threat posed to the Persians by the Assyrians. The similarities between these aspects of Cyrus's rule and Hobbes's political philosophy are striking. Like Cyrus, Hobbes started from a realistic conception man's passions, rather than a more idealistic appraisal of how man ought to be. Since for Hobbes what truly moves man is his passions and not his reason, he believed a political science founded on desire would prove more dependable and solid than the classical teachings of Plato and Aristotle, which held that human beings ought to be governed by their reason rather than their lower desires. In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, for Hobbes desire directs human action and reason is its subordinate tool: "the thoughts are to the desires as scouts and spies, to range abroad and find the way to the things desired."⁴⁵ Given his view of the centrality of desire and instrumentality of reason, Hobbes wrote that his project sought to

put such principles down for a foundation, as passion not mistrusting, may not seek to displace; and afterward to build thereon the truth of cases in the law of nature (which hitherto have been built in the air) by degrees, till the whole be inexpugnable.⁴⁶

Moreover, similar to the way in which Cyrus appeals to his subjects' fears and desire for security, Hobbes also stresses that man's strongest passion —the one by which he

⁴⁵ Leviathan, ch. 8.

⁴⁶ Elements of Law, Epistle Dedicatory.

may effectively be governed and that points the way to peace— is the fear of violent death. The fact that more so than any of the ancients Xenophon carefully considered and thought through what it would mean for political life were a ruler to take his bearings from man as he is rather than as he ought to be, just as Machavelli and Hobbes would do centuries later in the course of enacting their philosophic revolutions, is an important part of what makes Xenophon the most modern of the ancients.

Through Cyrus, Xenophon also explores the proposition that life is in essence the perpetual quest for power, a view that later becomes a central teaching of Hobbes's political philosophy. Cyrus starts in the little republic of Persia and expands his empire ever-outward, as country after country falls under his control. Because Cyrus prudently makes a policy of generously sharing the spoils of victory with his subjects, they view him as a moderate and benevolent ruler. Only Cyrus's uncle Cyaxares, after being repeatedly duped and suckered by his nephew, realizes that Cyrus is in fact not as moderate as his outward actions would suggest and that his desire for ever more power and riches is in fact insatiable. Even Cyrus himself, once his empire is secure and in a rare moment of complete candor, admits:

Not even I myself...am capable of becoming superior to that by which the gods, when they put it into the souls of human beings, made us all poor: I too am insatiate for money, just as others are (8.2.20).

Cyrus's insatiate desire for power and security renders him a near perfect and prescient literary depiction of Hobbesian man. Like Cyrus, for Hobbes human life is in essence the “perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death, [because a man] cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present,

without the acquisition of more.⁴⁷ Similarly, and also like Cyrus, for Hobbes true delight consists less in pleasure and enjoying and more in striving and desiring. On this view, the most pleasant thing of all for man is the perpetual striving and attainment of ever further goals.⁴⁸

Insofar as Hobbes and Xenophon both emphasize the problem of violent revolution, attempt to orient political life around man as he is rather than as he ought to be, and view human life as “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death,” Xenophon’s Cyrus would seem to be ahead of his time, the embodiment a modern Hobbesian man living among the ancients.

Xenophon vs. Hobbes

Xenophon plays a valuable and unique role in the conversation between the ancients and the moderns insofar as, while he anticipates many aspects of Hobbes’s modern science of politics and begins from common premises, he nonetheless arrives at very different conclusions. Most importantly, Xenophon denies that world government under an absolute sovereign would constitute a satisfactory solution to the problem of revolution, which is to say that he denies the overall soundness of Hobbes’s main argument.

While Hobbes himself does not highlight or stress the need for universal or world government, it must also be said that most everything in his system logically entails the need for it. If for Hobbes “war is the greatest evil that can happen in this

⁴⁷ *Leviathan*, ch. 11.

⁴⁸ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952) 134.

life,⁴⁹ then his solution of creating discrete commonwealths under the rule of various absolute sovereigns must be in fact only a partial or temporary solution to the problem of war. A world in which there are several commonwealths, each of which is ruled by a different “absolute” sovereign, necessarily will be potentially and perpetually on the verge of war. The logical endgame to which one who follows Hobbes’s recommendation to seek peace at all costs must inevitably be lead is therefore world government, since this is the only way to do away with the possibility of wars and violent struggles for authority between sovereigns. As Devlin characterizes Hobbes’s thought:

One of the most important consequences of his doctrine is never explicitly drawn in his own writings: its perfect embodiment requires world government. As long as separate commonwealths exist the state of war remains actual between them...If art and convention are unequivocally superior to nature, that is, if commonwealth is always preferable to the state of nature, this state should be left completely behind. That can only happen when a world state is established.⁵⁰

Starting with many of Hobbes’s premises, Xenophon thinks them through to their latent but logical conclusion, which is world government under the rule of an absolute sovereign. Because Hobbes’s project implicitly points to universal world government as its goal, and because Xenophon is the only ancient philosopher who considers the advantages and disadvantages of a world state ruled by a single sovereign, it follows that Xenophon provides the basis for a classical critique of Hobbes that provides a unique supplement to the more familiar criticisms provided by Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, and others. Xenophon anticipates and thinks Hobbes’s project

⁴⁹ *Leviathan*, ch. 30.

⁵⁰ F. Roger Devlin, *Alexander Kojève and the Outcome of Modern Thought* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004) 40.

through to its logical conclusion of a world state, illustrating in the process why this ambitious theoretical solution to the problem of violent revolution is deeply problematic in practice. To put the matter slightly differently, in a way that reflects the influence Xenophon's teacher Socrates may have had on him, in contrast to Hobbes's solution to the problem of violent revolution, Xenophon's "solution" is deeply ironic.⁵¹ On this interpretation, the Cyropaedia challenges Hobbes's claim to have provided a superior political philosophy to that of "any other Philosopher hitherto."⁵² Xenophon considers the Hobbesian endgame of world government very carefully, only to in the end reject it as destined to lead not to man's improvement, but rather to his enslavement and degradation. In this light, for all of his emphasis on realism, Hobbes begins to look a bit idealistic in his lofty hopes for improving the human condition by securing lasting peace through a world state.

A comparison of the conclusion of the Leviathan with that of the Cyropaedia reveals the differences between Hobbes and Xenophon's respective assessments about the wisdom of transferring power to an omnipotent sovereign who in turn provides security and stability for his subjects. At the end of Leviathan, Hobbes fears that his arguments may never actually be put into practice by a sovereign, but he never questions the theoretical adequacy of his system, and he never doubts that it would successfully rid the world of war, if only a sovereign would implement it:

And now, considering how different this Doctrine is, from the Practise of the greatest part of the world, especially of these Western parts, that have received their Morall learning *Rome*, and *Athens*; and how much depth of

⁵¹ My view challenges Gera's reading of the Cyropaedia. Far from being an ironist, Gera finds Xenophon to be a didactic and occasionally tedious author who at times lectures his readers. Deborah Levine Gera, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 233, 84.

⁵² Leviathan, ch. 31; see also On the Citizen, Epistle dedicatory.

Morall Philosophy is required, in them that have the Administration of the Sovereign Power; I am at the point of believing this my labour, as uselesse, as the Common-wealth of *Plato*; For he also is of opinion that it is impossible for the disorders of State, and change of Governments by Civill Warre, ever to be taken away, till Sovereigns be Philosophers. But when I consider again, that the Science of Naturall Justice, is the onely Science necessary for Sovereigns, and their principall Ministers; and that they need not be charged with the Sciences Mathematicall, (as by *Plato* they are,) further, than by good Lawes to encourage men to the study of them; and that neither *Plato*, nor any other Philosopher hitherto, hath put into order, and sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theoremes of Morall doctrine, that men may learn thereby, both how to govern, and how to obey; I recover some hope, that one time or other, this writing of mine, may fall into the hands of a Sovereign, who will consider it himselfe, (for it is short, and I think clear,) without the help of any interested, or envious Interpreter; and by the exercise of entire Sovereignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice.⁵³

Hobbes's diagnosis of the problematic relationship between theory and practice is, as he himself acknowledges, very similar to Plato's, at least in one important respect. Both Hobbes and Plato believe that philosophy could improve political life, if only the *polis* or commonwealth would listen. For both philosophers, the problem is that while in theory knowledge has the potential to solve the most pressing political problems, in practice the *polis* or the commonwealth simply refuses to listen, much like a stubborn patient who refuses to take his doctor's advice. Given the fact that Athens executed Xenophon's beloved teacher Socrates, he too was no doubt also well aware not only that the *polis* is highly unlikely to listen to philosophy, but also that it will become violently angry with philosophers who persist in their attempts to interfere. But while Xenophon agrees with Hobbes and Plato that it is unlikely or wishful thinking that a commonwealth or *polis* would ever permit itself to be ruled by philosophic wisdom,

⁵³ *Leviathan*, ch. 31. Author's emphasis.

perhaps alone among the ancients, Xenophon wonders whether a certain kind of lower knowledge that fell short of philosophy might still be able to improve political life in practice, precisely because by falling short of philosophy, the *polis* might paradoxically be more inclined to listen to it. This is one of the ways in which Xenophon's political philosophy can lay claim to being distinctive and to playing a unique and important role in the conversation between and among the ancients and the moderns. But if Xenophon is willing to sympathetically consider the possibility that a lower or non-philosophic knowledge might be able to solve the problem of politics, I shall also argue that he ultimately rejects this view. For Xenophon, the problematic relationship between knowledge and political life forms an elegant if frustrating perfect circle: Philosophic wisdom would improve the *polis*, but the *polis* will not listen to it; conversely, the lower kind of knowledge and methods favored by Cyrus is embraced by the *polis*, but in many ways to its detriment. If, as this dissertation argues, Xenophon's Cyropaedia thus suggests the overall inability of human knowledge to solve in practice the problems of politics in any satisfactory way, then the book may provide a realistic and sobering lesson about what can and cannot be expected from political life, one that transcends Cyrus and every other individual and points to the very nature of politics. If at its deepest levels the Cyropaedia thus prompts us to grasp the limits of politics, then it needs to be reassessed in the literature not only as a work of classical realism, but perhaps also as a provocative alternative to both Machiavelli and Hobbes's early modern realism, which, from the point of view of Xenophon, may even begin to look a bit idealistic in its hopes and expectations from political life.

While Cyrus solves the problem of revolution in practice, many of his subjects embrace hedonism and moral decadence at the conclusion of the Cyropaedia. Given Xenophon's claim that Cyrus solved the problem of revolution, how are we to account for the bleak ending of the Cyropaedia? To put the same question a bit differently, why is Xenophon apparently less optimistic about the ability of knowledge to adequately solve in practice the problems of political life at the conclusion of the Cyropaedia than Hobbes is at the conclusion of his Leviathan?

As I will endeavor to show in this dissertation, the bleak conclusion of the Cyropaedia may be accounted for by noting that while Cyrus did solve the problem of revolution, he did so by systematically deceiving his subjects and reducing many of them to women, children, slaves, and, in the end, animals. By deftly making use of these morally dubious yet highly effective methods, Cyrus renders his subjects docile and compliant. While Cyrus creates a predominantly peaceful, stable, and prosperous empire, his subjects pay a very high cost—in some cases, their very humanity—for the privileges that Cyrus bestows. Cyrus masterfully solves the problem of revolution and instability, but insofar as his empire made men into beasts, it was more stable than a friend of virtue such as Xenophon might have wished.

The Potential Contribution of This Dissertation to the Literature

The central claim of this dissertation is that the morally dubious yet highly effective methods Cyrus employs to solve the problem of revolution constitute a unique form of realism among the classical political philosophers, one that anticipates as well

as challenges the foundations of early modern political philosophy and modernity generally. I believe that this thesis challenges the existing literature in several ways.

First, while many scholars recognize a foundational and important form of realism among the ancient political philosophers, they cite Thucydides as the great realist among the ancients, not Xenophon.⁵⁴ This tendency among scholars to cite Thucydides as the classical exemplar of realism no doubt has much to do with Hobbes's fascination with Thucydides' realism, which culminated in his translation of the latter's History of the Peloponnesian War.⁵⁵

While Hobbes favored Thucydides among the Greeks, Machiavelli, the other great early modern realist political philosopher, favored Xenophon. In fact, Xenophon would seem to be the only classical political philosopher that Machiavelli even partially exempts from his revolutionary and wholesale criticism of the ancient and medieval philosophers. The fact that Machiavelli exempted Xenophon from many of his criticisms of the ancients, and even praised Xenophon and his Cyrus, suggests the possibility that there may be realist elements in Xenophon's writings that Machiavelli grasped but that contemporary scholars have tended to overlook.

Second, my contention that the Cyropaedia is in many ways a foundational work of realism challenges the dominant scholarly view of the Cyropaedia, which holds that, far from being a work of realism, it is in fact a kind of idealized romance. Nadon notes

⁵⁴ Steven Forde, "International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism," International Studies Quarterly 39.2 (1995). Steven Forde, "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli," The Journal of Politics 54.2 (1992). Michael T. Clark, "Realism Ancient and Modern: Thucydides and International Relations," PS: Political Science and Politics 26.3 (1993).

⁵⁵ On the relationship between Hobbes and Thucydides, see Peter J. Ahrens Dorf, "The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Anarchy," The American Political Science Review 94.3 (2000). Laurie M. Johnson, Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993). Richard Schlatter, "Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides," Journal of the History of Ideas 6.3 (1945).

that the Cyropaedia is widely held to be a founding document in the genre of ‘romance novels,’ a genre he notes “is usually associated with a radical deprecation of the political sphere of life.”⁵⁶ While there certainly are romantic elements in the Cyropaedia, especially in one of the story’s most important subplots involving the love between Panthea and Abradatas, readings that focus on the novel’s romantic motifs to the exclusion of its political themes distort the Cyropaedia, which I shall argue is at its core a profoundly political book.

While I agree that the Cyropaedia is in part a romance, on the reading I propose, a rather cunning political realism lies behind the romantic and often charming surface of Xenophon’s narrative. As I shall argue, Cyrus employs deception and fraud at every turn in order to gain power. Moreover, he infantilizes his subjects by treating them as women, children, and slaves, and even strips them of their very humanity by reducing them to animals. If Xenophon glosses over the more realistic elements of Cyrus’s rise to power in favor of stressing the seemingly benign effortless with which he gains power, this may be because he does not want to encourage too explicitly the sort of morally dubious actions his narrative quietly admits to be necessary in order to secure absolute power and solve the problem of revolution. If that is correct, then one of the things that separates Xenophon from Machiavelli —or perhaps one reason why despite his admiration for Xenophon, Machiavelli could not completely endorse him— is the fact that when Xenophon points to the necessity of Cyrus’s most disconcerting actions, he does so rather quietly and without emphasis, whereas when Machiavelli points to the

⁵⁶ Christopher Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 152.

need for similar actions, he does so blatantly and even seems to revel in stressing the point.⁵⁷

Third, this dissertation argues that, contrary to the view of many scholars, Cyrus does not represent and should not be viewed as Xenophon's ideal or perfect ruler, nor should the empire be viewed as Xenophon's utopia.⁵⁸ One of the most prevalent scholarly interpretations of the *Cyropaedia* dates back to Cicero and claims that Cyrus represents Xenophon's ideal or perfect ruler, one who was intended to be a standard or exemplary model for future rulers.⁵⁹ In contrast to this view, the view of another group of scholars—composed primarily of Leo Strauss' students and the students of his students—takes its bearings from the criticisms of Cyrus put forth by the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* (694c-695b) and holds that however impressed Xenophon was with Cyrus, he also harbored reservations about Cyrus and his rule.⁶⁰ In this

⁵⁷ See especially *Prince*, ch. 7, 8, 25.

⁵⁸ Gera argues that the *Cyropaedia* is a utopian work. Deborah Levine Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 240.

⁵⁹ Godfried Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000) 180. Sarah Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 267. Pericles Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 209, 231. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 1, 7, 11, 59, 98, 112, 22, 24, 280, 85, 86. Bodil Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1989) 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 62, 65, 67, 85, 89, 92, 99, 112, 17, 18, 28, 35, 39, 40, 45, 47, 70, 71, 74, 80, 92, 202, 06, 07, 08, 10, 12, 15, 18, 27, 33, 34, 38. Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction* xv, 11, 37, 39, 62, 63, 68, 76-77, 82, 177, 207, 09, 33. W.E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 53. Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1970) 133. Neal Wood, "Xenophon's Theory of Leadership," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 25 (1964): 64. Werner W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) 162. Phillip A. Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the *Cyropaedia*," *The American Journal of Philology* 112.4 (1991): 467-68.

⁶⁰ Christopher Whidden, "Cyrus' ss Persian Education in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *The Review of Politics* 69.4 (2007): 539. Christopher Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 34.2 (2007): 155. Gary D. Glenn, "Prudence in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*," *Tempered Strength: Studies in the Nature and Scope of Prudential Leadership*, ed. Ethan Fishman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002) 21. Robert J. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 2002, 178, 87, 97-98. Wayne Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," *Xenophon: The Education of Cyrus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 11, 12, 16, 17, 18. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and*

dissertation, I examine and weigh in on this controversy. The dissertation as a whole sides with the Straussian view. In this sense, there is nothing particularly novel in my contention that Xenophon was highly ambivalent and at times even critical of Cyrus. However, I think that the specific arguments I produce as to *why* Xenophon was ambivalent about Cyrus do bring something new to the table and make a novel contribution to the literature. Specifically, this dissertation argues that Xenophon is ambivalent about Cyrus because while Cyrus methodically solves the problem of revolution, he does so by reducing his subjects to women, children, slaves, and animals. I think the fact that Cyrus strips many of his subjects of their humanity may well be the key to understanding the Cyropaedia. Xenophon suggests in his introduction to the Cyropaedia that the way to solve the problem of revolution is for rulers to pattern their rule on the model of herdsmen:

[W]e reflected also that cattlemen and horsemen are the rulers of cattle and horses, and that all those called keepers of animals could plausibly be believed to be the rulers of the animals in their charge. We thought we saw all these herds more willing to obey their keepers than are human beings their rulers; for the herds go wherever their keepers direct them, they feed on whatever land their keepers drive them to, and they abstain from whatever lands their keepers turn them from. And as for such profits as arise from them, these they allow their keepers to use in whatever way they themselves wish. Nor have we ever perceived a herd uniting against its keeper, either so as not to obey or so as not to allow him to use the profits, but herds are more harsh toward all others than they are toward those who both rule over and benefit from them; on the

Empire in the Cyropaedia 146, 63, 76, 79. Yun Lee Too, "Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Disfiguring the Pedagogical State," Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning, eds. Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 288, 301. Gary D. Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," Law and Philosophy, eds. John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992) 159. Strauss, On Tyranny 181. Leslie G. Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," Interpretation 16.3 (1989): 392. Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon," History of Political Philosophy, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 102. Waller Randy Newell, "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981, 129. Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1969, 89, 124-25, 31.

other hand, human beings unite against none more than against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them.

Now when we considered these things, we inclined to this judgment about them: It is easier, given his nature, for a human being to rule all the other kinds of animals than to rule human beings (1.1.2-1.1.3).

If the problem of rule is that human beings do not wish to be ruled, and if animals do not resist man's efforts to rule them, then one solution to the problem of revolution is to make men into beasts. The fact that Cyrus transforms men into beasts constitutes one of the most important reasons why Xenophon cannot truly be said to have endorsed him.

Brief Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter one focuses on Cyrus's twofold Persian education, which consisted of his conventional and heterodox educations. The former emphasized the rule of law, while the latter stressed the need for absolute rule by a single leader. In order to evaluate Cyrus's revolution, one must grasp the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Persian regime that educated him, especially in light of the impressive but decadent empire he founds. In the end, the Cyropaedia comes to sight as a deeply ironic work, because despite Cyrus's prodigious wisdom, the empire he founded was at best a mixed blessing. In this sense, Xenophon's own knowledge rivals and supercedes that of Cyrus, insofar as Xenophon realized that wisdom is no match for the chaotic world of politics, a sobering and realistic outlook still applicable today.

Chapter two focuses on Cyrus's time as a boy and a youth in Media, and chapter three discusses his extended conversation with his father about the kingly art of rule. After some discussion of the despotic nature of the Median regime and the sense in which Cyrus's natural traits come to sight much more visibly while he is in Media, I

provide examinations of his Median and kingly educations, respectively. Throughout my discussion, I examine not only what Cyrus learns in theory from his Median and kingly educations, but also how he utilizes them in practice in the course of founding and governing his empire. I conclude chapter three with a few observations about Xenophon's place in the history of political philosophy and about the ways in which he anticipates many of Machiavelli's modern criticisms of ancient political philosophy.

In chapter four I argue that Cyrus rises to power in large measure because of his ability to deceive his subjects. In his analysis of the difficulty of ruling, Xenophon notes that "human beings unite against none more than against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them" (1.1.2). As Xenophon presents the problem, part of the difficulty inherent to rule is that individuals typically perceive that those who wish to rule do in fact seek their own personal aggrandizement at the expense of their subjects. But if, as Xenophon suggests, human beings resist being ruled by anyone they perceive trying to rule over them, then one way for an aspiring ruler to avoid this seemingly inevitable resistance would be to disguise his true intentions. As the Cyropaedia illustrates, one way for a potential ruler to avoid others' resistance is to deceive them, which explains why, as this chapter endeavors to show, along the way in his meteoric rise to power Cyrus of necessity deceives both friend and foe alike at every turn.

Chapter five argues that reading the Cyropaedia through an Aristotelian lens provides a useful means by which to understand Xenophon's analysis of Cyrus's empire. On an Aristotelian reading, a crucial facet of Cyrus's knowledge is his view that the household provides an appropriate model by which to found and govern an

empire. By incorporating many nations into what I call his ‘imperial household,’ Cyrus finds a way to help avoid what Xenophon sees as the fundamental problem of rule, which is that human beings do not wish to be ruled by others and eventually revolt against their rulers. But in contrast to all previous rulers known to Xenophon, Cyrus secures his subjects’ obedience. He does so in part by treating them as women, children, and slaves, each of whom looks to him as the head of the household. Under Cyrus the perpetual political revolutions Xenophon describes thus become a thing of the past, at least so long as Cyrus is alive to preside over his imperial household. But Xenophon also suggests that order, peace, and security in the empire come at a cost — in order to keep his subjects in line, Cyrus as leader must distort and do violence to their humanity. Read carefully, the Cyropaedia thus provides a thoughtful critique of imperial ambition and empire.

The conclusion of this dissertation argues that another important if unsettling part of Cyrus’s knowledge is his ability to strip his subjects of their humanity and make them into beasts. I give an account of the various ways in which Cyrus conceives of his subjects as animals and suggest that the models and images of hares, hounds, cattle, and bees play particularly important roles in the Cyropaedia. On this analysis, in forming the empire Cyrus sees his soldiers as dogs and his enemies as hares, while the empire under his rule alternately resembles a herd of cattle and a beehive, with Cyrus as the herdsman and the lead bee. My argument that Cyrus reduces many of his subjects to animals helps explain his unprecedented successes in making others submit to his rule and creating an empire the sheer size of which had never been seen. If, as Xenophon states in his prologue to the Cyropaedia, herds are “more willing to obey their keepers

than are human beings their rulers,” then it would seem to follow that the secret to making humans obey is to make them into animals that will be wholly dependent on their keeper (1.1.2). Nonetheless, for all of Cyrus’s stunning achievements, in the course of showing how he frequently conceived of his fellow man as brutes that were less than human, Xenophon compels his readers to wonder whether Cyrus’s remarkably effective methods were in fact good and thereby helps cast some light on the bleak and notoriously enigmatic conclusion of the book.

Chapter 1

THE ACCOUNT OF PERSIA AND CYRUS'S PERSIAN EDUCATION

In what scholars aptly have characterized as the first novel in European literature,⁶¹ Xenophon's Cyropaedia is a fictionalized biographical account of the life of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. Long recognized as an important author by many political philosophers throughout the ages, political theorists are once again turning to Xenophon and especially his Cyropaedia as an important work in ancient political theory.⁶² Given the many declarations in both scholarly and popular works as well as in the media about the U.S. "empire" of spreading freedom and democracy, political theorists have turned anew in recent years to ancient accounts of the growth and consequences of empire, including especially Persia, Athens, and Rome. To take only the most relevant example, Tuplin argues that Xenophon in his Hellenica

⁶¹ Bodil Due, The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1989) 10. Phillip A. Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the Cyropaedia," The American Journal of Philology 112.4 (1991): 461.

⁶² On Xenophon's influence on philosophers and scholars throughout the ages, see Christopher Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 3. Christopher Tuplin, The Failings of Empire: A Reading of Xenophon. Hellenica 2.3.11-7.5.27 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993) 21-28. J.K. Anderson, Xenophon (Bristol: Duckworth, 1974) 1-8. Karl Munscher, "Xenophon in Der Griechisch-Romischen Literatur," Philologus 13 (1920): 24. James Tatum, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 3-35. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Cyrus in Italy: From Dante to Machiavelli," Archaemenid History, V: The Roots of European Tradition, eds. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers (Leiden: Netherlands instituut voor het nabije oosten, 1990) 31-52. According to Bartlett, "the writings of Xenophon are once again attracting serious scholarly study" and a "rehabilitation of Xenophon" is currently underway. Robert C. Bartlett, "Editor's Introduction," Xenophon: The Shorter Socratic Writings, ed. Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 1. According to the 1996 edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary, "The Cyropaedia has been found dull in modern times. But a revival of interest is underway, and it is arguably a litmus-test for a true appreciation of Xenophon in general." Quoted in Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 4, n. 16.

is highly critical of empire.⁶³ This essay attempts to build on these recent analyses and to shed new light on Xenophon and his contemporary relevance by arguing that the Cyropaedia also provides a thoughtful critique of empire and imperial ambition. In contrast to interpretations that the Cyropaedia shows that Xenophon “has no reservations about the concept of an empire or the desirability of acquiring imperial power,”⁶⁴ that he offered the Cyropaedia as a “manifesto of Hellenic imperialism,”⁶⁵ or that he meant it as a “utopian vision” of “an imperial state,”⁶⁶ we shall suggest that Xenophon’s Cyropaedia is a work of irony and that its author was very skeptical and critical of empire. To the extent that contemporary U.S. foreign policy uses nation or empire-building as a tool to promote its objectives, Xenophon’s cautionary critique of empire in the Cyropaedia is especially important and timely. If he is correct, we ought to be very skeptical regarding the extent to which the international arena can be made amenable to reason, knowledge, and order. For Xenophon, the ambitious and well-laid plans of even the most virtuous and knowledgeable of leaders are no match for the chaotic world of politics.

In his explanation of why he decided to focus on the life of Cyrus and write the Cyropaedia, Xenophon wrote:

So on the grounds that this man (*anēr*) was worthy of wonder (*thaumazō*) we examined who he was by birth, what his nature (*phusis*) was, and with what education (*paidia*) he was brought up, such that he so excelled in ruling human

⁶³ Tuplin, The Failings of Empire: A Reading of Xenophon. *Hellenica* 2.3.11-7.5.27.

⁶⁴ Due, The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods 219.

⁶⁵ Espinas, quoted in Jean Luccioni, Le Idées Politiques Et Sociales De Xénophon (Paris: Ophrys, 1949) 304. Also quoted in Joel Farber, "The Cyropaedia and Hellenistic Kingship," American Journal of Philology 100 (1979): 497.

⁶⁶ Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the Cyropaedia," 468.

beings (*anthrōpoi*). Whatever we have learned, therefore, and think we have perceived about him, we shall try to relate.⁶⁷ (1.1.6)

Prior to his study of Cyrus, Xenophon states that he believed that ruling human beings was impossible or at least very difficult (1.1.3). But after considering Cyrus, Xenophon apparently changed his mind and decided that ruling human beings need not be impossible or even difficult, provided that one rules with knowledge (*epistamenōs*) (1.1.3). In Cyrus Xenophon thus thought that he had glimpsed the true nature of rule (*archē*) over human beings.⁶⁸

The manner in which Xenophon presents Cyrus's knowledge is somewhat curious, given that he did not disclose it by writing it down systematically in the form of a treatise. Instead, Xenophon rather indirectly and dialectically reveals Cyrus's knowledge by starting with Cyrus's boyhood and narrating the story and events of his life, from which the reader must often draw his or her own conclusions. Apparently, Xenophon judged that Cyrus's knowledge could not or perhaps should not be stated in the form of a treatise. Why Xenophon may have thought this is not entirely clear. But one could understand his reluctance to be too forthcoming in his own name about the

⁶⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all citations refer the book, chapter, and section of the *Cyropaedia* to which I refer. In most cases, I have followed the translations found in Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). In some cases, I have provided my own translations.

In the opening paragraphs, Xenophon uses the plural pronouns "we" and "us." To whom exactly the pronouns refer is not specified, though Xenophon clearly counts himself among the group, whose activities include reflection, thought, observation, perception, consideration, judgment, examination, learning, and wonder. Moreover, the subjects that are of interest to this group — regimes, households, differences and similarities between humans and animals, different kinds of rule (*archē*), nature (*phusis*), knowledge (*epistēmē*), desire (*erōs*), and education (*paidia*) — are all common Socratic themes in both the Platonic dialogues and Xenophon's Socratic writings. Insofar as all of these activities and subjects are characteristic of Socrates' conversations with his companions, it seems likely we are to infer that the 'we' and 'us' to whom Xenophon refers designates 'we students of Socrates.' If that is correct, then Xenophon's conversations with Socrates motivated him to write the *Cyropaedia*.

⁶⁸ For Xenophon, as for many of the ancients, the consideration of an individual human exemplar can point one toward the true character or nature of those virtues that the individual exemplifies.

specific contents of Cyrus's knowledge if Cyrus's knowledge of how to rule turns out, as we will suggest, not entirely to be good for human beings. Moreover, Xenophon also seems to be interested in revealing how Cyrus attained or came by his knowledge, which suggests that he may have thought that a proper account of the nature of Cyrus's knowledge could not be separated from a genealogical or genetic account of how Cyrus's knowledge came into being. Though Cyrus picks up bits and pieces of his knowledge from various conversations he has throughout the book,⁶⁹ Xenophon's account of Cyrus's education comes primarily in two main stages: In Persia (1.2.2-1.3.1) and in Media (1.3.1-1.4.28).

Whereas all commentators known to me refer to Cyrus's Persian education as if it were a single, unified, and cohesive program, this essay suggests that in fact his Persian education was not one thing, but rather two — consisting of his traditional and heterodox educations, respectively. Because Cyrus's Persian education is thus much more complex than has commonly been recognized, this essay of necessity limits itself to providing a full account of both parts of his Persian education and shows how each lays the groundwork and charts the course for his unprecedented achievements throughout his life. As I shall try to show, Xenophon thought that the Persian regime was of great importance for understanding Cyrus and his knowledge, because his twofold Persian education reflected and was a theoretically uneasy but strangely effective product of Persia's strengths and weaknesses. What were these strengths and weaknesses? How did Cyrus's twofold Persian education help prepare the way for his

⁶⁹ To take the most important example, Cyrus learns a great deal about ruling in an extended talk he has with his father (1.6.2-1.6.46). In another example, Cyrus learns the value of fear from a conversation with the Armenian Tigranes (3.1.23).

imperial revolution? And what was Xenophon's judgment of the empire that Cyrus used his knowledge to found, especially compared with the decent if unspectacular Persian regime that preceded it? To grasp not only Cyrus's knowledge, but also Xenophon's own judgment or view of that knowledge—which is to say, to understand the heart of the Cyropaedia—one must begin by exploring the connections between Cyrus's Persian educations and the character of the Persian regime.

The Character of the Persian Regime

The first regime that Xenophon describes in the Cyropaedia is the republic of Persia (1.2.2-1.3.1). He states that he was interested in Persia because he believed that a consideration of the Persian regime helped reveal the education Cyrus received there (1.1.6, 1.2.2), which in turn shed light on the overall content and nature of Cyrus's knowledge (1.1.6). We might also add that since the Persian educational curriculum sought to promote law-abidingness (1.2.2, 1.3.18), it follows that Cyrus's traditional Persian education cannot be separated from an analysis of the Persian regime, which was the source of the laws that Cyrus was taught to follow.⁷⁰

The first observation Xenophon makes concerning Persia is that both its laws and educational system aimed to promote the common good (1.2.2-3). Cyrus and the other Persian children were not only prohibited from acting in such a way as to harm the common good, but also even from so much as desiring anything shameful that would

⁷⁰ For the Greeks, the regime (*politeia*) designates the class of citizens who rule and the way in which they direct the city toward a certain end (*telos*) through its laws (*nomoi*). According to Strauss, the *politeia* is thus more fundamental than any particular law and is the source of all laws. Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953) 136. On Xenophon's view of the relationship between regimes and their laws, see also Memorabilia, 1.2.40-46.

promote their own selfish interests over the good of others (1.2.2-3). In contrast to most modern liberal regimes, the Persian regime thus emphasized what is today called the “public” or “common,” as distinct from the “private” or “individual.” For example, instead of giving some of their most promising children who attended the schools of justice the freedom to, as we might say, “do their own thing,” the Persians required them to adhere to a rigorous common morality that was strictly enforced and equally binding on all of them (1.2.6-8). Xenophon stylistically reinforces the Persians’ devotion to the common good and their public-spirited character by never mentioning Cyrus or any other Persian individual by name in his discussion of Persia.⁷¹

The Persians created several institutions that sought to promote the common good, but that also make their regime difficult to classify. One of the most important of these was the Free Square, which was where the king’s palace and the other government buildings were located (1.2.3). The Persians did not permit merchants in the Free Square, lest “their cries and their vulgarity” mix with “the good order of the educated” (1.2.3). This is the first indication Xenophon provides that the Persian education that sought to promote the common good was not actually a common education, since groups such as merchants did not receive it. While the Persians did not in theory disqualify anyone from receiving the systematic moral education that was prerequisite for ruling, Xenophon notes that in practice those who were forced to earn a living did not have time for the lengthy education in the schools of justice (1.2.15). If in theory Persia was a monarchic republic with equality under the law, such that even the king

⁷¹ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 43.

was bound as an equal under the laws (1.3.18),⁷² Xenophon suggests that in practice Persia was in some ways a de facto oligarchy, in the sense of rule by the wealthy few.⁷³ Instead of an unmixed regime, Xenophon's Persian regime was in truth a mixed regime, with monarchic, republican, and oligarchic elements.

Cyrus's Traditional Persian Education

Having sketched the backdrop of the Persian regime, we turn to a consideration of those elements of Cyrus's traditional Persian education that stayed with him his entire life and that helped him establish and maintain his empire. As a boy, Cyrus was taught moderation (*sōphrosunē*), which the Persian boys learned primarily by watching the adults behaving moderately and mimicking them (1.2.8). According to Xenophon, Cyrus saw *sōphrosunē* and *hubris*, which means extreme arrogance or insolence, as something like opposites. The distinction between *sōphrosunē* and *hubris* was a common theme among many Greek authors and provides a useful lens through which to view much (though not all) of Cyrus's behavior. For example, the hubristic Athenians who Thucydides describes in his History of the Peloponnesian War and who decided to brutally slaughter the Melians stand in stark contrast to Cyrus's comparatively moderate

⁷² The fact that Cambyses, the king of Persia, considered himself as equally bound by the law as a commoner suggested to Xenophon that he was a king rather than a tyrant. On the distinction between kingship and tyranny, see Memorabilia 4.6.12. Cambyses' willingness to be ruled by the law should be contrasted with Cyrus's grandfather Astyages, the ruler of Media, who was, according to his own daughter, tyrant (*tyrannos*) and master (*despotēs*) of everything (1.3.18).

⁷³ I agree with Strauss' argument that "The laws regarding a *politeia* may be deceptive, unintentionally and even intentionally, as to the true character of the *politeia*." Strauss, Natural Right and History 136.

behavior. Though Cyrus could easily have killed any number of individuals he captured, he typically spared the lives of those he conquered (3.1.30-37, 7.2.9-29). For Xenophon, such generosity on Cyrus's part was a sign of his moderation, one that should be contrasted with the comparatively barbaric acts of mass murder the Athenians committed against the Melians.⁷⁴ Moreover, Cyrus's moderation in turn proved highly beneficial to his rule. Cyrus made a habit of displaying his moderation, believing that when his subjects saw how moderate he behaved, even though he could have behaved insolently with impunity, they would be less willing to be openly impudent themselves (8.1.30). His moderation helped him gain a reputation for being benevolent, such that subjects who might have otherwise revolted against a less moderate ruler were content to be ruled by him. Nearly every conquered foe that Cyrus moderately and prudently spared became his ally, such that by the end of his life there were very few enemies left for him to conquer (1.1.3-5).

Cyrus's Persian teachers also encouraged continence (*enkrateia*), especially regarding food and drink (1.2.8). The Persian education in continence aimed to produce citizen-soldiers who took care of their bodies and who could survive with precious little food in times of war or hardship (1.2.11). This regimen made a lasting impression on Cyrus, as evidenced by the fact that he required both himself as ruler and his elites in the Persian Empire to always exercise before eating (1.2.16, 8.1.38, 8.6.12). The continence instilled in Cyrus as a boy also proved critical to his ability to rule over his subjects, particularly over those members of the lower class in the empire that he made

⁷⁴ Rubin makes the point nicely, suggesting a more modern contrast by remarking that "Cyrus is not Stalin." Leslie G. Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 16.3 (1989): 408. Similarly, Johnson notes that "Cyrus is no blood-thirsty tyrant." David M. Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 135.1 (2005): 202.

no attempt to educate or instruct. Because of his rigid continence with regard to things like food and drink that were highly coveted by many of his subjects, Cyrus was able to cater to others' desires for things that he himself did not want. As Xenophon notes, whereas typically those who possess absolute power rule with an eye toward self-aggrandizement (1.3.18, 1.4.26), especially regarding things such as food and drink, Cyrus's continence enabled him to cater to others' incontinent desires and in so doing simultaneously satisfy his own desire for honor, which his subjects gladly granted him as their benefactor.

In the course of establishing and administering over the empire, Cyrus liberally borrowed many other important facets of his traditional Persian education. For example, just as the Persians held public-spirited sporting events that promoted their citizens' courage and discipline, Cyrus also regularly held contests designed to encourage excellence in the virtues conducive to victory in war (1.2.12, 7.5.79, 8.1.38-39). Similarly, just as the Persians required their various divisions to be dutifully present at various places and times (1.2.4), Cyrus demanded that his elites regularly report to him, due to his belief that "those who reported were not willing to do anything either evil or shameful," while those who did not show themselves were "absent because of some incontinence, injustice, or neglect" (8.1.16). Much like the Persians dishonored those who shirked their duties (1.2.14), Cyrus came down quite harshly on those who were not present at the proper appointed time (8.1.20, 8.3.21-23). Much like the Persians held ingratitude to be one of the most shameful of the vices (1.2.7), Cyrus also went out of his way to always show his gratitude to his subjects, as evidenced by the fact that he always made sure to publicly reward those who helped him establish his

empire through acts of bravery and courage (6.2.5, 8.4.9-27). Finally, and most importantly, the Persians' educational curriculum attempted to promote the common good of Persia as a whole (1.2.2). Similarly, Cyrus took the Persian principle of caring for the common good and extended it internationally beyond Persia's borders in the effort to remake the world and establish an empire where he himself judiciously provided for the needs of all individuals across portions of the several continents that comprised his empire.

Cyrus's Heterodox Persian Education

While Cyrus learned a great deal from his traditional Persian education that proved useful to him, he also had as it were a second Persian education, one that he taught himself without his teachers' awareness and that proved more important than his traditional education, insofar as it proved to be the impetus for the empire. This second or heterodox facet of Cyrus's education consisted in his coming to see for himself the limitations and weaknesses of the Persian regime, which he attempted to correct by subverting the old Persian republic and establishing the Persian Empire on its ruins.

One problem within the Persian educational curriculum, the consequences of which Cyrus experienced firsthand, was that it taught the youth that when there was a conflict between justice defined as law-abidingness and what is simply good, they were simply expected to arbitrarily prefer the former to the latter, a "solution" in effect by fiat with which Cyrus refused to be satisfied. Xenophon expresses the potentially problematic conflict between the just and the good in a rather simple story involving two boys and two coats, which serves as one of the most important passages in the

Cyropaedia because it goes to the heart of what Cyrus learned from his heterodox Persian education regarding the need to move beyond the arbitrary limits of the Persian conception of justice. While visiting his grandfather in Media, Cyrus explained that one of his Persian teachers once appointed him to judge a case involving the transfer of property between a small boy with a big coat and a big boy with a small coat (1.3.17). The big boy who possessed the small coat forcibly placed his small coat on the small boy and assumed possession of the big coat that had belonged to the small boy.⁷⁵ As judge, Cyrus attempted simply to ignore the Persian law that prohibited taking another's property by force, because he recognized that it was better for both boys "that each have the fitting (*harmottō*) tunic." He thus awarded possession of the big coat to the big boy and the small coat to the small boy (1.3.17).

This simple case nicely captures the sense in which justice defined as following the law can sometimes conflict with the good. As Xenophon illustrates, the problem in this particular case was that the prescribed Persian verdict was not good since it was not — in the dispute over the coats quite literally— fitting. In the conflict between what the Persian law held to be just and what was obviously or self-evidently good, Cyrus as judge chose the good. Most importantly, when he was punished for his decision, Cyrus learned firsthand the sense in which the good can sometimes conflict with what a particular regime understands to be just, as well as the harsh consequences in store for any Persian judge who ignores the law to serve the good.

⁷⁵ The fact that this exchange was necessary in the first place would seem to reinforce the theme that some Persians were quite poor. The socio-economic context of the case was that apparently many Persians could not afford to outfit their children in clothes that fit properly.

The fact that Cyrus's teachers did not successfully persuade him to rethink his verdict proved highly consequential for them, as their most talented student apparently drew the lesson that no rational argument existed against his verdict. Consider the fact that when Cyrus returned home to Persia after his trip to Media, he did so only to avoid his father's anger were he to have remained in Media against his father's order to come home (1.4.25). The possibility that he might have had something additional to learn from the Persian system of education never even crossed his mind. It could not have been lost on a precocious and observant child like Cyrus that a benevolent person like himself who yearned to benefit others would need to somehow acquire enough power so as to be able to break the law with impunity when it prevented him from doing good. Cyrus drew the lesson from his own heterodox education that no procedural technicality would be able to bind him once he acquired an army and an empire. Seeing no reason to obey the law, the very foundation of which he believed to be the irrational and arbitrary application of force, Cyrus went on to make a career of ignoring and subverting it when he thought his will produced a better result (2.2.19, 2.2.21, 2.3.12, 7.4.13, 8.1.22, 8.6.23).

Leaders vs. Laws

Since none of his teachers provided a defense of the rule of law to Cyrus that he found persuasive, and especially since he was surely correct that it was better for both boys to possess coats that fit, one wonders whether Xenophon therefore agreed with Cyrus's view that rule by law is at bottom indefensible insofar as it is inferior to rule by leaders like himself, who are themselves "seeing laws" (8.1.22). Can the rule of law

still be defended even when it clearly produces a ridiculous outcome in a particular case? We shall suggest that Xenophon's own answer to this question is different from that of Cyrus. While Xenophon is quite cognizant of the potential weakness of the rule of law—as evidenced by the fact that his Cyrus sees and exploits those limitations—he nonetheless offers a defense, albeit a qualified one, of the rule of law. In addition, Xenophon's skepticism about leaders stands in marked contrast to Cyrus's confidence in his own abilities. These disagreements in turn point to one of the most subterranean and important questions raised by the Cyropaedia: Given Cyrus's impressive knowledge of how to rule (1.1.3, 1.1.6), to what extent might Xenophon nonetheless have found Cyrus's knowledge problematic, inadequate, or even mistaken? Might the Cyropaedia—and especially the lengthy praise of Cyrus with which the book opens—be somewhat ironic?

In contrast to those commentators who argue that the Cyropaedia reflects Xenophon's preference for rule by autonomous and omnipotent leaders,⁷⁶ Xenophon actually endeavors to show that rule by a single hegemonic individual is deeply problematic. The first problem with leaders according to Xenophon concerns the problem of succession. For Xenophon, leaders must ensure that those who succeed them after they die are by nature fit to rule and properly educated. In his estimation, the problem of succession is in practice inexorably fraught with difficulty. Nature often does not properly equip successors to the throne with the requisite capacity for virtue needed for rule. In the case of Cyrus's sons, they were clearly not cut from the same

⁷⁶ Deborah Levine Gera, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 12, 122, 280. Due, The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods 14, 210, 13, 38, 40. Tatum, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction xv.

cloth as their father. Moreover, while Cyrus did make a modest attempt to educate them (8.7.5-28), that effort fell far short of the systematic educational curriculum he received as a child and the numerous private conversations as a youth with his father Cambyses that provided the necessary educational compliment to his own natural virtue (1.2.2-16, 1.6.3, 1.6.5-8, 1.6.12-15, 1.6.43). While nature may occasionally create an individual with the requisite virtue for rule who also happens to receive a proper education (1.2.1-2), the possibility that such a fortuitous coincidence will occur again on cue when that leader dies is for Xenophon unlikely in the extreme.

The second problem with leaders in Xenophon's judgment is that even (and perhaps especially) the best of them are apt to be less wise than they fancy themselves. It would seem that Xenophon was highly skeptical about the adequacy of Cyrus's knowledge, as evidenced by a humorous yet telling passage where Cyrus attempted to play matchmaker (8.4.18-23). To the surprise of his friends, Cyrus claimed during a drinking party to be skilled in the art of matchmaking, which provoked highly unusual laughter and jokes from his companions at his expense, due to the fact that everyone knew that Cyrus, who was known to be "a frigid king," had little discernable interest in erotic pursuits (8.4.22). Chrysantas was especially dubious about Cyrus's claim and asked Cyrus to tell him what sort of wife would be proper for him (8.4.19). Cyrus answered that since Chrysantas was small, his wife should also be little, so that he would not have to jump to kiss her. If a small boy needs a tiny coat, he apparently reasoned, then a short man needs a little wife. Similarly, Cyrus argued that since Chrysantas was hook-nosed, his wife should be snub-nosed so that the two would be complimentary to one another. While the lighthearted passage is meant to be

humorous, it also suggests that Cyrus's understanding of *erōs* was superficial and left much to be desired. Nor is the light-hearted conversation with Chrysantas an isolated instance of Cyrus's shallow treatment and profound misunderstanding of *erōs*. In one of the most moving and tragic passages in the Cyropaedia, as the beautiful Panthea sat holding her husband Abradatas's mutilated corpse and mourning her loss after his death on the battlefield, Cyrus —attempting to be kind, but actually quite callously— lamely assured her that he would happily appoint an escort to take the grieving widow wherever she wished, as if she simply needed a change of scenery to forget all about her beloved (7.3.12).

The reason for Cyrus's inability to say anything meaningful about marriage or appropriate in a time of grief is directly tied not only to his misunderstanding of *erōs*, but also to the more important issue of his general ignorance of the soul. To borrow a phrase from Plato's Athenian Stranger—who incidentally was himself an astute observer of Cyrus's shortcomings, one who makes explicit much that Xenophon leaves implicit for his readers to tease out— on numerous occasions Cyrus hardly practiced politics in the sense of the art of caring for souls.⁷⁷ In this regard, Xenophon means for us to compare Cyrus with Socrates. Like Cyrus, Xenophon's Socrates also claims to be a matchmaker, and even a pimp (Symposium, 3.10, 4.56-64). But Xenophon suggests that Socrates' understanding of matchmaking far exceeded that of Cyrus. Unlike Cyrus,

⁷⁷ Laws, 650b. Plato's Athenian Stranger finds fault with Cyrus for leaving the education of his sons to women and eunuchs. Laws, 694c-695b. Citing Cyropaedia 8.7, Gera argues that the fact that Cyrus did try to educate his sons anticipates and virtually refutes the Athenian Stranger's criticism. Gera, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique 125. But, as Nadon points out, Gera's criticism of the Athenian Stranger's analysis is problematic, given that the paucity of time and energy Cyrus puts forth to educate his sons falls far short of his own stated standards for moral instruction at Cyropaedia 3.3.51-55. Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 135, n. 53.

who says nothing about speeches in his account of matchmaking, Xenophon's Socrates thought that *erōs* and speeches go hand in hand (a conclusion with which any reader of Plato's Symposium or Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet will heartily agree.) Whereas Cyrus's discussion of matchmaking only refers to choosing pairs based strictly on bodily attributes, Xenophon's Socrates' account includes not only "the appropriate arrangement of hair and clothing," but also speeches that "lead to friendship" (Symposium, 4.57-58). Moreover, whereas Socrates claimed that he was a true statesman in part because of his knowledge of the human soul,⁷⁸ Cyrus rarely speaks of the soul. On the rare occasion he does, he talks about it in a rather perfunctory, agnostic, and ultimately disinterested manner. For example, on his deathbed, Cyrus gives his lengthiest discourse on the soul. This speech has with some justice reminded one scholar of Plato's Socrates' speech about the soul as he waits for death in the Phaedo.⁷⁹ However, while the dramatic setting and topic of discussion in the Phaedo and at the conclusion of the Cyropaedia are very similar, there are also many important dissimilarities as well. Most importantly for our purposes, Socrates spends the little time he has left striving to learn more about the soul and to thereby benefit and console his bereaved companions in the process. In contrast to Socrates' kind-hearted purpose and lengthier and more detailed arguments about the soul, Cyrus permits himself only a few brief speculations about the soul and its possible immortality, before driving his real, self-interested point home:

So if these things are just as I think, and the soul leaves the body behind, do what I ask also out of respect for my soul. If they are not so, but if

⁷⁸ Gorgias, 503a-b, 513e, 521d.

⁷⁹ Gera, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique 285.

instead the soul remains in the body and dies along with it, then out of fear of the everlasting, all-seeing, and all-powerful gods, who hold even this order of the whole together unimpaired, without age, without defect, indescribable in both beauty and size, never either do or plan anything unholy or impious. (8.7.22)

He continues:

Now if I am teaching you sufficiently how you ought to be toward one another, [fine]; but if I am not, learn also from what has happened in the past, for this teaching is best. Many parents have gone through their lives as friends to their children, and many brothers as friends with their brothers, but some of these have acted toward each other also in the opposite way. So in whichever of these ways you perceive actions that were advantageous, you would of course deliberate correctly in choosing it. (8.7.24)

The main purpose of Cyrus's discourse on the soul is to ensure that his sons, the heirs to his throne, do not turn against one another, as Cyrus presciently predicts that strife between them would put his entire empire in jeopardy. Whether his sons appreciate the need to avoid faction by reflecting on the soul, the gods, or history makes little difference to Cyrus, so long as they grasp the essential point about how to preserve the empire. This is to say that Cyrus makes knowledge of the soul either inessential or, at best, a means to the preservation of empire. Herein lies one of the most important differences between Cyrus and Socrates. For Socrates, "attending to one's soul" seems to have been the natural and proper *telos* or end of a life well lived, and as such cannot be reduced to other "ends."⁸⁰ Unlike Socrates, Cyrus sees philosophic speculation about the soul the same way he sees everything and everyone with whom he comes into contact; namely, as a means to furthering and securing his empire. By placing greater importance on empire than on the soul, it seems likely that for Socrates Cyrus thus

⁸⁰ Memorabilia, 1.2.4.

profoundly misunderstands the human soul. Moreover, his ignorance of the soul could be interpreted to mean that, unlike Socrates, Cyrus is not truly qualified to rule. A key and overarching problem of Xenophon's collected writings may thus be stated as follows: While Socrates may possess adequate knowledge of the soul, he has no desire to rule; Cyrus has plenty of ambition, but his claim to knowledge may be wanting insofar as he misunderstands the soul. For Xenophon, it would seem that what is therefore needed above all else in a ruler is someone who combines Socrates' knowledge with Cyrus's ambition. Insofar as no such individual is to be found in Xenophon's corpus, save perhaps Xenophon himself,⁸¹ his writings may point to the likely problematic nature of political rule by nearly all leaders in practice.

A third problem with leaders in Xenophon's judgment is that their rule is good only if they are virtuous and free from passion, which always has the potential to overpower reason and corrupt by causing them to place their own self-interest over and above that of the common good. Did Xenophon think that Cyrus always overcame such temptation? While Xenophon's narrative repeatedly illustrates that Cyrus often truly did desire to provide for what he understood to be his companions' good, he also shows that, for all Cyrus's benevolence, he was not above quietly and covertly sacrificing his companions' good to further his own whenever the two conflicted, or once he thought they had served their purpose. For example, contrary to interpretations that Cyrus behaves "as a true gentleman" and shows "genuine concern" in the famous story involving Panthea,⁸² in fact he ruthlessly and with cold-blooded precision conspired to

⁸¹ *Anabasis*, 2.1.13, 5.6.15-16.

⁸² Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 67 n. 63. W.E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 53.

precipitate both her death and that of her husband Abradatas once they were no longer of use to him and their continued presence proved problematic. After Panthea —who was the Queen of Susa and the most beautiful woman in all of Asia (4.6.11)— was captured, Cyrus used her beauty to inflame the Mede Araspas’s passions to the point at which after she resisted his advances, he threatened to do violence to her to satisfy his desire. By knowingly appointing Araspas to be her “guardian,” Cyrus deliberately incurred Araspas’s shame and guilt when he “discovered” Araspas’s rough treatment of her, which Cyrus himself quite deftly orchestrated (6.1.31-34). Cyrus in turn used Araspas’s shame to his own advantage by sending him off on an important yet dangerous mission as a spy (6.1.31, 6.1.38-45), which Araspas agreed to in order to try to “get back” in Cyrus’s good graces. Since Cyrus kept the true nature of Araspas’s mission a secret, everyone, including Panthea and Abradatas, assumed that he fled because Cyrus was going to severely punish him for his assault against Panthea. By posing as the avenger of Panthea’s honor, Cyrus thereby gained Abradatas’s allegiance, which was important not only because he was the King of Susa, but also more importantly because he was a formidable warrior and had many soldiers at his disposal, which he made available to Cyrus (6.1.45).

Xenophon portrays Abradatas as impetuous to the point of recklessness (6.3.35-36), which led directly to his demise. When Cyrus directed the soldiers to cast lots, it just so happened that Abradatas selected an extremely dangerous post right in front of the enemy (6.3.35-36). It is implausible in the extreme that Cyrus would allow a game of chance to determine crucial military strategy in the most important battle of his career. We suggest instead that the game was likely fixed by Cyrus, so that Abradatas

would be put directly in the line of fire, because Cyrus actually wanted him dead. To see why this was the case, it is necessary to recall that the exiled Araspas desired more than anything to be united with Panthea, who was of course also Abradatas's beloved. From Cyrus's point of view, it must have seemed as though there were two big boys and only one big coat, which posed a major problem for him, because he knew that his subjects' willingness to let him rule was conditional on his uncanny ability to satisfy their deepest desires. Since in addition to Araspas and Abradatas many other men desired to have Panthea for their own (5.1.17), she represented a visible limit on Cyrus's ability to satisfy all of his subjects. Cyrus's solution to this problem was fairly simple, if ruthless. In effect, he conspired to bring about the death of Abradatas, which he knew full well would prompt the grief-stricken Panthea to take her own life in turn. When Panthea all but told him that she was planning to kill herself, Cyrus quite coldly did nothing to stop her or to secure her safety (7.3.13-14).⁸³ As he correctly predicted when he initially captured her, she eventually proved useful to him, insofar as she became the link that gained him both Abradatas's troops and Araspas's willingness to spy on the enemy (5.1.17). But once Panthea served her purpose and Cyrus no longer had need of her, she became wholly expendable.

When Araspas returned from his reconnaissance mission (6.3.14-17), Cyrus embraced him, but the embrace Araspas truly longed for was that of Panthea, whose affection he will never know. Out of Cyrus, Araspas, Panthea, and Abradatas, in the end the only one who gets what he wants is Cyrus, who excels time and again at this

⁸³ Edouard Delebecque, *Cyropédie III* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978) 61.

type of duplicitous scheming.⁸⁴ While he was remarkably adept at bringing others' desires into line with his own and utilizing those around him, sometimes in a mutually advantageous manner, to help him achieve his imperial goals (1.4.13), when there was an irreconcilable conflict between Cyrus's desires and the good of another, Xenophon leaves little doubt that Cyrus put his own interest first. Cyrus's benevolence was thus somewhat shallow and self-serving in that it was at bottom primarily a keenly effective means to promoting his own ends. If, as we have suggested, for Xenophon rule by leaders is good only if they are free from the corrosive effects of self-interested passion on their judgments, then to the extent that Cyrus was willing to sacrifice others to promote his own selfish ends, he cannot rightfully be considered, as the dominant scholarly interpretation of the *Cyropaedia* dating back to Cicero would have it, Xenophon's "hero," "ideal," or "model leader."⁸⁵

It is perhaps possible that while Cyrus himself lacked the requisite amount of moderation and wisdom, another more talented individual might conceivably possess the traits needed for successful absolute rule of an empire. But Xenophon doubts it. While Cyrus has his shortcomings, for Xenophon he represents the best leader that one is likely to find in practice (1.1.6). By going out of his way to stress Cyrus's prodigious

⁸⁴ For a discussion of other similar examples throughout the *Cyropaedia*, see Christopher Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 34.2 (2007).

⁸⁵ Godfried Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000) 180. Sarah Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 267. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 1, 7, 11, 59, 98, 112, 22, 24, 280, 85, 86. Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 62, 65, 67, 85, 89, 92, 99, 112, 17, 18, 28, 35, 39, 40, 45, 47, 70, 71, 74, 80, 92, 202, 06, 07, 08, 10, 12, 15, 18, 27, 33, 34, 38. Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction* xv, 11, 37, 39, 62, 63, 68, 76-77, 82, 177, 207, 09, 33. W.E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 44, 53, 54, 55. Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1970) 133. Neal Wood, "Xenophon's Theory of Leadership," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 25 (1964): 64. Werner W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) 162. Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the *Cyropaedia*," 467-68.

talents (1.1.3-1.2.2) —and especially his systematic moderate education and knowledge— Xenophon would seem to suggest that the problem of absolute rule is not simply that Cyrus himself was not up the job, but more importantly that no one is likely to ever truly possess enough of the necessary qualities for successful absolute rule on such a large scale. Precisely because of Cyrus’s extraordinary talents, Xenophon’s narrative would seem to be less about Cyrus’s individual failure per se than the deeply problematic nature of all absolute imperial rule, even by the most talented of leaders. For Xenophon, Cyrus is a kind of exemplary test case for the desirability and feasibility of absolute rule over an empire. Given Cyrus’s failure, Xenophon asks, how likely is it that another omnipotent leader could ever succeed? Moreover, given this unlikelihood, might not a wise man be willing to take a second look at alternate, less spectacular, and more moderate forms of rule, even those that he knew had certain drawbacks themselves, such as the rule of law? Read carefully, we believe that the Cyropaedia represents not only Xenophon’s critique of absolute rule, but also his qualified case for the rule of law.

The most important argument Xenophon makes for the superiority of the rule of law as compared to rule by a single autonomous leader is that in light of an individual leader’s unavoidable ignorance and self-interest, the rule of law potentially provides a superior alternative since in the best case it reflects the gradual and dispassionate accumulation of wisdom over time. Even if leaders lack perfect wisdom and moderation, as all of them *qua* human being surely do, laws compensate for this deficiency by reflecting the combined wisdom of various wise-if-not-omniscient legislators that has been gradually accumulated, tested, and modified through

experience over time. By abolishing the rule of law in favor of his own absolute authority, Cyrus rejected the wisdom that had been accumulated in the Persian laws, not least of which was that possessed by his father Cambyses, whose preeminent understanding of any number of issues far exceeded that of his son, such that Cyrus eagerly adopted some of his father's opinions on matters about which he himself had not reflected very deeply (1.6.1-46). Insofar as Cambyses warns Cyrus about the dangers of imperial overreach, and insofar as the prudence of his warning is borne out by the bleak conclusion of the Cyropaedia when the empire violently implodes, Cambyses would seem to be a kind of surrogate or stand-in for Xenophon, who does not himself appear as a character in the Cyropaedia. Unlike Cyrus, the great subverter of the Persian laws, Cambyses's prudent wisdom and recognition of his own limitations lead him to humbly submit to the rule of law. Cambyses or Xenophon —not Cyrus— is the true wise man of the Cyropaedia.

To the extent that Xenophon had grave concerns about the problem of succession, and to the extent that Cyrus abolished the rule of law in favor of his own absolute rule but was neither perfectly wise nor entirely willing to put aside his own self-interest in order to serve the greater good, the Cyropaedia represents Xenophon's qualified case for the rule of law. For Xenophon the rule of law is not perfect, especially insofar as it can lead to absurd outcomes in specific cases like that involving the coats and can also be overthrown by ambitious leaders like Cyrus. Still, for Xenophon the rule of law is superior to the absolute rule of leaders like Cyrus whose belief that they are wise and dispassionate enough to be "seeing laws" unto themselves leads them to seek absolute power, but who in truth lack the accumulated wisdom and

sober nature of the rule of law that is more, if not always, conducive to the common good.

The Case For and Against Old Persia

As we have seen, Cyrus's knowledge of how to rule included the systematic application of equality of opportunity, moderation, continence, benevolence, duplicitous scheming, and absolute rule. If Cyrus's knowledge was a kind of art or expertise (*technē*) characterized by its method, then Xenophon's narrative suggests that Cyrus's *technē* is best judged by comparing the empire, which was the artifact or end-product his *technē* led him to create, with old Persia. In addition, the narrative structure of the Cyropaedia also invites this comparison. If one starts reading from the beginning, one begins with old Persia and the dramatic action of the book builds steadily to the account of the empire; and, when one completes the book and begins rereading it from the beginning, one immediately moves from the empire back to old Persia. This portion of the essay examines the case against old Persia and the case for it, with an eye toward determining whether Xenophon believed that the transformation of Persia from the small mixed regime of Cyrus's childhood to the vast expansionist empire that he autonomously presided over as an adult constituted an improvement, a decline, or perhaps a bit of both.

The first problem with old Persia was that it had to resort to force to rule the most discontented of the commoners. For Xenophon, as for the classical political

philosophers generally, rule over the unwilling by force was characteristic of tyranny.⁸⁶ This is to say that in addition to its monarchic, republican, and oligarchic elements, the mixed regime of old Persia in Xenophon's estimation also had despotic parts as well. These tyrannical elements were an important strike against old Persia, insofar as any regime which requires perpetual defense by force against its own inhabitants who want to overthrow it is seriously flawed.

The second problem with old Persia was that no one could defend the traditional and predominantly decent Persian conception of virtue when Cyrus issued a revolutionary challenge to it. Addressing his troops, over whom he had been given command on the eve of setting out for Media to help his uncle Cyaxares defend against an impending Armenian attack, Cyrus boldly proclaimed:

I consider our ancestors to have been no worse than we. At least they too spent all their time practicing the very things that are held to be works of virtue (*aretē*). What good they acquired by being such, however, either for the community of Persians or for themselves, I cannot see. (1.5.8)

While Cyrus credits the Persians' ancestors for being virtuous, he argues that, as far as he can tell, their virtue was questionable in that it did not result in any kind of reward. The implicit premise of Cyrus's argument was thus that virtue should be practiced not so much for its own sake so much as for the sake of gain (6.1.12, 7.5.74, 7.5.82).⁸⁷ On

⁸⁶ Memorabilia, 4.6.12.

⁸⁷ John Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," Interpretation 19.3 (1992): 230, 35. Nadon and Glenn argue that by treating virtue as a means to other goods, Cyrus deprives the noble of any intrinsic dignity or worth. Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 129. Gary D. Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," Law and Philosophy, eds. John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992) 158. Cyrus's speech should be compared with Simonides the poet's speech in Xenophon's Hiero, where he recommends to Hiero the tyrant that he practice virtue for the sake of gain. Whereas practicing virtue for the sake of gain would constitute an improvement for a tyrant like Hiero, it constitutes moral decline and corruption for the Persians, who must henceforth be promised gain or bribed by Cyrus in order to act "virtuously" after his

the one hand, his revolutionary speech stands as a testament to his remarkable rhetorical gifts and his overall ability to charm, insofar as with a single speech he entirely severed the Persians' attachment to the traditional conception of virtue that had provided the foundation of their regime up to that point. On the other hand, his reform, which was based on appealing to the desire for materialistic gain, was inconsistent with the dictates of both justice and moderation, which were the morally decent and praiseworthy foundational principles of the Persian regime.⁸⁸

Cyrus's revolutionary speech virtually cries out for a response by one of those present, perhaps by one of the Persian gentlemen (*kalos kagathos*) who, like Cyrus, had attended the schools of justice and moderation and was skilled at making speeches. But in contrast to Plato's Republic, which depicts philosophers-in-training whose virtue is tested and tempted,⁸⁹ and unlike the Spartan boys who according to Xenophon's Constitution of the Lacedaemonians were taught to steal and deceive,⁹⁰ the sheltered and flabbergasted Persians listening to Cyrus's speech apparently lacked the cunning and wisdom necessary to defend their traditions against revolutionaries such as Cyrus who would entice them to abandon their decent, if unspectacular, way of life. Not a single Persian spoke up to challenge Cyrus's proposed revolution. Nor did anyone so much as ask for clarification about the meaning, intention, or potential implication of his words. At the end of Cyrus's speech, Xenophon sardonically suggests the extent to which the exhortation was a complete success by remarking of the Persians, "So this is

revolutionary speech . For other comparisons between Cyrus and Hiero, see Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 136, n. 56.

⁸⁸ Robert J. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 2002, 93-94.

⁸⁹ Republic, 430a-b.

⁹⁰ Constitution of the Lacedaemonians, 2.6-7.

what they were doing,” which implies that Cyrus barely had a chance to catch his breath after ending his speech before his audience immediately began acting on his revolutionary proposals (1.5.14). The complete success of Cyrus’s speech suggests that Xenophon thought that most people’s conventional attachment to virtue can be easily severed when it is challenged by someone as talented and seductive as Cyrus.⁹¹ Individuals in a republic like old Persia may be especially easy targets, Xenophon implies, because their decency may blind them to the fact that others may have motives more sinister than they themselves could ever imagine.

The third problem with the Persian regime —one that was surely at least partially responsible for the second problem we have identified— was the absence of philosophy and liberal education. While one commentator characterizes “openness” as the “hallmark” of the Persian education,⁹² in truth Xenophon presents the Persian schools as somewhat insular. For example, Xenophon never mentions philosophy or philosophers in his discussion of old Persia as Cyrus knew it. King Cambyses does tell Cyrus that there had once been a kind of philosophic teacher of justice present among the Persians of old, one who taught the youth that actions like lying to and stealing from friends were justified provided one acted so as to benefit them (1.6.31). However, needless to say, the boys quickly took to stealing and deceiving, but frequently

⁹¹ Bruell points out that the myth of Er in book ten of Plato’s *Republic* makes the same point Xenophon does regarding how weak most individuals’ attachment to virtue is. According to the myth, well-bred gentlemen who simply accept conventional notions of virtue and who do not themselves philosophize will choose tyranny in the next life. Only the philosopher, Socrates suggests, will choose virtue over tyranny in the afterlife. See *Republic*, 614b-621d. Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," 28-29. See also Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon," *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 99.

⁹² Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* 45, 48.

neglected to commit these actions so as to benefit others.⁹³ The Persians therefore did away with their more nuanced attempt at something like philosophic education in favor of a safer, rule-based, and more clear-cut moral system of education that did not allow for exceptions (1.6.32-33). Because the Persians' experiment with philosophy did not go well for them, it seems the Persian regime subsequently not only did not encourage philosophy, but also was somewhat hostile to it. The Persian resistance to philosophy and liberal education may be inferred especially by comparing Xenophon's suggestion that the Persians downplayed the importance of writing and reading (1.2.6) with the account that Socrates describes in Xenophon's Memorabilia, which involves going "through the treasures of the wise men of old which they wrote and left behind in their books."⁹⁴ The Persian aversion to philosophy may also be surmised from the fact that any questioning of the established customs and laws—an activity characteristic of and essential to philosophy—was met, as Cyrus discovered firsthand, with swift and harsh punishment (1.3.17).

If the absence of philosophy was one of the defects in the old Persian regime, then we must wonder whether philosophy potentially could have helped old Persia avert Cyrus's revolution. Specifically, when Cyrus asked the Persians what they gained from practicing their traditional conception of virtue and they had no answer, surely a philosopher or someone with a philosophic education would have been able to provide a few answers or responses that might have at least given the Persians and perhaps even

⁹³ Plato's Socrates also recommended lying and stealing when doing so would promote the common good. Republic, 331c-d. While Xenophon probably agrees with this way of teaching ethics in theory, his depiction of the way the Persian boys responded to the philosophic education suggests he was skeptical about whether teaching ethics philosophically on a widespread basis was a good idea in practice.

⁹⁴ Memorabilia, 1.6.14

Cyrus pause.⁹⁵ Fortunately, we do not have leave this question about whether philosophy could have saved old Persia solely at the level of counterfactual speculation. If, as we have suggested, Cyrus's father Cambyses possesses philosophic wisdom and is a surrogate for Xenophon's own views, then it is especially striking that—in a manner reminiscent of Socrates⁹⁶—immediately after Cyrus's revolutionary speech Cambyses approaches him in private and attempts to throw cold water on his son's imperial ambitions and to moderate his potential for overreach (1.6.1-46). But unfortunately for old Persia, Cyrus chooses to interpret his father's warnings as individual problems that can be overcome, rather than as difficulties that when combined may be insurmountable, which seems to be the overall thrust of many of Cambyses's arguments. In light of Cambyses's apparent failure to dissuade Cyrus, one must be careful about placing too much stock in the possibility that philosophy could have saved the Persian regime. Moreover, even if a philosopher or wise man such as the one Cyrus's childhood Armenian friend Tigranes once associated with and that Cyrus knew in passing (3.1.14, 38) had been present to offer a few counter-arguments to Cyrus, and even if those arguments had been sound, we must doubt whether Cyrus or his audience that was so entranced by him would have actually listened. One suspects that if a philosopher had not sought out Cyrus in private like Cambyses prudently did and instead had publicly badgered him and attempted to thwart his plans, he might have simply arranged for the philosopher to disappear, similar to the way in which Xenophon notes that the jealous Armenian king had his son Tigranes' wise companion killed

⁹⁵ Gary D. Glenn, "Prudence in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*," *Tempered Strength: Studies in the Nature and Scope of Prudential Leadership*, ed. Ethan Fishman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002) 20-23.

⁹⁶ See especially *Memorabilia*, 1.4.1, 4.3.1.

(3.1.38).⁹⁷ Cyrus was not above quietly eliminating those whom he saw as threats to his power. For example, when he reorganized the Persian army by eliminating the class differences, only Aglaitadas defended the traditional and elitist Persian methods of inculcating virtue, and not coincidentally, he promptly disappeared, never to be mentioned or heard from again (2.2.11-16).⁹⁸

Even if Cyrus as a young adult would never have permitted a philosopher to badger him in public, we might still wonder whether a philosopher might have had better luck starting earlier with him and trying to redirect his boyhood desire (*erōs*) from honor (*timē*) to wisdom (*sophia*). On this possibility, old Persia might have avoided Cyrus's revolution had there been a philosopher present who could have befriended Cyrus as a boy and gradually over time converted him from a *philotimos* to a *philosophos*. It is especially pertinent to wonder whether Cyrus could have become a philosopher if he had been raised in a regime like Athens that was more open to philosophy, given Xenophon's description of him as a *philomathēs*, a lover of learning (1.2.1, 1.4.3). In fact, Xenophon suggests that an important reason why Cyrus left Persia and went abroad to Media as a youth was because he "clearly surpassed all his

⁹⁷ Several commentators have noted the similarity between Tigranes' wise companion (*sophistēs*) and Socrates. Glenn, "Prudence in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*," 22. Nadon, [Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia](#) 79. Due, [The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods](#) 77. Bruell, "Xenophon," 103. Edouard Delebecque, [Essai Sur La Vie De Xénophon](#) (1957: C. Klincksieck, 1957) 394-95. Tatum, [Xenophon's Imperial Fiction](#) 135, 38, 39-45. Luccioni, [Le Idées Politiques Et Sociales De Xénophon](#) 395. Gera, [Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique](#) 91-94. The fact that Cyrus sees a philosophic figure reminiscent of Socrates as a *sophistēs* suggests that from the perspective of those who have political power, there may be no real difference between sophists and philosophers.

⁹⁸ Aglaitadas also went missing because he favored weeping, which he believed encouraged moderation and justice, instead of laughter, which he questioned. His defense of weeping constituted a challenge to Cyrus, whose corruption of the Persians consisted partially in his ability to make them laugh at the "folly" of their old ways (2.2.16). In this sense, it seems that Machiavelli, who speaks very highly of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, learned as much from Cyrus's manner of speech as his deeds. Both Cyrus and Machiavelli aim to create revolutionary coconspirators by provoking laughter.

agemates both in quickly learning what was necessary and in doing everything in a noble and manly way,” (1.3.1, 1.3.15-16) traits that are entirely consistent with the philosophic nature.

But having prompted his discerning readers to wonder whether given Cyrus’s similarities with the philosopher’s nature he could potentially have become a wisdom-seeking philosopher instead of a glory-seeking founder of an empire, Xenophon seems to have concluded that in the final analysis, in fact Cyrus’s nature would have prevented him from ever becoming a philosopher, even if Persia had been more tolerant toward philosophy. Though he enjoyed learning, Cyrus loved it not as an inherently pleasurable activity in the way that a philosopher does,⁹⁹ but rather as a means to the end of gaining honor by distinguishing himself and eventually establishing an empire in an intelligent or knowledgeable manner (1.1.3, 1.2.1). Cyrus’s interest in learning and wisdom was thus always with an eye toward the uses to which he could put his knowledge (1.6.23).¹⁰⁰ One could say that for Cyrus, all knowledge (*epistēmē*) was expertise or know-how (*technē*), the product of which was empire. If Socratic dialectic culminates in the recognition of one’s ignorance and helps spark a desire to remedy one’s lack of wisdom, then Cyrus’s education culminated not in the recognition of his ignorance, but rather in his tenacious application of his knowledge, the value or goodness of which he, unlike Xenophon, never seems to have seriously questioned.¹⁰¹

In addition, Cyrus’s nature probably would have prevented him from finishing the

⁹⁹ Republic, 587d-e.

¹⁰⁰ Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 408.

¹⁰¹ The fact that Cyrus never questions the value of his knowledge should also be compared with Socrates, who embarked on what he called his “second sailing” in part because he questioned the value, adequacy, and possibility of purely mechanistic scientific knowledge of physical causes. *Phaedo*, 96a, 99c-d.

philosophic curriculum Socrates describes in Plato's Republic. Whereas the philosophers-in-training that Socrates describes must be able to resist temptations at odds with their education,¹⁰² Cyrus's nature prevented him from completely resisting the temptations that enticed him when he traveled as a youth to Media and that were at odds with his traditional Persian education. For example, when he first encountered his grandfather Astyages dressed in lavish makeup and wearing an opulent wig and jewelry, he immediately expressed his delight with his grandfather's handsome (*kalos*) appearance (1.3.2-3). Since he had never seen such fine attire in Persia, his attraction to this particular manifestation of what he saw as the beautiful (*kalos*) must have been natural rather than conventional. Moreover, Cyrus's natural attraction to the sort of excessive personal adornment that the philosopher would find unbecoming and even morally suspect remained with him his entire life. At the end of the Cyropaedia, Cyrus's exquisite personal appearance was indistinguishable from that of his grandfather (8.1.40-41). Most importantly, we base our claim that no amount of regular conversation with a philosopher could have cured Cyrus on the fact that Cambyses's lengthy conversation with him was apparently the capstone in a long series of rather philosophic conversations between father and son (1.6.3, 5-8, 12-15, 43). It is not as though on a single occasion Cambyses tried to moderate his son and failed, as incidentally Cyrus seems to have done with his own sons at the end of his life (8.7.5-28). Rather, Cambyses frequently engaged his son in philosophic conversation, yet still failed to cure him. Because of Cyrus's pragmatic view of knowledge, his unwillingness to question his own knowledge, his lifelong inability to resist luxurious temptations that

¹⁰² Republic, 430a-b, 485d-e.

were directly at odds with the philosophic life, and the fact that his philosophic father labored mightily but was unable to moderate him, we conclude that, whatever his similarities with the philosophic nature, Cyrus's nature would have prevented him from ever abandoning the political life spent seeking honor for the philosophic life spent seeking wisdom. If that is correct, then one is justified in viewing Cyrus as one of the "incurables" that Socrates regularly encounters in the Platonic dialogues.¹⁰³

Additionally, to the extent that Cyrus never turned to philosophy and thus never truly finished his education, Machiavelli's decision to refer to Xenophon's book as "the life of Cyrus" —rather than The Education of Cyrus— is justified.¹⁰⁴ To sum up, while we have criticized Persia somewhat for not having been more open to philosophy, we have also suggested that even had the Persians been more tolerant toward it, in the end that would not have made much difference, at least where Cyrus was concerned.

The fourth problem with old Persia was that the Persians never found a way to satisfy individuals like Cyrus who possessed extraordinary ambition and desire for distinction (*philotimia*) (1.3.3). While the Persians did attempt to provide what honor they could to those such as Cyrus who craved and deserved it (1.2.12), they apparently offered no honors great enough to appease him, for he wanted to be praised the world over (1.2.1). The fact that Cyrus was entirely indiscriminate in his longing for honor, in the sense that he desired to be praised not simply by the wise, but rather by all human beings *tout ensemble*, was a sign for Xenophon that he possessed tyrannical longings.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ On "incurables," see, for example, Gorgias, 525c-526d. I am grateful to Susan D. Collins for raising the possibility of this line of argument to me.

¹⁰⁴ See Prince, ch. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Hiero, 7.1. Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1124a5-20. Aristotle argues that though the great souled individual believes that there is no honor worthy of his complete virtue, he will accept honors

Cyrus was willing to go to the ends of the earth and establish what Machiavelli called “new modes and orders,” all in the name of appeasing his insatiable needs for honor and praise, desires that Persia by herself could not satisfy.

Based on his characterization of old Persia, it seems that even though Xenophon harbored reservations about what he understood to be its weaknesses, he also approved of several facets of its regime. We must of necessity limit ourselves to discussing only the most important argument in favor of old Persia according to his account, which is that on the whole the Persians were a remarkably virtuous people. By requiring their peers to attend the schools of justice and moderation, the Persians produced a predominantly virtuous ruling class that was in large measure devoted to the common good (1.2.2). Xenophon points to the Persians’ virtue by showing how Cyrus had to work harder to exhort his troops to fight as more and more foreign soldiers joined his army, since the foreigners apparently lacked the discipline of the Persians (6.2.14-20, 7.1.10-22, 7.5.20-24). However, as we have seen, it was also the case that not every deserving Persian was able to attend the schools of justice, which is to say that in theory the Persian education in virtue could have been extended wider and more equitably than it was in practice. What was Xenophon’s view of this limitation?

The Cyropaedia in effect presents two possible alternatives to the Persian system of moral education, both of which Xenophon seems to have judged as inferior. First, regimes could simply make no effort to provide any of their citizens with a moral

from virtuous people on the grounds that they have nothing greater to offer him. But he will have nothing but disdain for honors that come from those who are not themselves virtuous. Insofar as Cyrus indiscriminately desires honor from everyone, he does not possess greatness of soul in the Aristotelian sense. I therefore agree with Rubin, who argues that Xenophon gradually enables the careful reader to see that Cyrus’s “magnanimity is hollow” and his “beauty/nobility superficial.” Rubin, “Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*,” 410.

education. For example, the absence of moral education was characteristic of the tyrannical Median regime that Cyrus visited as a child. Media was morally suspect in Xenophon's eyes to the extent that its citizens' behavior was immoderate and devoted to the tyrant Astyages' good, rather than to the common good (1.3.10, 1.3.18, 1.4.22, 4.1.13). After Astyages' death, Cyrus easily acquired rule over Media and kept the Medians mired in slavery, however benevolent, in part because they were accustomed to being treated as slaves and thus did not possess the moral fortitude that would have been required to resist him. Similarly, even though in his empire Cyrus made some effort to educate the upper classes, the empire was unable to preserve itself after he died because he did little to educate his sons (who were the heirs to his throne) to be virtuous, which resulted in dissension among them that quickly led to the empire's dissolution (8.8.2). As evidenced by both Media and Cyrus's empire, Xenophon's judgment was that regimes that do not sufficiently appreciate the need for moral education do so at their own peril. If the fall of old Persia reveals that the inculcation of morality in a sizable part of the citizenry is not always sufficient for a regime's survival, then Media and especially the collapse of Cyrus's empire suggest that moral education is at least necessary for a regime's perpetuation.

The second alternative to the Persian system of moral education is the life devoted to pursuing material gain, which was also characteristic of the empire Cyrus enacted on the ruins of old Persia. Rather than seizing and redistributing funds from the wealthiest Persians so that everyone, including the poor, would have the opportunity in practice to attend school, Cyrus took property from other nations and redistributed it to

the Persians.¹⁰⁶ But even though Cyrus found a way to provide for equality of opportunity without redistributing the Persians' property, the fact remains that by helping himself to other nations' possessions, he seized what did not belong to him, often by force and fraud. In effect, he liberated the commoners from their lowly economic status and gave them an equal opportunity to excel under his rule by turning his soldiers' eyes on neighboring nations' property.¹⁰⁷ Prior to Cyrus, Persia functioned fairly well and maintained an impressive level of virtue among its citizens by not succumbing to the desire for materialistic gain, which the classical political philosophers, including Xenophon, saw as the root of injustice.¹⁰⁸ From the point of view of Xenophon and classical political philosophy as a whole, one can point to old Persia's justice and overall virtue by noting that its laws encouraged its citizens to be satisfied with what they had, whereas one can point to Cyrus's injustice and dubious virtue by noting that he longed to seize riches that did not belong to him, to say nothing of the fact that he sought to awaken and encourage similarly immoderate desires in those he ruled. When Cyrus founded the empire and attempted to hearken back to the

¹⁰⁶ The fact that Cyrus was eager to fund the social elevation of the commoners in Persia so as to be in a better position to seize ever-greater possessions that belonged to other countries and thereby harm them is a sign that he was willing to help friends in order to harm enemies, which is a defining characteristic of spirited individuals. On Cyrus's tendency to see the world in terms of friends and enemies, see 1.4.19. On his deathbed, Cyrus candidly admits that for him helping friends is a means to harming enemies, rather than the reverse (8.7.28). Cyrus's obsession with harming enemies (1.4.24) should be compared with Plato's Socrates' argument that it is never just to harm anyone (Republic, 335e), and with Xenophon's Socrates, who claimed that he never committed injustice against any human being (Memorabilia, 4.8.10).

¹⁰⁷ According to Nadon, Cyrus first decides to be generous with other people's possessions as a child in Media while dining with his grandfather. Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 45. (See 1.3.6-7). But strictly speaking, the large quantity of meat that Cyrus distributes in return for favors he received belonged to him, not to others, because his grandfather gave it to him to do with as he pleased. I find Phillips' reading more satisfactory in that he argues that in the passage in question Cyrus did away with his debts in a manner wholly painless to him, since, given the quantity of meat he was given, he simply gave away excess. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," 85.

¹⁰⁸ See also Republic, 373d-e.

old conception of virtue, he found that the immoderate desires he sparked were difficult to all of the sudden extinguish. Thus, for Xenophon, failing to make any serious attempt at moral education and funding equality of opportunity by seizing the assets of foreigners were both less satisfactory alternatives to the commendable Persian system of education, whatever its limitations.

Xenophon's "Utopia" and the Limits of Politics

By examining the case against old Persia as well as the case for it, we have been led to the position that, contrary to the view of one scholar that Xenophon made "no critique of the Persia of Cyrus's youth,"¹⁰⁹ Xenophon's overall view of old Persia was in fact highly ambivalent. If, as several scholars have argued, Xenophon offered old Persia as an improvement on what he saw as the weaknesses of the Spartan regime,¹¹⁰ then the foregoing analysis suggests that Xenophon's Persia was itself not perfect, either. If, as Strauss argues, Xenophon's Persia was his "utopia,"¹¹¹ then we must wonder why, whatever its merits, his utopia was nonetheless flawed on several counts.

One explanation for why Xenophon's utopia had several flaws was that he intended old Persia's shortcomings to be seen not as uniquely or idiosyncratically Persian, but rather as inherent to the nature of all regimes, and thus to the nature of the regime as such. If Cyrus knowledgeably and skillfully exploited certain facets and weaknesses of the Persian regime, as we have suggested, we must note that each of the

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 181.

¹¹⁰ Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," 5. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 29-42. Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 146. Bruell, "Xenophon," 92. Walter Miller, "Introduction," *Cyropaedia*, vol. 51, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) viii-ix.

¹¹¹ Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* 146.

four problems with Persia we have identified would also seem to be problematic for all regimes *qua* regime. First, through old Persia Xenophon suggests that no matter how just and devoted to the common good a regime is, there will always be at least a handful of individuals such as Cyrus and the commoners who will want to overthrow the regime, either out of self-interest, because of their belief that it could do even more to promote the common good, or perhaps a bit of both. For Xenophon, regimes are thus always in perpetual danger, insofar as at any given time some of their own citizens are in truth enemies who would happily overthrow the regime if given the opportunity. Second, by illustrating how easily Cyrus undermined the traditional conception of virtue of the educated and highly disciplined peers, Xenophon suggests that public-spiritedness and devotion to the common good, however well inculcated, always potentially can be overcome by talented and shrewd individuals like Cyrus, who appeal beyond convention to what Cyrus and Xenophon both seem to have seen as humankind's latent natural desire for private individual gain. The fact that Xenophon, perhaps alone among the ancients, considered the possibility of reconstructing political life around the core principle of the liberation of individual desire for gain is, we believe, part of what makes him, as Strauss suggested, the most modern of the ancients.¹¹² Moreover, the fact that Xenophon anticipated and gave serious thought to unleashing human desire (*à la* the moderns) rather than bending, educating, or suppressing it (*à la* the ancients) —only to in the end reveal the grounds for reasonable skepticism about whether the liberation of individual desires is in fact a sustainable

¹¹² Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1991) 24-5.

basis for political life— renders him a powerful critic of one of the key foundational premises of modern liberal regimes. Third, while the absence of philosophy and liberal education likely contributed to Persia’s decline, we have suggested it does not necessarily follow that had the Persians encouraged philosophy, they would have thereby preserved their way of life. While Persia’s attempt to live without philosophy backfired and may have precipitated its destruction somewhat, Xenophon remained deeply skeptical about whether the presence of philosophy in Persia necessarily would have saved the regime. As he surely knew from witnessing revolution in Athens firsthand,¹¹³ philosophy cannot guarantee a regime’s perpetuation. If the execution of his beloved teacher Socrates taught Xenophon that even the most cultured of regimes cannot quite bring themselves to live with philosophy, then old Persia’s inability to defend its way of life to Cyrus must have suggested to him that regimes cannot quite live without philosophy, either. With respect to philosophy, for Xenophon regimes are damned if they do and damned if they don’t, which is to say that for him while philosophy can potentially save individual souls, it cannot save cities. Fourth, Persia’s inability to satisfy Cyrus’s indiscriminate, immoderate, and infinite desire for honor raises the question of whether the honors bestowed by any single regime short of a world state could have satisfied him.¹¹⁴ Through Cyrus, Xenophon would seem to be

¹¹³ *Memorabilia*, 1.2.12

¹¹⁴ Abraham Lincoln raises a very similar question in his “Lyceum Address,” where he warns about the potential danger posed to republican government and the rule of law by those towering geniuses “who seek the gratification of their ruling passion” and “*who belong to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle*,” such as Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon. Insofar as Cyrus is also one of the great world-historic subverters of republican government and the rule of law, Lincoln could easily have added him to this list. In addition, he might also have included Alcibiades. While Alcibiades’s fellow Athenians often voted him into high office, they also mistrusted him for his legendary ambition and thinly disguised desire to seize absolute power for himself. Xenophon remarks in his own name that in addition to being

pointing to a weakness not only of Persia, but of all regimes, insofar as the honors any one regime has at its disposal to offer will never satisfy an individual like Cyrus, the *philotimos par excellence*. To the extent that all regimes necessarily possess finite amounts of honor that will never be able to satisfy some of their most supremely talented individuals, Xenophon suggests they are perpetually vulnerable at the hands of those like Cyrus who will be willing to destroy them if necessary in the quest to find ever greater honors. For all these reasons, the Cyropaedia may be said to teach the limits of politics.

Conclusion

If, as we have suggested, Xenophon's judgment of the Persian empire was highly ambivalent because it was, at least while Cyrus was alive, in some respects better than old Persia and in some respects worse, then this ambivalence would seem to mirror his dividedness regarding Cyrus's Persian education, which Cyrus used to found the empire and which consisted of two parts: His traditional education, which Xenophon approved of, and his heterodox education, about which Xenophon harbored doubts. Cyrus's traditional Persian education per se leads to the old Persian republicanism of his childhood, whereas his heterodox Persian education per se points toward the kind of absolute rule he uses to control the empire. If Cyrus's knowledge was a kind of art or expertise that helped enable him to create the empire, then it stands to reason that to the extent Xenophon was ambivalent toward Cyrus's overall Persian education, he would

"incontinent, insolent, and violent," Alcibiades was (with Critias) "by nature the most honor-loving of all the Athenians," one who wished to "become the most renowned of all." Memorabilia, 1.2.12-14.

also be of two minds about the imperial product Cyrus's Persian education led him to create.

Perhaps the two key characteristics of the empire (aside from its enormous size) were the systematic regimen of moral education Cyrus instituted for the elite upper class under his direction and the fact that there were no laws in the empire, which was governed solely in accord with Cyrus's autonomous will (1.1.5). The former characteristic followed directly from Cyrus's traditional Persian education, while the latter facet stemmed directly from his heterodox Persian education and, it should be noted, from his Median education as well. Cyrus's sojourn in Media (which we have considered only in passing and which a more complete study of the Cyropaedia would have to consider in greater detail than we have been able to here) revealed to him the charms of absolute power, which he understood to be a superior alternative to the rule of law, the weakness of which had formed the basis of his heterodox Persian education. The roots of the empire's two fundamental characteristics may thus be traced back to Cyrus's two distinct Persian educations.

If Cyrus's twofold Persian education translated directly into policy in the empire, we must briefly consider which aspect of his Persian education was most directly responsible for both the temporary preservation and eventual collapse of the empire, respectively. Whereas Cyrus appealed primarily to his soldiers' desire for gain in the course of establishing his empire, once he established it, his focus shifted from acquisition to preservation, which he believed required a return to the inculcation of traditional virtues such as moderation. He therefore in effect reinstated his traditional Persian education for the ruling class with an eye toward preserving the empire he

founded. As a young man, Cyrus believed that in the context of republicanism, appeals to the desire for gain would help him foment revolution. In Xenophon's estimation, Cyrus is right about that. But for Xenophon Cyrus makes a serious mistake when assumes that he will be able simply to put the genie back in the bottle. As the widespread decadence at the Cyropaedia's conclusion suggests, it is far easier for a people to abandon their moderation than it is for them to get it back. With Cyrus looking on, the Persians pretended to be moderate, because that was what he commanded. But in truth they were only play-acting to please their leader (8.1.33). Their outward behavior was moderate, but their hearts were anything but. Cyrus's attempt after his revolution to make the Persians moderate once again was ultimately negated by his unwillingness to codify his will in a system of laws that could be passed on to the heirs to his throne. Absent guidance in the form of codified law and lacking Cyrus's knowledge, Cyrus's heirs quickly proved wholly unable to govern after his death. This is to say that the reimplementation of his traditional Persian education helped him maintain the empire for a time, while his heterodox Persian education, which proved so instrumental in establishing the empire, contributed in the end to its rapid decline. The peculiar and synergistic combination of Cyrus's twofold Persian education thus leads to the Persian Empire and, in the end, helps account for why it did not last.

Xenophon's opening optimism about the potential for knowledge to solve the problem of political rule and render politics orderly, noble, and beautiful becomes steadily more skeptical and uncompromisingly realistic as the Cyropaedia unfolds. At the conclusion, the Persian Empire that Cyrus seemed at times to found almost

effortlessly quickly breaks apart and disintegrates. Xenophon summarizes the conclusion to the Cyropaedia by remarking that after Cyrus the Persians became more impious, irreverent, unjust, and unmanly than their predecessors (8.8.27). Cyrus's imperial enterprise, which at first seems so noble and beautiful, is for Xenophon in the end quite ugly and morally repugnant. How are we to account for this seeming transformation?

The beginning of the Cyropaedia makes those disenchanted with politics consider more thoughtfully the possible grounds for optimism and the sense in which politics can be noble and even awe-inspiring; but in the end, Xenophon shows that there is no guarantee that knowledge or expertise that subdues the world and renders it more orderly and less chaotic will thereby also make it better. While the Cyropaedia shows that politics and political life when pushed to their extremes can produce spectacular results that fire the imagination and point toward the sublime possibilities of human achievement, it also shows that what appear initially to be the most sublime political achievements are, when one looks a bit more closely, destined to be marred and fleeting. The Cyropaedia thus points to the magnificent potential latent in political life, even as it carves out the inherent and unavoidable limits of those possibilities by tacitly and ironically suggesting that politics can never truly become as luminous as first appeared possible. To borrow a phrase from Plato's Socrates, who as a young man and for the remainder of his life questioned the adequacy of his own knowledge, insofar as Xenophon came to question the value and goodness of Cyrus's knowledge, with which he was at one point quite impressed, the Cyropaedia may be read as Xenophon's second

sailing.¹¹⁵ If at the beginning of his intellectual odyssey Xenophon was optimistic that wisdom can provide salvation for political life, throughout the Cyropaedia he shows the reasons for rejecting his opening hypothesis and concluding that wisdom is no match for and thus cannot tame politics. In this sense, far from a later, inauthentic, or spurious addition that does not fit with the rest the book, as some have suggested,¹¹⁶ Xenophon's conclusion actually remains true to his opening promise to show the sense in which Cyrus and his knowledge show the nature of political rule, even as he deliberately confounds his audiences' expectation regarding what the true nature of political rule will turn out to be. Xenophon thereby prompts his readers to dialectically retrace his footsteps and, with his help, thoughtfully reconsider whether their deepest longings could ever be achieved through political life, even when pushed to its most majestic extremes. If the reader comes to the same conclusion as Xenophon, then he or she will be open to considering alternative human activities such as the philosophic life that are potentially more satisfying. In this sense, spectacular though it is, the Cyropaedia is by its nature the *prolegomenon* to Xenophon's Socratic writing.

¹¹⁵ On Socrates' second sailing, see note 43 above.

¹¹⁶ Steven W. Hirsch, The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire (Hanover: University Press of England, 1985) 91-97. Before the concluding section of the Cyropaedia, Miller, the translator and editor of the Loeb Edition of the Cyropaedia, goes so far as to recommend to the reader that he "close the book...and read no further." Xenophon, Cyropaedia, trans. Walter Miller, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G.P. Goold, vol. 52 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 439.

Chapter 2

MEDIAN EDUCATION

Introduction

Cyrus's education consisted of three parts: his Persian or republican education (1.2.2-16), his Median or tyrannical education (1.3.1-1.4.28), and his kingly education in the art of rule with his father Cambyses (1.6.1-46). In chapter one, I discussed Cyrus's Persian education. Building on that analysis and with an eye toward providing a more comprehensive account of Cyrus's education and the Cyropaedia as a whole, this chapter focuses on Cyrus's time as a boy and a youth in Media. After some discussion of the despotic nature of the Median regime and the sense in which Cyrus's natural traits come to sight much more visibly while he is in Media, I provide an examination of his Median education. Throughout my discussion of Cyrus's Median education, I examine not only what he learns in theory from it, but also how he utilizes it in practice in the course of founding and governing his empire.

Astyages and Median Tyranny

When he is about twelve years old, Cyrus leaves his native Persia and travels to her neighboring ally Media for an extended visit with his grandfather (1.2.1). This section examines the tyrannical character of the Median regime, which lies in the background and influences Cyrus's Median education in many important ways. After

noting a few differences between the Persia of Cyrus's childhood and the Media of his youth, I analyze the sense in which Media is wholly devoted to satisfying the tyrant Astyages, who is the master of everything therein (1.3.18).

By placing his account of Media directly after his account of Persia, Xenophon invites his readers to compare the two regimes. Three points of comparison are particularly important. First, whereas the Persian schools of justice (*dikaioṣunē*) and moderation (*sōphrosunē*) reflect the character of Cyrus's father, Persia's just and moderate king Cambyses, Media is a comparatively lawless and comparatively depraved regime that reflects the character of its tyrannical ruler Astyages (1.3.10-11, 1.3.18). Second, in contrast to Persia, there is no common (*koinon*) education in place in Media to help provide moral instruction to the Medes. As Cyrus notices, the only attempt Astyages makes to "educate" his subjects is that he "teaches" them to have far less than himself (1.3.18). Third, whereas Persia is a nation of laws (1.2.1, 1.2.6, 1.3.16-18, 1.6.20), the only standard for judgment in Media is Astyages's subjective and absolute will (1.3.13, 1.4.11, 1.4.26). One advances to positions of distinction in Media not, as in Persia, by excelling at the rigorous curriculum in the schools of justice and moderation (1.2.5), but rather simply by flattering or gratifying Astyages (1.3.8-9, 1.4.2).

In Media, Astyages fashioned his rule such that, as Cyrus's mother (and Astyages's daughter) Mandane says, "he has made himself the master (*despotēs*) of everything" (1.3.18). One example of Astyages's absolute authority is when Cyrus finds out that the Median fathers refuse to allow their sons go hunting without Astyages's permission (1.4.11). Similarly, when Cyrus eventually returns home to

Persia after his stay in Media, many Medes wished to go with him, but Astyages made them turn back (5.1.25). Astyages's influence on Mandane's decision to return home without Cyrus and to let him stay behind and grow up as a young man in Media rather than in Persia provides the most important example of the fact that no one in Media can resist Astyages's will (1.4.1). Given the importance Mandane's decision has for the course of Cyrus's life and for the fate of individuals and countries around the world who become subsumed under his rule as leader of the Persian Empire, and since at first glance her decision to leave Cyrus behind is quite puzzling given her reservations and the shortcomings of Cyrus's arguments as to why he should be allowed to stay, we must examine the conversation leading up to her fateful decision in some detail. As much as anything in the Cyropaedia, this exchange reveals the nature of Astyages's Median tyranny.

I aim to show that Mandane's decision to leave Cyrus behind has almost nothing to do with the persuasiveness of Cyrus's arguments and everything to do with Astyages's absolute will and power (*dunamis*). Since Astyages offers his grandson anything he wants in hopes of persuading him to remain in Media, Cyrus quite predictably "did not hesitate but quickly said that he wished to stay" (1.3.15). When his mother inquires as to why he wants to remain, Cyrus replies that though in Persia he is the best at the characteristic Persian activities of throwing the spear and shooting the bow, in Media he is regarded as an inferior horseman, which vexes him greatly. If he is permitted to remain with his grandfather, Cyrus promises Mandane that he will strive to become a valuable ally to him by becoming the best horseman in Media. His answer in response to his mother is crafty and shrewd, insofar as he plays on her desire to have a

distinguished son who, like herself, will honor and serve Astyages well (1.3.1, 1.3.13).

But Mandane is not altogether satisfied with Cyrus's explanation. She asks, "But, my child, how will you learn justice here [in Media] when your teachers are there [in Persia]?" (1.3.16). Her question has merit insofar as the tyrannical principle of the

Median regime, according to which it is right for the ruler to have more than his subjects, is diametrically at odds with the Persian education in justice, which seeks to ensure that leaders are moderate and that they promote the common good (1.2.2).

Cyrus attempts to convince his mother that he already understands justice so as to persuade her to let him stay in Media. To help his cause, he tells a story about a case that he was once asked to adjudicate in the Persian schools of justice when he was a boy (1.3.17). He cites the case in order to show Mandane that even though on that occasion his teacher found that he rendered an unjust verdict, he took his beating and learned his lesson (1.3.16). Having done so, he now claims to understand justice thoroughly. But Xenophon means for the reader to regard Cyrus's claim to understand justice backward and forward with skepticism. Despite the fact that as a precocious boy Cyrus was something of a prodigy, as indicated by the fact that the reason he was allowed to visit Media for such an extended stay in the first place was that he was far more advanced than his fellow classmates in the Persian curriculum (1.3.16), the fact still remains that at the point in time he was pleading with his mother to remain in Media he was nowhere close to finishing his systematic educational program (1.2.13). Whether Cyrus really knew all he needed to know about justice therefore must be a matter of some doubt. We especially must not be taken in by the final part of Cyrus's appeal, where he adds — apparently with a straight face— that regarding justice, "If I need anything further in

this, grandfather here will teach (*didaskō*) me” (1.3.17). Mandane counters that if Cyrus returns to Persia having adopted Astyages’s tyrannical principles, then he can expect to be severely punished (1.3.18). Confronted with this bleak prospect, Cyrus breezily replies that there is no reason to worry that he will be corrupted by Median luxuries, since Astyages “is more clever at teaching one to have less than to have more,” purportedly as evidenced by the fact that he has taught all the Medes to make do with less than himself and not to be greedy (*pleonekteō*) (1.3.18). But Cyrus’s suggestion that Astyages encourages moderation and teaches others to be content with less while he takes more is dubious for three reasons. First, unlike Persia, there are no schools of justice and moderation in Media to provide the kind of moral education that would encourage and indeed require one to make do and to be satisfied with modest provisions. Second, given that Astyages has to guard against the possibility of assassination when he dines (1.3.9), it must be the case that contra Cyrus some individuals in Media are not in fact content to have less while Astyages takes more than his fair share. Third, and most importantly, Astyages not only fails to provide for the moral education of the young, but also actively encourages their corruption, as evidenced by his attempts to persuade Cyrus to abandon his Persian education in moderation and to sample the exotic new pleasures that Media has to offer (1.3.4-6, 1.3.14). Despite the glaring shortcomings of Cyrus’s arguments, Mandane nonetheless decides to return to Persia and leave Cyrus behind in Media to be raised by Astyages (1.4.1). Since it is unlikely that Cyrus’s dubious arguments truly assuaged her skepticism, one can only conclude that, like everyone else in Media, Mandane was

unable to resist Astyages's will and desires. When she says that in Media her father is "the master of everything," she knows this to be true firsthand.

Cyrus's Nature

This section identifies several aspects of Cyrus's nature that are hidden or suppressed in the comparatively austere Persia, but that come to light in the more permissive and lax regime of Media. Given an unprecedented amount of freedom and no longer supervised by his strict Persian teachers, Cyrus's natural traits emerge more visibly in Media,¹¹⁷ where he experiences temptation the likes of which he never knew in Persia (1.6.31-33). The temptations that he resists as well as those to which he succumbs are instructive for understanding his nature, which is important because Xenophon argues that Cyrus's nature is one of the keys to understanding what differentiated him from all other rulers (1.1.6).

When Cyrus first arrives in Media and meets his grandfather, Xenophon states that he "immediately —since he was by nature an affectionate (*philostorgos*) boy— hugged him as one would have done if he had been raised with him and had been friendly with him for a long time" (1.3.2). This comment about Cyrus's nature might seem to simply reaffirm Xenophon's earlier description of Cyrus as one who was "most benevolent (*philanthrōpos*) in soul" (1.2.1). But in fact the passage at 1.3.2 adds something important to the passage at 1.2.1. Whereas *philanthrōpos* literally means "friend of humankind," and while *philostorgos* may be translated similarly as

¹¹⁷ Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1969, 24.

“affectionate,” the latter word can also connote the desire to receive affection. By using the term *philostorgos*, Xenophon implies that by nature Cyrus not only desires to befriend others but also wants to be adored himself. Xenophon thereby invites his readers to wonder whether Cyrus’s desire to love or to be loved is predominant. This question is of the greatest importance given Xenophon’s view that the longing to be honored and loved by others is intimately related and closely intertwined with the desire for tyranny (Hiero, 7.1-10). For Xenophon, the fact that Cyrus yearned to be universally loved and honored the world over by all human beings, rather than simply by those more discerning individuals by “whom it is fitting to be honored” (Memorabilia, 2.1.32), is a sign that to some extent he possessed tyrannical longings. Contrary to the views of those commentators who believe that the bleak conclusion of the Cyropaedia where the empire falls apart is inconsistent or even spurious when compared with Xenophon’s optimistic portrayal of Cyrus throughout the bulk of the Cyropaedia,¹¹⁸ more discerning readers will grasp that when Xenophon writes early in the Cyropaedia that Cyrus “endured every labor and faced every risk for the sake of being praised,” he intimates the possibility that all will not necessarily end well for Cyrus’s subjects and his empire (1.2.1). On the one hand, because of Cyrus’s benevolence, he is not a conventional tyrant; on the other hand, because of his all-consuming desire to be universally acclaimed, he is in part a tyrant. For these reasons, perhaps the best characterization for Cyrus is that he is a benevolent tyrant.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Steven W. Hirsch, The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire (Hanover: University Press of England, 1985) 91-97. Walter Miller, "Introduction," Cyropaedia, vol. 51, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914) 439.

¹¹⁹ Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's Cyropaedia," 408. Waller Randy Newell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981, 256.

Along with his natural desire to benefit others and to be loved the world over, Cyrus's natural love of the beautiful comes to sight during his first meeting with his grandfather. Observing for the first time Astyages's elaborate adornment—which includes eye shadow, rouge, and a wig—Cyrus exclaims, “Mother, how handsome (*kalos*) my grandfather is” (1.3.2). Cyrus's reaction to Astyages's appearance is noteworthy because the Persians' clothing was much simpler and less contrived than his grandfather's attire (1.3.2). Since Cyrus has never seen such lavish clothing before, his favorable reaction to it cannot be attributed to custom or convention.¹²⁰ Instead, his reaction reveals that he is by nature drawn to the exquisite and a lover of beautiful things (*philokalos*) (1.3.3).

Eager to show his affection for his grandson, Astyages offers Cyrus three kinds of gifts: lavish attire (including a robe, necklaces, and bracelets), a horse with a golden bridle, and fine sauces and meat (*opsa*) (1.3.3-4). Cyrus is pleased with the attire and extremely delighted at the prospect of learning to ride a horse (1.3.3). His attraction to these things is noteworthy, insofar as both fancy attire and skilled horsemanship are not only absent from Persia, but also at odds with the Persian way of life. The fancy attire reflects the Median desire for luxury, which contradicts the Persians' austerity. The horse and bridle reflect a penchant for horsemanship, which is almost entirely absent from Cyrus's homeland because Persia's mountainous terrain does not lend itself to riding horses, the result of which is that prior to Cyrus most Persians had never even seen a horse (1.3.3). While the lack of horses in Persia was caused by contingent

¹²⁰ Robert J. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 2002, 84, John Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," *Interpretation* 19.3 (1992): 228.

geographic factors, this absence affected the Persians' entire way of life. One consequence of not having horses was that, unlike the Arabians (2.1.5), Assyrians (3.3.60), and Medes (6.2.8) that Xenophon describes, his Persians prior to Cyrus did not possess chariots of war, each of which required four horses to pull it (6.1.28). In this regard, two of the most important innovations Cyrus enacts are that he introduces the Persians to horseracing (8.3.25, 8.3.33) and creates a revolutionary new design for war chariots, which makes them more sturdy and dependable in battle (6.1.27-30). The most significant consequence of Cyrus's innovations is that the Persians become increasingly better equipped to defeat and conquer their enemies. Absent his exhortations to practice horsemanship and without his technological innovation with regard to the chariots, the ability of the Persians to defeat and conquer their enemies would have been substantially diminished and they would have been less likely to become an expansionist empire. All of this is to say that the seeds of Cyrus's revolution and his destruction of the traditionally moderate and non-expansionist Persian way of life are in essence present in his natural delight in receiving fancy clothes and learning to ride horses.

Perhaps the most important facets of Cyrus's nature that emerge in Media are that he is attracted to liberty and that he has a strange fascination with death. The appeal that both of these things hold for him is visible during the second time he distributes meat to his companions (1.3.7, 1.4.11). On this occasion, he expounds on the beauty of hunting wild game as compared to hunting pent-up animals in his grandfather's manmade park, so as to try to persuade his companions to accompany him on his next excursion. Referring to the animals that he used to hunt in his grandfather's

preserve, Cyrus says that they were “skinny and mangy, and one was lame, another maimed” (1.4.11). He exclaims, “Boys, what triflers we were when we hunted the animals in the park! At least to me, that seems the same as hunting animals that are tied up.” As his comments suggest, Cyrus objects to imprisoning animals and preventing them from realizing their full potential, not because he cares about the animals’ well-being, but rather because to the extent that they are hampered, his victory over them on the hunt is not satisfying. Conversely, regarding the wild animals he encountered on the hunt, he states, “At least to me, these seem to be more beautiful (*kalos*) even when dead than do those pent-up animals when alive” (1.4.11). Cyrus finds the dead wild animals to be beautiful because unlike the domesticated animals, he can take pride in killing ferocious wild beasts that have a legitimate fighting chance against him. In his description of the wild game he killed, he quite uncharacteristically goes so far as to break into poetic similes: “The deer leaped forward toward heaven as if they had wings, and the boars came on at close quarters just as they say courageous men do” (1.4.11). When speaking about the hunt, Cyrus uses poetic language, which is often the language of love and the erotic, as well as of thumoeidetic expressions of militarism. As reflected in both the style and substance of his speech, Cyrus is passionately attracted to freedom and killing. While his descriptions of erotic love between human beings are stilted and flat (8.4.18-23), his descriptions of liberty and death are comparatively poetic, colorful, and lively.

Cyrus’s views about the beauty of freedom and death that come to light in the context of hunting animals are particularly important because for him they also apply to human beings as well. In the course of founding his empire, Cyrus attempts to enact

what he sees as a liberation of individuals from a vast array of countries whose circumstances, like the restricted animals in his grandfather's park, have prevented them from attaining their full potential (1.1.4, 2.3.7-16, 8.3.2, 8.3.5, 8.3.37). For example, he liberates the Persian commoners (*dēmotai*) from their lot in life by turning Persia into an expansionist empire, which according to his plan necessitates that they be trained in combat and thereby have access to the same opportunities for honors and leadership positions as the elite Persian peers (*homotimoi*) (2.1.9-19). But over time some of the Persian commoners as well as individuals from other nations who are supposed to benefit from Cyrus's reforms meet tragic and untimely demises under his lead (7.1.29-32, 7.3.2-16). For Cyrus, these deceased human beings that he believes he liberated prior to their deaths are more beautiful than they were when they were alive but constrained by the artificial limitations their homelands imposed on them (7.3.16), much like for him the dead wild animals are more beautiful than the living domesticated ones in the park.

Cyrus's natural and rather spooky attraction to death accounts in large part for why Astyages does not object to his grandson returning home when for the second time Cambyses summons him back to Persia to complete his Persian education (1.4.25). After the Medes under Cyrus's leadership successfully repel the initial attack waged by the Assyrian forces, Astyages rejoices at his good fortune and at the burgeoning martial talents of his grandson, who is instrumental in the Median victory (1.4.16-24). But for the first time he is troubled by Cyrus and a bit ambivalent toward him. His beloved grandson appears in a strange new light to him because of the fact that when the Medes were returning from battle, Cyrus "did nothing but ride around and gaze at (*theaomai*)

the fallen, and it was with difficulty that those who were ordered to do so dragged him away and led him to Astyages” (1.4.24). Seeing the angry expression on Astyages’s face, Cyrus realizes that his unsavory behavior has upset his grandfather. Even the seasoned tyrant Astyages is shocked and unsettled by Cyrus’s desire to gaze at and gloat over the fallen enemy. A passage from Xenophon’s Hiero helps put into context how inappropriate and morbid Cyrus’s behavior truly is. According to the tyrant Hiero’s testimony, one characteristic of men is that they typically delight in killing their enemies (Hiero, 2.15). But Cyrus’s remarkable bloodlust for his enemies and his desire to reign supreme over them requires more macabre satisfactions than the comparatively simple joy of the knife that Hiero describes. By feasting his eyes on his slain foes, Cyrus lords his existence over them and relives the thrill of the kill, over and over again. In light of his morbid behavior—which cannot be dismissed as a one-time or isolated transgression since to the contrary Cyrus does the same thing as an adult, albeit on that occasion with the corpse of one of his allies (7.3.3-10)—the conventional and dominant interpretation of the Cyropaedia, dating back to Cicero and according to which Cyrus is Xenophon’s “hero” or “ideal ruler,” leaves much to be desired.¹²¹ As Leo Strauss argued, “If Xenophon was not a fool, he did not intend to present Cyrus’s regime as a

¹²¹ Godfried Hutchinson, Xenophon and the Art of Command (London: Greenhill Books, 2000) 180, Pericles Georges, Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 209, 31.; Sarah Pomeroy, Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 267, Gera, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique 1, 7, 11, Phillip A. Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the Cyropaedia," The American Journal of Philology 112.4 (1991): 467-68, Bodil Due, The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1989) 19-21, James Tatum, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) xv, 11, 37, W.E. Higgins, Xenophon the Athenian (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 44, 53-55, Michael Grant, The Ancient Historians (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1970) 133, Neal Wood, "Xenophon's Theory of Leadership," Classica et Mediaevalia 25 (1964): 64. Werner W. Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) 162.

model.”¹²² Whereas most of Cyrus’s subjects and some commentators see only his actions and behavior (5.5.36-37), Xenophon’s narrative allows his careful readers to compare Cyrus’s deeds with his inner thoughts and motivations, which sometimes cast his actions in a different, less favorable, and occasionally more ominous light. In evaluating Cyrus’s rule, his many merits should not cause us to turn a blind eye to his flaws.

The fascination with death and thrill of the knife Cyrus experiences should be contrasted with his lack of passion for the sorts of erotic endeavors young men more typically seek out and enjoy. To take the most striking example of how unusual Cyrus is in this regard, consider that whereas many of his soldiers flock to ogle the beautiful prisoner Panthea (5.1.7-8), Cyrus himself never bothers to look at her, at least until she needs consoling after her husband Abradatas dies a noble but violent death on the battlefield (7.3.3-6). For an author whose tone is normally very gentle and who typically prefers to leave much to his reader’s imagination (6.1.46-48),¹²³ Xenophon is unusually explicit in his account of Abradatas’s death scene:

Where Abradatas and those with him made their charge, since the Egyptians were not able to withdraw because others on their sides stood fast, they struck and knocked down those who stood upright with the impetus of the horses, and they crushed the fallen, both the [men] and their weapons, with their horses and wheels. Wherever the scythes reached, they cut up everything with their violence, both arms and bodies. In this indescribable confusion, because of heaps of all sorts of things, Abradatas and others of those who joined in the charge fell out of their chariots when their wheels bounced off, and so these men who had been good (*agathos*) were here cut down and killed. (7.1.31-32)

¹²² Strauss, *On Tyranny* 181.

¹²³ Christopher Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 34.2 (2007): 131.

Why is Xenophon, at least by his own modest standards, so uncharacteristically vivid in his description of Abradatas's demise? I suggest that Xenophon goes out of his way to stress the carnage because he wants the reader to piece together how perverse and downright ghoulish Cyrus can be underneath the charm of his benevolent façade. Only after Abradatas's death does Cyrus agree to see Panthea with his own eyes for the first time, ostensibly to "comfort" her. But it is important to note that Cyrus becomes interested in visiting Panthea only after he hears that she sits weeping and holding her husband's severed "head on her knees" (7.3.3-6). While Xenophon certainly does not labor to stress the point, and though Cyrus comforts Panthea somewhat, Cyrus also simultaneously indulges his desire to gaze at corpses that first manifested itself and got him into trouble as a youth in Media (1.4.24). While Panthea is blind to Cyrus's real motivation, as are those commentators who maintain that Cyrus behaves "as a true gentleman" and shows "genuine concern" for her,¹²⁴ Xenophon means to help his more discerning readers grasp the dark side of Cyrus's personality and motivations by having Panthea ask him regarding Abradatas's mutilated corpse: "The rest is also like this, Cyrus. But why must you see?" (7.3.10). In posing this question, Panthea comes very close to grasping one of the less savory aspects of Cyrus's character that he would prefer to keep hidden. For this reason, when she all but confesses to him that she is plotting her own suicide, he does nothing to secure her safety and instead lets events run their course (7.3.12-14).

¹²⁴ Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 67 n. 63. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* 53.

Another way in which Cyrus's time in Media foreshadows the rest of his career is that, with the exception of his mother, women hardly figure in his life.¹²⁵ It is therefore fitting that no women are mentioned in the group that accompanies him as he heads back to Persia (1.4.25). As his time as an adolescent in Media foreshadows and as the rest of the *Cyropaedia* confirms, Cyrus has little if any erotic interest in women. For example, the Assyrian Gobryas offers him his daughter, who Gobryas describes as "ripe for marriage," but Cyrus declines (4.6.9, 5.2.12, 8.4.16, 8.4.24-27). Moreover, even when he finally takes his uncle Cyaxares' daughter as his wife later in life, he seems to do so mostly for political expediency (8.5.19, 8.5.28),¹²⁶ specifically to gain Media as a dowry and thereby avoid the necessity and impropriety of conquering his own uncle's kingdom by force.¹²⁷ Aside from her political importance in helping Cyrus peacefully expand his empire, his wife's insignificance in his own eyes is visible in the fact that he does not even bother to personally say goodbye to her before he dies (8.7.28). Even Socrates, who at the end of his life no one could possibly mistake for being in love with his tempestuous wife Xanthippe, condescends to spend at least some time with her just prior to his execution (*Phaedo*, 59e-60b).

Given Cyrus's general disinterest in women, as well as his proclivity for cultivating friendships almost exclusively with males, one might be tempted to think that he was homosexual. In this regard, Xenophon's playful account of the story of Cyrus and his Median boyfriend Artabazus (*paidikos logos*) is important because it

¹²⁵ Leslie G. Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 16.3 (1989): 392.

¹²⁶ Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 169. Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 54. Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction* 77. Newell, "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," 45.

¹²⁷ Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 201.

points to the fact that he does not seem to have any more erotic interest in men than he does for women (1.4.27-28). As the Greek adjective *paidikos* implies and as Xenophon's account confirms, the relationship between Cyrus and Artabazus has erotic overtones, with Artabazus playing the part of the lover and Cyrus the beloved. In keeping with a Persian custom that encourages one to kiss one's kin prior to departing on a trip or returning after a separation, just before Cyrus leaves to return to Persia, Artabazus jokingly pretends to be a kinsman of his so that Cyrus will kiss him (1.4.27). After Artabazus playfully manipulates Cyrus into kissing him for a second time, the two go their separate ways. However, no sooner have they separated than Artabazus suddenly comes back to Cyrus. Cyrus pretends to be confused and asks, "Did you forget something you wished to say?" "No, by Zeus," Artabazus swears, "but I am returning after a length of time." When Cyrus jokingly notes how short their separation was, Artabazus expresses a very different opinion: "Do you not know, Cyrus, that even so long as it takes me to blink seems to me to an extremely long time, because I then do not see you, such as you are." At this point, Cyrus laughs and bursts into tears, promising to return to Artabazus "in a short time, so that it would be possible for [Artabazus] to look at him, if he wished, without blinking" (1.4.28). While Artabazus's behavior demonstrates that he is powerless to resist Cyrus's good looks (1.2.1), Cyrus's laughter reveals his delight to learn of Artabazus's affection. As becomes apparent many years later when Cyrus quite coldly refuses to kiss Artabazus anymore (8.4.26-27), the tears he shed in the earlier encounter while leaving Media were due to his being overcome with joy to learn that Artabazus loved *him*, not because he himself felt any reciprocal passion for Artabazus. Cyrus, it seems, has little romantic interest in women

or men. As some interpreters have noted, he has a peculiarly cold psychology.¹²⁸ With respect to *erōs* he is, as one of his own companions candidly jokes during a drinking party, “a frigid king” (8.4.22-23).

Xenophon sees the fact that Cyrus is naturally unerotic as a key to his spectacular political achievements, but also as one of the root causes for his shortcomings. Throughout his life, Cyrus gladly receives both friendly affection (*philia*) and declarations of passionate love (*erōs*) from his subjects. While he goes out of his way to be friendly and generous to most of his subjects, he does not reciprocate the shows of intense erotic affection some of his admirers, such as Artabazus, bestow on him. To the contrary, he sees that insofar as he can make himself the beloved of others, he can have them as his willing subjects (1.1.3, 8.2.28). Prior to his marriage later in life, his refusal to commit himself to any one person allows some of his subjects to fantasize that someday they might have Cyrus for themselves, which causes them to go to great lengths to prove their devotion. In the case of Artabazus, a few playful kisses from his beloved completely bind him to Cyrus for the rest of his life, such that he is willing to go to the ends of earth, both figuratively and literally, to please his beloved (4.1.22-24, 5.1.24-26, 6.1.9-10, 7.5.48-54, 8.4.27). As Cyrus learns, by cultivating and harnessing many of his subjects’ feelings and passions, he can make use of them in a political advantageous way. Regarding the problem of revolution to which Xenophon refers at the beginning of the book (1.1.1-3), Cyrus discovers that subjects who love and adore their rulers are not likely to seek to overthrow them. *Erōs* for Cyrus is thus

¹²⁸ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 155. W.R. Newell, "Tyranny and the Science of Ruling in Xenophon's "Education of Cyrus", " *The Journal of Politics* 45 (1983): 895.

primarily a means to power, honor, and empire, one that he looks at more as a detached and scheming spectator than he does as an actual participant. Like the *kallipolis* or beautiful city in Plato's Republic, Cyrus by his nature manipulates *erōs* to serve his political ends, which is to say that he distorts and denatures it, since *erōs* by its own uncorrupted nature is apolitical insofar as it points beyond the conventions of politics and political life.¹²⁹ Largely devoid of *erōs* himself, Cyrus easily avoids getting himself ensnared in complicated affairs of the heart, as well as eliciting hatred for crass sensual indulgences that have contributed to many a ruler's downfall, including to some extent that of Cyrus's uncle Cyaxares (one is reminded in this context of Machiavelli's argument in chapter 17 of the Prince that one way for the prince to avoid evoking hatred from his subjects is to keep his hands off their women.) But if Cyrus's lack of *erōs* helps account for his unprecedented rise to power, it also helps explain why once he obtained power, he had little idea of what to do with it. Lacking a philosopher's *erōs* for lifelong education, Cyrus decides at a young age that he grasps all he needs to know to found and rule judiciously over an empire (1.3.16-17, 1.6.8). He leaves school in the middle of his Persian education to help defend Persia and her ally Media from the Assyrians, but as country after country falls under Cyrus's control, he decides to forego the rest of his education and focus his efforts entirely on establishing his empire, despite his father's calls for him to return home to finish his education. In the end, Cyrus has absolute power and everything he does is accompanied by great pomp and circumstance. Yet for Xenophon all of this fanfare is mostly smoke and mirrors that,

¹²⁹ Allan Bloom, Love and Friendship (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 35, Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964) 117.

contra Cyrus's adoring subjects, does not completely conceal the fact that Cyrus's education was both incomplete and, in addition, also somewhat defective. Aside from the fact that Cyrus never finished his Persian education (1.2.5-14, 1.5.1), no part of his education was more problematic in Xenophon's eyes than his Median education, to which I now turn.

Cyrus's Median Education

This section argues that in the course of his Median education Cyrus learns important lessons that he applies throughout his life as he founds and then administers over the Persian Empire.

The first part of Cyrus's Median education is that he learns the value of cultivating a benevolent appearance. While as the ruler of Media Astyages must guard against the possibility that his disgruntled subjects might poison him (1.3.9-10), Cyrus discovers that if he gives away his possessions, others will come to see themselves as his fortunate subjects and to see him as their generous ruler, to whom gratitude is owed (5.3.20). For example, one evening Astyages offers Cyrus a great quantity of meat to do with as he pleases, under the auspices that such a large amount will make him stronger (1.3.6). But Cyrus has his own thoughts as to what to do with the meat. He takes it and distributes it to his grandfather's servants, saying to them, "This is for you, because you teach me to ride with enthusiasm; for you, because you gave me a javelin, and now I have it; for you, because you serve my grandfather nobly; for you, because you honor my mother" (1.3.7). Cyrus continues in this fashion until he distributes all the meat that Astyages gave him. By distributing the meat rather than keeping it for

himself, Cyrus rewards others for their services in a manner altogether painless to him, gains the gratitude and affection of those who receive it from him, and furthers his reputation for kindness. He does this sort of thing repeatedly throughout his career and his kindness makes a very favorable impression on his subjects, some of whom composed poetry and songs as testaments to his benevolence (1.2.1). Yet it is important to note that, just like at his grandfather's table, Cyrus often uses others' possessions to finance his operations and to reward his faithful subjects (5.3.10, 5.4.14). Machiavelli saw the nature of Cyrus's benevolence quite clearly: "And of what is not yours or your subjects' one can be a bigger giver, as were Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander, because spending what is someone else's does not take reputation from you but adds it to you; only spending what is your own harms you" (Prince, ch. 16).

While Cyrus is always quite liberal and generous in giving away other people's things, as well as items about which he himself cares little, such as food, drink, and women, he is much more guarded and less willing to share what he considers to be more refined pleasures, including above all else the supreme honor that he accrues for himself as ruler of the empire. Fortunately for him, he discovers that for the most part he does not have to compete with others for these more refined pleasures. While Xenophon notes that the many admire tyrants who are able to hold on to their power (1.1.1), a tacit lesson of the Cyropaedia —one that Machiavelli also endorses in the Prince when he writes, "the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed" (ch. 9; see also Discourses 1.1, 1.5, 1.16, 1.40)— is that regardless of what they may say, in truth most human beings do not themselves desire to rule, so much as they simply wish not to be oppressed by their rulers, whoever they happen to be (1.1.2-

3).¹³⁰ As the Cyropaedia suggests, the mistake that most rulers make once they gain power is that they begin immediately oppressing their subjects, from which point their days in power are almost always numbered. Knowledgeable rulers like Cyrus know better and recognize that their duration in office is directly tied to their ability to benevolently provide for their subjects' needs. While oppressive tyrants might make quicker short-term gains than Cyrus, his steady long term policy of benevolence eventually results in him presiding over almost the entire known world.

Though his grand displays of generosity helped him rise to power, the fact that Cyrus always ensures that he has a captive audience to witness his benevolent deeds suggests that they are not always entirely genuine (1.4.2, 5.5.37). Xenophon in his own voice very quietly admits that there were subjects toward whom Cyrus was so indifferent that he scarcely cared if they lived or died: "And whenever anyone fell sick *in whose recovery he was interested*, he would visit him and provide for him whatever was needed" (8.2.25, my emphasis). When it suits his purposes, Cyrus makes a big production of visiting the sick; when it does not, Xenophon implies that Cyrus discreetly stays away. His decision-making process seems to take the form of a conditional —if there is some gain (*kerdos*) to be had by acting philanthropically, then act benevolently— which raises questions about the extent to which he truly deserved his reputation among the barbarians for benevolence (1.2.1). For example, much to Cyrus's delight, Astyages cannot help but grant his every request, in part because Cyrus goes to such extraordinary lengths to make the fact that he is such a devoted grandson visible to everyone. Xenophon states that "when his grandfather was sick, Cyrus never

¹³⁰ Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 129-30.

left him and never ceased weeping, but he made it plain to all that he was extremely afraid that he might die” (1.4.2). In this passage, Xenophon emphasizes the public character of Cyrus’s intentions.¹³¹ While Cyrus is no doubt truly concerned with Astyages’s well being, he is at least as concerned that others witness his extraordinary devotion. Throughout his life, Cyrus at all times is acutely cognizant of being on stage, with the eyes of his star-struck subjects constantly on him. In particular, as ruler of the Persian Empire he continues his childhood practice of bestowing attention on the sick. One might say that as a boy Cyrus grasped on his own what Machiavelli would feel compelled to explain to would-be princes that apparently did not have Cyrus’s natural and intuitive understanding — princes must be aware of their appearances at all times and must carefully orchestrate them so as to produce the desired or necessary effect (Prince, ch. 18). The mutual emphasis on the importance of appearance is no doubt one reason why Machiavelli for the most part spared Xenophon the comparatively harsh criticisms to which he subjected the other ancient political philosophers.

Several other passages also stress the importance Cyrus places on appearances, which further calls into question the extent to which his benevolence is entirely genuine. Throughout his life (5.5.37, 8.1.39, 8.2.7), Cyrus made “his benevolence of soul every bit as visible (*phainō*) as he could, for he believed that just as it is not easy to love those who seem to hate you, so also those known as loving and as being well disposed could not be hated by those who held that they were loved” (8.2.1). While this passage stresses the utility of Cyrus’s benevolent appearance for his rule, it also leaves open the possibility that he might have been willing to cultivate a reputation for benevolence and

¹³¹ Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 52.

nonetheless practice cruelty, provided that no one saw him doing so. In fact, a few characters in the Cyropaedia who get in the way of Cyrus's desire for preeminence testify to his benevolence (3.3.4, 6.1.47), completely unaware that he in fact conspires to put them under his thumb and to bring about their fall (7.3.13-16, 8.7.11). One misses important facets of Cyrus if one judges him based only on favorable reactions to his public persona, especially since on occasion he can be quite callous, particularly when he is not in front of an audience (7.3.12-16). Behind the scenes, Cyrus is not quite as benevolent as he appears to be when he is in the public eye (5.1.17, 6.1.38-45, 6.1.45-49). To take but one example, one day while in Media Cyrus asks his companions whether their fathers might allow them to accompany him on future hunting expeditions, to which they reply that if Astyages gives his permission, then they will (1.4.12). When the question arises regarding who should petition Astyages to allow Cyrus's companions to accompany him, his friends state that Cyrus is of course the natural choice. In part because of shyness that accompanies the onset of puberty, but more importantly because his newly emerging pride means that he does not like having to ask permission, the once loquacious Cyrus replies that he is no longer as willing to petition Astyages as he was when he was younger (1.4.12). The boys coldly respond that since Cyrus is unwilling to provide for their needs, they will ask someone else to do so. According to Xenophon, "Cyrus was stung at hearing this, and going away in silence, he ordered himself to take the dare" (1.4.13). As this passage shows, Cyrus cannot abide the thought of someone other than himself providing for his companions' desires. In Media, he infers by watching Astyages that one who fails to provide for others' desires can never rule over them without recourse to the threat of

force and to constantly being on guard against assassination. Conversely, he intuits that as long as he provides for others' desires, they will count him as their ruler, one for whom no honor will be too great.¹³² Cyrus might have divulged his discoveries to his grandfather, explaining that in order to rule others knowledgably and capture their hearts, one must effectively provide for and satisfy their desires. In a manner along the lines of the poet Simonides's conversation with the tyrant Hiero in Xenophon's Hiero (ch. 8-11) or Aristotle's advice to tyrants in the Politics (1313a34-1315b10), Cyrus could have tried to moderate Astyages's tyranny a bit by explaining to his grandfather the way in which giving away many of his excess possessions to his subjects could begin to make him honored and adored by them. Had Cyrus shared his secret with Astyages, and had Astyages acted on his advice, Cyrus potentially could have improved the Medes' plight a bit through his behind the scenes discussions with his grandfather. But Cyrus chooses to keep his knowledge completely to himself. I conclude that he apparently has no interest whatsoever in benefiting the Medes and improving their lot in life if he himself cannot take credit for doing so. From Cyrus's point of view, teaching Astyages to benevolently provide for his subjects would be tantamount to letting someone else petition his grandfather to take his friends on the hunt. The harsh side of Cyrus's "benevolent" nature is that he wants himself —and only himself— to be the benefactor (8.4.35-36).

The final aspect of Cyrus's benevolence is that it involves a concerted effort to satisfy his subjects' desires without passing judgment on them, a technique that Cyrus

¹³² W.R. Newell, "Machiavelli and Xenophon and Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter," The Journal of Politics 50.1 (1988): 116 n. 9.

hones while in Media. After he secures Astyages's permission to hunt, Xenophon notes that "Cyrus spent most of his time [hunting with his friends], being for all a cause of pleasure and of some good, but of nothing bad" (1.4.15). The fact that Cyrus avoided being the cause of anything unpleasant for his comrades stands in stark contrast to his Persian education, which could be so unpleasant that it sometimes reduced individuals to tears, because it prohibited them from taking part in immoderate and ignoble activities, some of which were nonetheless naturally pleasurable (2.2.14). According to the Persian authorities, pleasures such as eating moderately after exercise were deemed good, while other pleasures like drinking excessively were regarded as bad (1.2.8). In contrast to his Persian teachers, Cyrus does not make it his business to judge the pleasures in which others happen to indulge. As he quickly learns, his interest is served by skillfully providing others with their pleasures, not by passing judgment on them. Cyrus sees that a ruler who strives to produce laughter and pleasurable satisfactions rather than tears will find willing and adoring subjects (4.5.52, 4.5.55). Whereas the Persians try to improve their citizens by educating them to take pleasure in virtue, and whereas Astyages tends to simply neglect the majority of the Medes' needs and pleasures in favor of lavishly providing for his own, Cyrus adroitly provides for others' desires without passing judgment on them. In Media, he learns that he can rule over everyone, provided that instead of trying to educate or talk people out of feeling pleasure in whatever happens to please them, he simply provides for everyone, without judgment, on a case-by-case basis.

The second part of Cyrus's Median education is that he learns that politics is sometimes what is today called a 'zero-sum game,' whereby one can benefit oneself and

one's friends only by taking from or harming enemies. Watching Cyrus give away the meat he gave him as a gift, Astyages asks his grandson whether he is going to give any to Sakas, the royal cupbearer and doorman (1.3.8). Cyrus ignores Astyages's question and responds with one of his own: "Why, grandfather, do you honor him so?" Astyages replies that he esteems Sakas because he nobly and gracefully pours his wine for him. Hoping to further increase his grandfather's already considerable affection for him, Cyrus volunteers to pour the wine for Astyages himself (1.3.9). Mimicking Sakas's elaborate, contrived, and servile gestures, Cyrus laughs and provokes others' laughter, which he takes as a sign of approval. Delighted with himself, he says, "Sakas, you are done for; I will cast you out of honor (*timē*), for I will both pour the wine more nobly than you in other respects and I will not drink the wine myself" (1.3.9). The preceding passage is the first time Xenophon states that Cyrus laughed. On the one hand, his laughter stems from his delight in realizing that he can more dutifully serve his grandfather and make a better cupbearer than Sakas by not drinking any of the wine, which it should be noted he does not himself desire anyway. But on the other hand, Cyrus's laugh cannot be attributed solely to his delight in better serving his grandfather, insofar as it also reveals his satisfaction in casting Sakas "out of honor" and thereby taking his job and the perquisites that come with it from him. As evidenced by his threat to Sakas, who he admits he does not like (1.3.11), Cyrus delights in harming those he regards as his enemies. His treatment of Sakas foreshadows his lifelong tendency to regard politics and life in general as zero-sum games, which require him to divide up the world into friends who he benefits and enemies who he harms. In order for him to advance his own interests by providing for his friends, Cyrus typically harms

a third party such as Sakas that he regards as an enemy (6.3.22, 8.2.9). At the broadest level, the basic means by which Cyrus establishes the empire is that he seizes the possessions of one country, redistributes them to his army, and then offers those he has recently conquered the opportunity to join his forces and thereby regain “their” possessions after the next country falls (7.1.41-45, 7.4.14, 7.5.35).

Along with those like Sakas that Cyrus regards as enemies, he is willing to undercut even his own relatives when necessary to secure honor and power for himself. For example, Xenophon indicates the extent to which Cyrus’s power grows while in Media by showing how his grandfather begins grooming him, instead of his own son Cyaxares, to be the next ruler of Media. Astyages’s favoritism toward Cyrus, which Cyrus goes out of his way to court (1.3.2), can be seen by considering the circumstances surrounding one of the hunting excursions in which his grandson participates (1.4.7-9). This passage is an example of Cyaxares’ relative insignificance as compared to Cyrus, for at this point in the narrative Cyrus has been in Media for years, yet this is the first time Xenophon bothers to reveal that Astyages has a son, and thus a natural heir to the throne. We meet Cyaxares as Astyages orders him to go with Cyrus to protect him on the hunt (1.4.7). By delaying the introduction of Cyaxares until this moment, Xenophon thereby suggests that Cyaxares’ only real significance is that as the heir to the throne he is an obstacle for Cyrus to overcome and, worse yet, on this particular occasion a mere means to Cyrus’s safety. Cyaxares in essence gets unceremoniously demoted from the heir apparent to the throne to the ranks of the royal guard. The fact that compared to Cyrus Astyages apparently thinks so little of his son —and his judgment is far from groundless, given Cyaxares’ pusillanimity (1.4.20, 1.4.22, 3.3.14,

4.1.13-18) and his repeated immoderate excesses (4.1.13, 4.5.8, 4.5.51-52, 4.6.11, 5.5.2, 5.5.38-40, 8.5.17)— helps explain why he adamantly desires that Cyrus stay and grow up in Media (1.3.1, 1.3.13). As he learns of Cyrus's remarkable natural talents (1.3.1), Astyages begins to conceive of Cyrus as his heir apparent. If Cyaxares is the natural heir in the sense that he is Astyages's son, then Cyrus is a competing natural heir in that he is more talented by nature and more fit to rule than Cyaxares (1.1.3, 1.1.6, 5.1.24-29).¹³³

When Cyrus is around 15 or 16 years old, the belligerent son of the Assyrian king who emerges as Cyrus's arch-rival decides to hunt game on the border of Assyria and Media for his upcoming marital feast (1.4.16), which leads to a skirmish between the Assyrians and the Medes and gives Cyrus the opportunity to outshine his uncle on the battlefield. Soon after the Assyrian forces arrive at the border, they contentiously decide to foray into Media to take additional plunder (1.4.7). As soon as Astyages receives word of the Assyrian's plans, he dispatches Cyaxares along with the Median guard and cavalry to repel the enemy (1.4.18). Though Astyages does not send his grandson, "Cyrus, seeing others going in a rush to help, also went to help" (1.4.18). By this point, Cyrus has become quite skilled as a horseman, which prompts one to wonder why Astyages did not see fit to send him along with Cyaxares to help fight. I suggest that Astyages considers Cyaxares but not Cyrus to be somewhat expendable. If that is correct, then the fact that Astyages sends Cyaxares but not Cyrus into battle is another indication that shortly after Cyrus's arrival in Media, Astyages begins grooming him

¹³³ Wayne Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," *Xenophon: The Education of Cyrus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 6, Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction* 117, Newell, "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," 81.

instead of Cyaxares to be the next ruler. In fact, Cyaxares himself dejectedly concedes this point when he says to Cyrus, “Do what you wish, for it looks like you are now our king” (1.4.9). As evidenced by Cyrus’s diligent efforts to make himself the apple of his grandfather’s eye, and especially by the way in which he rather cruelly manipulates and humiliates Cyaxares every step of the way as the empire expands, he is willing to undermine his own uncle’s authority when it gets in the way of him securing preeminence of position and power.¹³⁴ The point was not lost on Machiavelli, who makes a similar point regarding the potential need for aspiring princes to depose their own family members, but in his characteristically audacious way goes further than the comparatively delicate Xenophon by compounding the treachery with cold-blooded murder for good measure (Prince, ch. 8).

The third part of Cyrus’s Median education is that he comes to believe that given absolute power (*dunamis*), nothing is beyond his will to control. One part of the considerable amount of power Cyrus possesses in Media is the freedom to decide whether or not he will keep his promises, as evidenced by the pledge to his mother that he eventually breaks regarding when he will return to Persia. Given that his stated reason to his mother as to why he wants to remain in Media despite his father’s summons home is that he wants to become “the best horseman (*hippeus*)” in Media (1.3.15), at the point at which he surpasses his peers in horsemanship (1.4.5), he ought to have returned home. Instead, he chooses to continue his sojourn in Media, which is to say that he breaks his promise to his mother with total impunity. As long as he remains in Media with his powerful and doting grandfather, he is free to break his

¹³⁴ Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 134-39.

promises and do exactly what he pleases. As Cyrus's broken promise to his mother demonstrates, he learns that promises can be useful for getting what he wants and for buying time to augment his power, at which point he may decide for himself whether or not to honor them. As Machiavelli puts it, "A prudent lord...cannot observe faith, nor should he, when such observance turns against him, and the causes that made him promise have been eliminated" (*Prince*, ch. 18).

In Media, for the first time in his life, Cyrus feels the thrill of absolute power and total control over people and events, which makes it unlikely in the extreme that he would ever be able to abide going back to Persia and submitting once again to the will of his teachers for very long (1.2.4-14, 1.5.1, 1.5.8). Eager to entice his beloved grandson to remain with him for an extended stay, Astyages promises Cyrus anything he wishes (1.3.14). Regarding meals, Astyages tells him, "you may take whatever path you wish to what seems to you to be a measured (*metron*) [diet]" (1.3.14). In this regard, two facets of Astyages's tyranny and absolute power are particularly relevant to Cyrus's Median education and especially noteworthy. First, Astyages implies that there are many paths to moderation, rather the common regimen the Persians traditionally taught their young in the schools of moderation (1.2.8). In this way, Astyages tempts Cyrus not so much by challenging the goal of moderation that the Persians had taught him to pursue, but rather by calling into question the standard means they believed conducive to that end. Second, Astyages's phrase "what seems to you to be a measured diet" goes further, insofar as it implies that there is no such thing as moderation, per se. His tacit suggestion is that the meaning of moderation and what counts as a measured diet varies from time to time and place to place. Having made Cyrus master of the

means to moderation, Astyages also makes him dictator of moderation's very meaning. If, as Astyages's statement implies, human beings do not possess natural ends the fulfillment of which completes their nature; and if, as he also suggests, the means toward whatever ends one happens to choose to adopt are themselves not governed by nature and thus are also arbitrary; then it follows that according to him nature provides no guidance for human life. Insofar as Astyages offers Cyrus the opportunity to define moderation and to delineate the means to it however he likes, he offers him the prospect of absolute power. In Media, Cyrus thus begins to question whether anything—even that which exists according to nature—is necessarily beyond his will to control. Because of his grandfather's tyrannical influence, Cyrus leaves Media believing that if he can acquire enough power, then his will need not recognize any boundaries and his authority over all persons and things, including even nature herself, will be absolute (1.3.6, 1.3.14, 1.4.5, 7.2.7, 7.5.9-19). The fact that Cyrus does not object when his grandfather implies that both the meaning of moderation and the means to it are in the eye of the beholder portends his eventual incorporation of certain tyrannical elements into his rule at the conclusion of the *Cyropaedia* (1.1.5, 7.4.5, 7.5.36, 7.5.61, 7.5.83, 8.1.43-44, 8.3.14, 8.4.35, 8.5.6, 8.6.1-16, 8.6.18).

The fourth part of Cyrus's Median education is that he learns to abide short-term losses when they are conducive to achieving his own long-term gain. For example, prior to becoming a skilled horseman, he declined to challenge his young Median friends to contests where he knew he was their superior and instead preferred to compete against them in contests on horseback that he knew in advance he would likely lose (1.4.4, 1.6.10). Xenophon notes, "When defeated, he would laugh at himself most vigorously"

(1.4.4). Though Xenophon does not spell out in his own name why Cyrus laughs, it seems that he does so because despite the fact that he “loses,” he still gets exactly what he wants. By only choosing to compete in contests in which everyone knows he cannot win, Cyrus displays to others what looks like nothing more than good-natured generosity and thereby indulges his all-consuming desire for popularity (1.4.1). He is in effect content to lose the battles on horseback in order to win the war for his friends’ affection and his own renown (1.4.1). This willingness to tolerate short-term losses when necessary to advance his own long-term interests becomes a key strategy in his rise to power. For example, he claims that he is willing to forego immediate pleasure when doing so can lead to greater pleasures down the road (8.1.32). Despite his austere outward appearance, Cyrus is in essence a hedonist, albeit a shrewdly calculating and enlightened one (5.3.35, 7.5.80, 8.1.32). Despite Cyaxares’ general unreasonableness (4.5.9), he hits the nail on the head when he implies that Cyrus is uncontrolled in his pursuit of pleasure (4.1.14-18).¹³⁵ In rare moments of candor, Cyrus himself admits as much, declaring that he himself is “insatiable for money” and “desire[s] always more” (8.2.16, 8.2.20, 8.2.22).

The fifth part of Cyrus’s Median education is that while as the son of king Cambyses he is assured of one day inheriting the Persian throne, in Media he learns how to establish himself as ruler in foreign lands where, absent his knowledgeable and creative efforts, he would not otherwise be the sovereign. By the end of Cyrus’s stay in Media, Xenophon subtly suggests that he has grown so popular with the Medes that he

¹³⁵ Wayne Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," *Xenophon: The Education of Cyrus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 18.

is beginning to emerge as their de facto ruler. One way that Cyrus increases his stock is by publicly manipulating Astyages and boldly contradicting him as others look on. For example, riding along to accompany Cyrus and his friends on a hunt, Astyages forbids anyone else to throw until Cyrus has his fill (1.4.14). However, Cyrus does not allow Astyages to hinder the others, telling him, “Grandfather, if you wish me to hunt with pleasure, let all those with me give chase and compete, that each may do as well as he is able (*dunamai*).” Though Cyrus stresses the justness of his intentions, he downplays the sense in which a situation where everyone has an equal opportunity to compete also benefits himself. Camouflaged under the veneer of well-intentioned egalitarianism, the first of Cyrus’s two unspoken objections to Astyages’s decree is that while he can win his companions’ respect and admiration should he prove himself the best hunter when they all have a chance to throw, his victory will be tarnished and hollow if Astyages denies the other boys an equal opportunity to compete. Cyrus’s second and more important unspoken objection is that he dislikes Astyages assuming the role of the commander of the boys on what was supposed to be an excursion that he himself lead. Because of his rapidly emerging pride (1.4.8), Cyrus resents receiving orders from his grandfather as the other boys look on (1.4.14). Insofar as Astyages takes away his opportunity for a legitimate and satisfying victory, and because his fantasy does not unfold exactly as he envisioned it with himself as leader, Cyrus contradicts his grandfather in front of others in a manner that might have had serious consequences for anyone but Cyrus. However, not only does Astyages not take offense at being contradicted publicly by Cyrus, but also he agrees to Cyrus’s proposal (1.4.15). To his

amazed companions, it must appear that in practice Cyrus is the ruler and Astyages is his subject, which is exactly the impression Cyrus wants to convey.

The final indication that Cyrus emerges as the de facto ruler in Media can be seen in Astyages's decision to send him back home to Persia, which in part suggests Astyages's awareness that Cyrus's presence is politically destabilizing and problematic, insofar as he is rapidly emerging as a hero in the eyes of the Medes (5.1.25). Shortly after the initial skirmish with the Assyrians in which Cyrus courageously leads the Median forces to victory, Cambyses summons him back to Persia for the second time (1.4.25). This time, unlike the previous occasion, Astyages complies with Cambyses's request because he thought it necessary (*anagkaios*) and expedient to send Cyrus away (1.4.25). We are left to wonder: In the time between Cambyses's first and second summons, what caused Astyages's change of heart? While Xenophon does not state why or in what sense Astyages thought it necessary to send Cyrus home, two possibilities come to mind. First, as we have seen, Astyages is clearly displeased with Cyrus when after the clash with the Assyrians he rides around gazing at and gloating over the dead bodies (1.4.24). Second, and perhaps more importantly, Astyages sees firsthand that Cyrus's prodigious talent and ambition make him politically destabilizing, regardless of whether he is in Persia (1.3.16-17, 1.5.6-14, 2.1.11-19), Media (1.4.9, 1.4.25), or anywhere else (7.5.57). As Artabazus tells Cyrus, human beings, regardless of their nationalities and prior loyalties, seem to follow his lead as if by instinct (5.1.25). Moreover, given that Cyrus's presence proved so problematic in the eyes of his Persian teachers that they apparently judged it necessary to give him a beating (1.3.16), what are the odds that the excessively permissive Astyages will be able to keep

Cyrus in check and prevent him from destabilizing his rule over the Medes? The fact that Cyrus's doting grandfather thought it necessary to send him home shows the extent to which Cyrus's talent and ambition threaten to overturn even the most stable of regimes and their established rulers (1.1.4, 8.8.27).

Cyrus's Median education is important for understanding his rule and the Cyropaedia as a whole, insofar as he is in many respects a theoretically uneasy yet practically effective product of his Persian and his Median educations, the respective core principles of which are fundamentally at odds with one another. First, while Cyrus's Persian education stresses moderation, his Median education encourages immoderation. Cyrus in a sense splits the difference and remains very moderate with respect to bodily pleasures, but extremely immoderate in his love and pursuit of wealth, honor, and victory (8.2.20). The result is that the many are quite taken in by Cyrus's ability to remain moderate toward those things such as food and drink which they themselves covet. While they especially appreciate him generously providing for their desires that to their amazement he himself does not seem to share, they fail to notice something that Cyrus himself sees quite clearly: For every act of charity, there is often an implicit hierarchy established between benefactor and benefited. The fact that Cyrus wants others to be in his debt but does not himself want to be beholden to anyone else explains his why he sometimes refuses others' generous offers (5.2.14). Second, whereas Cyrus's Persian education promotes dedication to the common good (1.2.2), his Median education under the tutelage of his tyrannical grandfather encourages him to put his own desires ahead of the common good (1.3.5, 1.6.8). Once again, Cyrus creatively and effectively combines his educations by striving to promote the common

good as a means to satisfying his love of honor and fame. He in essence establishes a *quid pro quo* with his subjects throughout his empire. Cyrus provides them with peace, security, and abundance; and all he asks in return is that they gratefully give him the preeminent honors to which he is entitled. It is a Faustian bargain his blithe subjects all too happily make.

More than any other part of Xenophon's narrative, Cyrus's Median education helps make sense of the conclusion of the Cyropaedia, at which point both his appearance and method of governing become in some ways practically indistinguishable from that of the tyrant Astyages (2.4.1-8, 7.5.58-65, 8.1.40-41, 8.1.46-48, 8.2.10, 8.2.26-28, 8.3.5, 8.3.14, 8.6.1-16).¹³⁶ Cyrus's Median education helps explain why, despite the fact that at the outset of the narrative he seems so promising in light of his natural gifts (1.1.6), he ultimately disappoints. In his appearance, once Cyrus wins the final battle against the Assyrian and conquers Babylon, he adopts the Median dress, replete with platform shoes, cosmetic, and fine robes in a variety of exotic colors that had been favored by his grandfather (8.1.41, 8.3.1). Regarding his rule, by the end of his life, Cyrus possesses absolute power and control over the Persian Empire. While his rule extends vastly wider than his grandfather's comparatively localized tyranny ever had, both govern according to absolute rule, which is the shared method that unites them. For example, like Astyages (1.4.26), while Cyrus gives the appearance of allowing some in the empire to possess property, in fact everything belongs to him (8.4.36), as evidenced by the fact that he redistributes property as a

¹³⁶ Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 42, Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," 17.

means of punishing his disobedient subjects when they displease him and rewarding those who serve him particularly well (8.1.17-18, 8.1.20). To take another example, the educational system under Cyrus also reflects his absolute authority. Though he makes some effort to preserve a kind of continuity between the traditional Persian education and the education of the most talented of his subjects who will assist him in governing (7.5.85-86, 8.1.43), in fact the two systems are very different. The most important difference is that, unlike the elite Persian peers, whose republican education consisted in studying the Persians' laws (1.2.2, 1.2.6), Cyrus governs solely according to his own will, as he had dreamed of doing from a young age and which his visit with Astyages convinced him was truly possible (1.3.16-17). As was the case in Media under Astyages, in the empire obedience to Cyrus as the absolute sovereign replaces fidelity to the law as the cardinal virtue.

In the end, Cyrus gets exactly what he wants, presiding over legions of subjects who are for the most part content to be ruled by him. But whether the absolute power he wants, or thinks he wants, is truly what he desires must be a matter of some doubt. Never one for modesty, Cyrus pronounces himself blessed and happy (*makarios*) (8.7.8-9), but Xenophon never in his own name calls him that. In contrast, Xenophon himself does call Socrates *makarios* (Memorabilia, 1.6.14).¹³⁷ When Cyrus asks, “[H]ow should I not justly obtain for all time the memory of being blessedly happy,” Xenophon in effect offers the Cyropaedia as a whole by way of answer to Cyrus. While the barbarians remember Cyrus as blessedly happy (1.1.1, 1.2.1), Xenophon himself does

¹³⁷ Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon," History of Political Philosophy, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 102.

not. After all, Cyrus sets out to rid the world of tyrants like his grandfather, yet in the end winds up becoming in many ways indistinguishable from him. The reason why over time he becomes that which he once hated is for a Socratic like Xenophon fairly straightforward: Cyrus does not know himself. He fancies that once he has absolute power he will know what to do with it and that all decisions will be as easy to decide as making sure that boys have coats that fit (1.3.16-17). But once Cyrus assumes power, the fact that he does not truly know how to benefit human beings becomes apparent. Like the case involving the coats, he is adept at providing for his subjects' material needs; and, to be fair, he does attempt to inculcate a kind of virtue in some of his subjects, albeit a low form of it that is mostly in the service of further gain. But perhaps the most serious problem for Cyrus is that while he has no trouble providing for his subjects' material needs, his knowledge of the soul leaves much to be desired, as he himself unwittingly admits (8.7.22). The reason for this deficiency in Xenophon's estimation is because Cyrus's education is defective. Xenophon finds no part of Cyrus's education more suspect and lacking than his Median education, which misleads him into thinking that there is no obstacle that he cannot overcome and that his rule will be a blessing for the world. He is basically correct on the first count, but mostly mistaken on the second. Yet ignorance in Cyrus's case is for Xenophon no excuse for his failure to live up to his potential, especially in light of his father's admonishment that there is much he needs to learn before he sets out to conquer the world. Blessed with a wise harbinger of what is to come, Cyrus's essential crime in Xenophon's eyes is at bottom not so different from that of Critias and Alcibiades — drowned in a sea of his

own ambition, Cyrus failed to listen to the warnings and admonitions of one whose knowledge surpassed his own.

Chapter 3

KINGLY EDUCATION

I turn now to Cyrus's kingly education, the third and final part of his education, which takes place over the course of an extended conversation he has with his father Cambyses (1.3.1-1.4.28). One may state the broad relationship between Cyrus's kingly and his Median educations as follows: Cambyses does his best to minimize Astyages's tyrannical influence on Cyrus by showing him that there is far more to his traditional Persian education than meets the eye, that it is not nearly as innocent and naïve as Cyrus believes it to be, and that, contrary to what he learned from Astyages, nature itself sets certain limits before which even tyrants' wills must inevitably bend.

After Cyrus leaves Media and returns home to Persia, a series of important events unfolds that culminates in the need for him to receive private instruction from his father in the kingly art of rule. Cyrus receives word that Astyages has died and that Cyaxares has succeeded him as ruler of Media (1.5.2). At the same time, the Assyrian king is actively assembling a multinational coalition with an eye toward defeating the powerful Medes and their lesser allies, including the Persians. When Cyaxares learns of this plot, he sends word to the Persians and requests that Cyrus come lead the Medes into battle (1.5.4). The elders in the Persian council approve Cyaxares' request and grant Cyrus broad military powers, including command of over 30,000 soldiers (1.5.5). Addressing his troops, Cyrus gives a revolutionary speech in which he whets their appetite to do

battle, primarily by appealing to their desire for gain (1.5.8-10), which heretofore the Persian regime had attempted to suppress.¹³⁸ As Cyrus sets out for Media, his father decides to accompany him to the border (1.6.1). Before the fighting begins, and with the fate of so many individuals under Cyrus's command hanging in the balance, Cambyses apparently reasons that it is time for his son to receive an accelerated course in the kingly art of rule, which very broadly may be divided into five main parts. As I shall argue, throughout their discussion, Cambyses attempts with varying degrees of success to walk a fine line between on the one hand exhorting Cyrus to victory against the Assyrian, and on the other hand moderating his seemingly limitless ambition and boundless confidence in his own abilities.

The first part of Cyrus's kingly education is the need for a leader to possess for himself the art of divination (1.6.2-6). Like much of Cyrus and Cambyses's conversation, though more than any other single part of it, the discussion of the soothsayer's art is mostly a review of lessons past (1.6.2-6). While one commentator suggests that throughout Cyrus's life Cambyses has "evinced some, but not much, concern over his son's education,"¹³⁹ in point of fact Cyrus and his father repeatedly refer to their many previous conversations as well as the lessons they learned from them (6.1.2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 28, 29, 43), which is particularly striking when compared with Cyrus's later attempt to instruct his own sons in the art of rule, where

¹³⁸ Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 181. Gary D. Glenn, "Prudence in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*," *Tempered Strength: Studies in the Nature and Scope of Prudential Leadership*, ed. Ethan Fishman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002) 20-21. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," 93-4. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 129. Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," 230, 35. Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," 28.

¹³⁹ Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," 95.

there is not a single reference to previous conversations between father and sons. The Athenian Stranger's criticism of Cyrus in Plato's Laws —that he foolishly entrusted the education of his sons to women and eunuchs rather than personally overseeing it himself (694c-695b)— emerges as quite trenchant when one compares Cyrus's lone attempt to educate his sons with the lengthy series of conversations he had with his own father.

Cambyses begins the discussion about divination by noting that according to both the sacrifices and the divine signs, the gods seem to be on Cyrus's side as he sets out to defend Media and her allies (1.6.2). He hastens to add that Cyrus no doubt already has surmised the favorable signs for himself, given that Cambyses "purposely taught [him] this so that [he] would not learn the counsels of the gods through other interpreters" (1.6.2). In Cambyses's estimation, he who has access to the gods' will can effectively influence and control public policy. For this reason, rulers who cannot interpret divine signs for themselves are in effect not really in command, insofar as their policies will always be subject to the approval or disapproval of the de facto rulers, the soothsayers.

Cyrus professes to his father his belief that both the gods and one's friends will be more dependable allies provided one remembers to take account of them with gifts, not only when one is in dire straits, but also and especially when one is faring very well (1.6.3). Indeed, Cyrus faithfully petitions the gods and offers them sacrifices before almost every major event throughout his life and always remembers to reward his friends and loyal subjects for services rendered (1.3.6-7, 2.1.1, 3.3.21, 3.3.22, 3.3.57, 4.2.12, 5.1.29, 6.3.11, 6.3.21, 8.1.23, 8.2.7, 8.4.1-35, 8.7.3). With respect to both gods

and men, Cyrus is interested in getting what he wants from them, which is to say he takes a rather utilitarian or pragmatic view of piety and friendship. From human beings he desires honor above all else, while from the gods he desires good fortune (1.2.1, 1.6.3, 8.4.1). While he wants different things from gods and men, Cyrus believes that he has unearthed a powerful commonality between them. With the right technique, both can be skillfully rendered tractable and one can obtain whatever one wishes from them (1.6.3-6).

Along with the fact that he desires honor and praise above all else, Cyrus's wish to control everyone —not just human beings, but also the gods— is a sign that he is ruled by his *thymos*, the spirited part of his soul that loves to dominate (1.4.24) (Republic 375a-b). In this sense, Xenophon's Cyrus is a worthy and alternative rival to Homer's Achilles, who was for the Greeks the paradigm *par excellence* of the spirited individual. Like Cyrus, Achilles wants the entire world to bend to his will, which is why he rages against not only his human enemies, but also natural objects such as rivers that resist him. But what if Achilles had somehow retained his spiritedness *and* managed to be more rational and calculating, or less shortsighted? What if instead of furiously trying to wrestle a river with his bare hands, he had ingeniously diverted it by having his soldiers dig a ditch, as Cyrus does, and thereby controlled it (7.5.9-19)? In his account of Cyrus's life, Xenophon in effect imagines what a more rationalized, reasonable, and knowledgeable Achilles would look like. Such a man would be able to use his rationality to knowledgeably conquer the world (1.1.3-6), all in the name of gratifying his spirited love of honor and fame. As Machiavelli knew well, such a person at his core would combine the natures of the wily fox and the spirited lion

(Prince, ch. 18). Neither hyper-rationality in the form of Socrates nor pure spiritedness incarnate in the person of Achilles came anywhere close to the spectacular results Cyrus achieved as the founder and emperor of the Persian Empire. For Xenophon, only as it were “in between” Socrates and Achilles does the latent potential to transform the world, and not simply a few individuals within it (Republic, 591c-592b), exist. To the extent that the Cyropaedia is a work of fiction that is only loosely based on a handful of accounts known to Xenophon about the historical Cyrus, Xenophon was free to imagine for himself what the middle ground between Socrates and Achilles might look like, as well as what his existence might mean for political life as he and everyone else had always known it.

The second part of Cyrus’s kingly education is his economic education, which is similar in many respects to the kind of household management Socrates discusses in Xenophon’s Oeconomicus and involves dependably being able to procure supplies for one’s soldiers (1.6.7-12). In contrast to the conversation about divination, which apparently was more of a review and summary of previous discussions between Cyrus and his father, the young Cyrus has much to learn about how to ensure that his soldiers will be well provided for. His comparative ignorance can be gleaned from the fact that whereas Cambyses never disagrees with him in their discussion of the soothsayer’s art, in their conversation about economics, he contradicts or disagrees with his son four times (1.6.7, 9). The third of these contradictions occurs in the context of Cambyses’s query to Cyrus about whether he understands the sense in which a commander’s failure to effectively provide provisions for his army undermines his authority:

“Accordingly, father,” he said, “Cyaxares says that he will provide for all who come hence, no matter how many they may be.”

“So, son,” he said, “you are going off trusting in these funds from Cyaxares?”

“I am,” said Cyrus.

“Well,” said he, “do you know how much he has?”

“No, by Zeus,” said Cyrus, “I do not.”

“And you nevertheless trust in these uncertainties? Do you not know that you will need many things and that he will now of necessity have many other expenses?”

“I know,” said Cyrus.

“Then if his expenses outstrip him, or if he is willing to lie to you, what will the condition of your army be?”

“It is clear that it will not be a noble (*kalos*) one.” (1.6.9)

The crux of Cambyses’s admonishment is that by trusting Cyaxares to provide provisions for Cyrus’s own troops, Cyrus has left far too much to chance. In a line of argument that surely caught Machiavelli’s attention when he read it, Cambyses in essence tells his son to rely on his own arms to help him secure provisions, not the arms of others (1.6.10; *Prince*, ch. 6). Cyrus takes this advice to heart and claims later in his career that he has developed a systematic “military science” that provides “freedom and happiness to human beings (*anthrōpoi*)” (7.5.79, 8.1.14, 8.5.7), which calls to mind Machiavelli’s dictum that “a prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war” (*Prince*, ch. 14).

In contrast to one interpretation that argues that Cambyses’s “whole intention” throughout their conversation is to check and moderate Cyrus’s bold ambitions and his eagerness for war¹⁴⁰, by showing Cyrus how to use force to secure his own supplies, far from restraining him, Cambyses in fact exhorts him:

You are going out with an infantry power in exchange for which I know that you would not accept another even many times as numerous, and the

¹⁴⁰ Newell, “Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism,” 84-85.

Median cavalry, which is very strong, will be your ally. What sort of nation, then, of those around here, do you think will not serve you, both because they wish to gratify you and because they fear they might suffer something? (1.6.10)

While it is true that Cambyses does attempt to restrain Cyrus at various points in their conversation, particularly in his closing remarks about the ultimate inscrutability of the gods' will (1.6.46), when he gives advice to his son about how others will provide him with supplies out of fear and to avoid harm at the hands of his army, he is trying earnestly to point the way to victory for Cyrus. Cambyses sees, quite correctly, that if Cyrus fails to defeat the Assyrian, then the latter will either reduce the Persians to slavery or eradicate them.

While Cambyses wants Cyrus to defeat the Assyrian, this does not mean that he sees his son's potential victory as wholly unproblematic. Cambyses knows full well that for Cyrus victory over the Assyrian is not the final goal, but rather only the first step in his grand and ambitious desire to rid the world of tyranny (1.6.8). The political and rhetorical situation in which Cambyses finds himself may thus be stated as follows: He sees that for Persia the emerging fundamental alternatives are Cyrus and the Assyrian.¹⁴¹ In this conflict, he certainly wishes to see Cyrus prevail. Yet even as Cambyses imparts military advice to Cyrus and thereby helps give him the means to defeat the Assyrian, he must simultaneously ensure that while Cyrus understands how to defeat the Assyrian, he is not so brash as to think he can conquer the entire world.¹⁴² From Cambyses's perspective, if the Assyrian threatens the existence of the Persian

¹⁴¹ Robert Faulkner, "Justice Overruled: The Ambition of Xenophon's Cyrus the Great," *Enlightening Revolutions: Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner*, ed. Svetozar Minkov (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006) 301.

¹⁴² Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 167-68.

republic, it is also threatened, albeit in a different way, by the prospect of Cyrus transforming it into an empire. Cambyses thus finds himself in a very tenuous situation. His support for Cyrus is neither crass nepotism nor in any way due to a lack of foresight about the unique set of challenges and problems Cyrus himself represents. Rather, Cambyses prudentially sides with his son as the lesser of two evils.

The third part of Cyrus's kingly education involves learning how to inspire enthusiasm in his soldiers (1.6.18-19). According to Cambyses, enthusiasm "makes all the difference in every work" (1.6.13). In order to help his son elicit enthusiasm in his troops, Cambyses recommends that Cyrus keep his soldiers in peak physical condition. When Cyrus suggests that holding contests and offering prizes would increase his army's overall health and spirit, his father agrees (1.6.18). This exchange is significant, insofar as throughout his life Cyrus strives to keep his soldiers in good fighting condition by holding contests, always taking care that the winners receive generous rewards (6.2.6, 8.1.29, 8.2.26).

Cyrus suggests to his father that another useful way to promote enthusiasm in the army is to inspire soldiers with hope (1.6.19). Cambyses agrees to some extent, though he adds:

But son...this is the same sort of thing as in hunting, if one always calls the dogs with the same call he uses when he sees the game. At first, I am sure, he has them obeying enthusiastically. If he deceives them often, in the end they do not obey him even when he truly sees the game and calls. So it is also regarding hopes. If someone deceives often, instilling the expectation of good things, such a person ends up not being able to persuade even when he speaks of true sources of hope. One must avoid saying oneself what one does not know clearly, son, but sometimes others could produce the desired effect in their speeches. One must, as much as possible, preserve trust in one's own encouragement in the face of the greatest risks. (1.6.19)

In Cambyses's estimation, Cyrus did not properly appreciate the danger of creating false expectations.¹⁴³ After hearing his father make the distinction he himself had failed to make regarding the need to only create hope when such expectation has a good chance to come to fruition, Cyrus states that he likes his father's account better. In particular, Cambyses's suggestion that Cyrus use others as his mouthpiece when recommending actions whose result cannot be accurately predicted in advance makes an especially strong impression on him. For example, after Cyrus defeats the Assyrian and conquers Babylon, the Persian Chrysantas proposes that Cyrus take up residence in a palace (7.5.56). When Chrysantas finishes speaking, many who heard his proposal second the motion, such that "*of course*, Cyrus moved into the palace of the king" (7.5.57, my emphasis). Given Cyrus's outward austerity, it is odd that Xenophon would hasten to add that he "of course" moved into the palace. Why does he do so? I suggest that, in Xenophon's characteristically subtle and understated manner of writing, Cyrus "of course" accepted the proposal because it was in truth his own proposal from the beginning, which is to say that Chrysantas was in truth simply his mouthpiece. Since Cyrus could not have known with certainty how his troops would react to their normally austere commander taking up residence in a palace, he creatively implements his father's advice and uses Chrysantas to in effect test public opinion. As Cyrus himself later reveals, he holds Chrysantas in high esteem because those "points he perceived that I wished the allies to know, but was ashamed to say about myself, he said himself, declaring them as his own judgment (*gnōmē*)" (8.4.11).

¹⁴³ Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," 233.

The fourth part of Cyrus's kingly education involves learning how to secure his soldiers' obedience (1.6.20-25). At the beginning of this discussion, Cyrus notes that because of his Persian education, which instructed him in how "to rule and to be ruled," he is "not without experience" in compelling others to obey (1.6.20). As he sees it, subjects can be encouraged to obey through praise and honor, while those who disobey should receive nothing but scorn and punishment. Cambyses agrees with Cyrus's account of compulsory obedience, but he suggests that there is "another road that is shorter" to secure willing obedience, one that Cyrus failed to mention (1.6.21). In a passage that calls to mind Madison's argument in Federalist 10 that the people's representatives should know their interests better than they themselves will, Cambyses argues that human beings happily obey a leader who "they think is more prudent about their own advantage than they are themselves" (1.6.21). He likens leaders who excel at divining and promoting their subjects' interests to doctors whose advice the sick willingly obey, passengers on a ship who willingly defer to the captain, and travelers who follow and wish not to get separated from their guide.

Cambyses's example of the doctor differs from his other examples of the captain and the guide in an important but unstated way that proves quite indicative of Cyrus's rule. In the case of doctors, as a matter of course they routinely give their patients advice that they would rather not hear. For example, patients see their physician and hope to receive a clean bill of health, but they are told to lose weight, exercise more, adjust their diet, and so forth. This is to say that doctors routinely give patients advice that is opposed to their immediate or short-term desires. In a sense, doctors tacitly emphasize the need for their patients to relearn, educate, or control their desires so as to

improve their overall bodily health. But ship captains and guides are different, insofar as these individuals are in the business of procuring their clients' desires, without passing judgment on them or seeking to alter them. The tourist or traveler says, "Take me here," and the tour-guide or captain says, "As you wish."

Like the guide and captain, as ruler Cyrus specializes in sizing up his subjects, figuring out what they want, and providing it for them. His subjects' motivations for supporting him range from desires for honor (8.1.39, 8.4.4), fine food and drink (7.4.6-9), security and protection (6.1.2-3), and the wish to be part of something noble and larger than themselves (5.1.24, 6.1.19-24), to name just a few. Unlike his Persian education, which attempted to educate the elite class of peers by prompting them to desire public-spirited virtues that were also conducive to their own self-improvement, Cyrus does not make much of an effort to reform the vast majority of his subjects' desires or talk them out of what they think they want. Rather, he tends to simply ascertain a given individual's desire and fulfill it, without considering whether or not the desire is one that ought to be satisfied (Gorgias, 464d-e, 521d, 522a). One may point to a difference between the old Persia of Cyrus's childhood and the Persian Empire under his rule by noting that whereas the old Persian education prompted weeping when it denied individuals pleasurable but harmful satisfactions (2.2.14), under Cyrus there are few tears, but lots of laughter (2.2.14, 2.2.16, 2.3.1, 4.5.52-55, 8.4.12, 8.4.23). To suggest a modern contrast, consider that whereas in Federalist 10 and 71 Madison and Hamilton argue that one virtue of representation is that it helps create a situation where it is more likely that the people's true interests will win out over their occasionally unwise, imprudent, and factious inclinations, Cyrus typically makes no

distinction between an individual's true interest and his desire, however ill-considered, at a given moment. While his refusal to make this distinction is a key part of his knowledge of rule that helps him secure his subjects' willing obedience (1.1.3, 1.1.6-1.2.1), I would also suggest that his unwillingness to moderate and educate most of his subjects helps account for the widespread depravity that quickly ensues after his death (8.8.27). Rightly understood, the bleak conclusion of the Cyropaedia is not an aberration or departure from the rest of the book, much less an inauthentic or spurious addition by a later author, but rather the necessary and logical consequence of Cyrus's refusal to educate the vast majority of his subjects, including especially his own sons (Plato, Laws, 694c-695b).

The final part of the discussion about obedience also proves influential for Cyrus's rule, because it foreshadows both his adeptness at manipulating appearances and his proclivity for industrious and bold action as opposed to what he sees as idle and timorous thought. While he correctly ascertains his father's suggestion that nothing is more effectual in rendering one's subjects obedient than seeming to be wiser (*phronimōteron*) than they fancy themselves (1.6.22), he confesses that he is at a loss as to how to quickly gain a reputation for wisdom. Cambyses points out that the quickest way to become thought of as wise is actually to be wise. But no sooner does Cambyses shift the conversation away from the realm of appearance and opinion to that of reality and knowledge than Cyrus abruptly shifts it back by turning from the topic of obedience to love and professing the view that the way to become loved by one's subjects is to make a great show of being their benefactor (1.6.24). Once again, Cambyses tries to focus Cyrus's attention to a reality that exists irrespective of opinion, arguing that

scarcity creates inherent limits on a ruler's ability to make grand displays of his kindness, which calls to mind Machiavelli's argument that one downside of the prince lavishing benevolence on his subjects is that such displays deplete his resources (Prince, ch. 16). In the exchanges regarding both obedience and love, Cambyses tries to steer Cyrus away from the realms of action and opinion toward those of thought and knowledge. One might therefore say with some justice that Cambyses is a kind of philosopher-king. He tries to turn Cyrus's attention away from opinion and toward knowledge because he wants to impress upon him that there are limits inherent in the nature of things that no leader, however knowledgeable, can possibly transcend. In the face of such unavoidable limitations, a wise and prudent leader would be content to accomplish what good he could—in Cyrus's case, this means defeating the Assyrian—and would resist the temptation to overreach that Cyrus expresses when he declares his wish to rid the world of tyranny (1.6.8).

The fifth and final part of Cyrus's kingly education involves learning how to gain advantage over enemies (1.6.27-43). Cyrus asks his father whether it is the case that, once his soldiers are well prepared, he should engage the enemy at the first opportunity. Cambyses assents, but only if by doing so "one were going to get an advantage (*pleon echein*)" (1.6.26). Otherwise, when gaining an advantage over the enemy is not likely, he recommends resting content with what one already has and being on guard or defense. Given the perilous nature of attempting to gain advantages over one's enemies, Cambyses intimates that it is not nothing if leaders can find a way to maintain their people's freedom and way of life and "to put in greatest security those things that we think are most valuable to us" (1.6.26). Cyrus's response to his father's

call for caution is rather telling, insofar as he completely ignores Cambyses's advice to focus on securing his possessions and forces against enemies, instead of precipitously attacking them. Cyrus apparently has no interest whatsoever in hunkering down in a defensive posture; rather, heedless of Cambyses's warnings, he presses his father only to explain how best to gain an advantage over enemies (1.6.27).

Cyrus's interest in gaining an advantage and comparative disinterest in protecting what he sees as the Persians' meager possessions suggests that for him the imminent attack by the Assyrian is as much as anything the cover he needs to launch what appears to others as a defensive military campaign, but one that in truth Cyrus from the beginning has no intention of ever ending, even once the Assyrian aggressor is defeated (1.6.8). The Assyrian thus provides Cyrus with the opportunity to take control of the army and to dramatically increase its size by introducing a radically egalitarian restructuring of the Persian social classes, all in the name of wartime necessity and security (2.1.11-19). By the time the Assyrian is eventually defeated, Cyrus expects that his already considerable power as commander will have become practically insurmountable, at which point he can ignore his father and his other Persian teachers' commands with impunity. In this bold gambit, he proves entirely clairvoyant. The size of his forces grows so vast that after he compels the Assyrian to retreat and Cambyses summons him back home to Persia (6.1.4-5), he brazenly disobeys his father and ignores his order to return home. Despite Cyrus's many impressive initial successes, Cambyses has the wisdom to recognize that his son's spectacular but imprudent quest for empire will not end well, so he tries to nip it in the bud by sending for him after the Assyrian has been rebuffed. But once Cyrus has firm control over an ever-expanding

multinational army, there is really nothing Cambyses can do to force his son to come home. Cyrus lacks Cambyses's prudent wisdom, but he craftily finds a way to seize more power than Cambyses himself ever held (1.2.5). Along with the wise poet Simonides's conversation with Hiero the tyrant in Xenophon's Hiero, as well as the fact that Xenophon explains why Socrates for the most part did not practice politics in the conventional sense of holding offices (Memorabilia, 1.2.4-8, 1.2.61, 1.6.15), the gulf that separates Cambyses from Cyrus is one striking way in which Xenophon illustrates the difficulty of uniting power and wisdom in the same pair of hands. That unification, which in light of Cyrus's natural talents and aptitude seems far more likely at the beginning of the Cyropaedia, in the end proves elusive.

Seeing that despite the risks his son is clearly hell-bent on gaining advantage over enemies, Cambyses decides that it is incumbent on him to teach Cyrus how to do so successfully. Cambyses elects to give Cyrus the strategic tools he will need if he is to defeat the Assyrian, most strikingly by telling him that in order to gain advantage over the enemy he must become "a plotter, a dissembler, wily, a cheat, a thief, [and] rapacious." Cyrus finds this quite funny and tantalizing. He laughs and swears, "Heracles, father, what sort of man you say I must become" (1.6.27). Confronted with the need to become capable of being wicked or, as Machiavelli would say, "to be able not to be good," (Prince, ch. 15) Cyrus is a willing and eager accomplice. In contradistinction to the view of one scholar who argues that Cyrus was "the very image of *kalokagathia*"¹⁴⁴, the fact that Cyrus does not recoil and in fact delights in putting Cambyses's advice into practice throughout his life is one sign that he is not simply a

¹⁴⁴ Georges, Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience 209.

conventional or idealized Greek gentleman, which is a key part of what fascinated and drew Machiavelli to Xenophon in the sixteenth century.

Cambyses brings Cyrus's kingly education to a close by returning to the opening theme of divination and arguing that, no matter how favorable the auspices, Cyrus should always remember that human beings cannot know the future with certainty and that the outcomes of events, whatever they will be, are known only to the gods (1.6.45-46). In this regard, he stresses to his son that human actions and policies sometimes have unintended and unpredictable consequences. This is one of the many ways in which Cambyses and Xenophon's Socrates agree. As Xenophon notes in his Memorabilia, Socrates believed that even seemingly unequivocally good things such as power over a city or marriage to a beautiful (*kalos*) woman can actually turn out to be harmful for human beings in certain situations, such that a wise or prudent person would consult the gods to help him discern whether the things he believed to be good or beneficial were in fact so (Memorabilia 1.1.3-9, 1.2.19, 1.3.2, 1.3.4). The inherent and unavoidable limitations of human knowledge and foresight Cambyses and Socrates refer to help explain why the latter urged Xenophon to consult the oracle as to whether or not he should join the military campaign lead by Cyrus the Younger against the Persian king. When Xenophon reports back to Socrates that he asked the oracle what the best way to travel to meet up with the younger Cyrus would be, instead of whether he should go at all, Socrates rebukes him (Anabasis, 3.1.4-7). Given the epistemological limitations on humankind's ability to know the future, Xenophon failed to ask the right question, which is to say that in Socrates' view he assumed too much. A bit like Xenophon himself in his confidence in his own powers, Cyrus also assumes too

much. But the difference is that while with Socrates' help Xenophon learned from his own mistakes (Memorabilia, 1.2.22, 1.4.9-13), and learned from Cyrus's mistakes as well (8.8.27), Cyrus himself never has any moments of realization like the ones Xenophon had after Socrates scolded him. Despite his father's cautionary warnings, Cyrus dies believing that all will go splendidly for his empire, but Xenophon goes out of his way to stress that it began to crumble almost as soon as Cyrus drew his last breath (8.8.2).

Cambyses closes the conversation with Cyrus with one last call for caution in light of the unknown. But Cyrus's confidence in his own prodigious abilities, and in particular his presumptuous view that he is a friend of the gods and that he is an instrument of their divine will sent to earth to rid the world of injustice and inequity (1.6.4, 1.6.8), all but guarantee that the more cautionary aspects of Cambyses's advice are destined to fall on deaf ears. The delicate tightrope he walks between giving Cyrus the strategies he needs to defeat the Assyrian and impressing upon him the importance of returning home and not continuing ever-outward after his victory snaps under the massive weight of Cyrus's confidence and ambition. In this sense, because of his inability to moderate Cyrus, Cambyses is a failure. But like Socrates' failure to moderate Critias and Alcibiades, Cambyses's failure is nonetheless a noble one. In the end, his fears about whether old Persia's transformation into an empire will be beneficial for the Persians turn out to be justified. Conversely, Cyrus's confidence that once he acquires absolute power he will be able to rid the world of injustice without himself succumbing to its temptations represents for Xenophon a serious theoretical

error that has grave practical consequences the world over. Cambyses's foresight thus marks him, and not Cyrus, as the true wise man of the Cyropaedia. He argues:

To many it has not been acceptable to live pleasantly with their share; yet because they desired to be lords over all, they lost even what they had. Many, on acquiring much-wished-for gold, have been destroyed because of it. (1.6.45)

These lines are meant as a warning to Cyrus, but they also double as an apt and keenly prescient description of Persia's transformation from a republic to an empire under his lead.

Conclusion

There is one last facet of Cyrus's kingly education, which technically falls under the fifth part (gaining advantage over enemies), but that I have saved for the conclusion because I believe it helps frame Xenophon's overall importance for the history of political philosophy and the sense in which his thought more than any of the other ancient philosophers represents an anticipation of Machiavelli. For this reason, as Strauss suggested, Xenophon is in many ways the most modern of the ancients and represents a unique midpoint between the ancients and the moderns.¹⁴⁵

When Cyrus learns how cunning and duplicitous he must become if he wishes to take advantage of his enemies, he demands to know why his Persian education did not teach him how to deceive his foes (1.6.28). The conversation that follows is the most esoteric part of Cyrus's education, insofar as he learns the true and heretofore hidden

¹⁴⁵ Leo Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 291.

meaning behind his previous training. As Cyrus begins to see, his traditional Persian education is not quite what it seems and there is more to it than meets the eye. In essence, Cambyses explains that all the tricks and deceptions Cyrus learned to use while hunting animals may also be applied to attacking human enemies as well (1.6.28-9). Cambyses tells him that “we educated you to deceive and take advantage not among human beings but with wild animals, so that you not harm your friends in these matters ...yet, if ever a war should arise, so that you might not be unpracticed in them” (1.6.29).

Cambyses’s distinction between the good that friends are owed and the harm that enemies are due is one of the ways that Xenophon raises what we might identify as one part of the problem of justice. On Cambyses’s account, regimes require two different moralities, both of which make a distinction between friends and foes: Citizens of one country are prohibited from harming or taking advantage of one another, but in war they are required to kill and take advantage of enemies. If Socrates is correct when he argues in Plato’s Republic that it is never just to harm anyone (335e), then it would seem to follow that insofar as nations and their soldiers are of necessity compelled to harm enemies, they are forced to commit all manner of unjust acts against their foes in a time of war. As Cyrus intimates, as long as there are separate nations the potential for war will be perpetual (6.1.12), which is to say that as long as multiple nations exist, justice of necessity will be complex and not simple, two things and not one. It is all well and good for Plato’s Socrates to argue that it is never just to harm anyone, not even enemies. But even if we grant the soundness of this argument in theory, in a world of separate nations, no country that adopted his principle in practice could ever possibly survive. One may point to part of what Strauss and Bloom saw as the limits of politics

by noting that all nations are of necessity compelled to commit unjust acts against their enemies in order to survive.¹⁴⁶ To his everlasting credit, Xenophon was willing to consider the imperial path blazed by Cyrus as a potentially viable way around this problem. If the existence of separate nations necessarily entails that justice will always be contradictory in practice because it will be two things and not one, then a single, universal world empire could potentially embody a coherent account of justice as one thing and not two. By coming very close to doing away with the distinction between friends and enemies and replacing those two classes with a single, homogenized mass class of “friends” under his own sovereign rule (8.2.1-4, 8.2.9, 8.7.13), Cyrus brings about an unprecedented situation where a contradictory aspect of justice as it has historically existed in all places and times begins to disappear. Insofar as a universal empire abolishes the distinction between friends and enemies, it entails that the same is owed to all, not just in theory, but also in practice.

In the Republic, Socrates suggests that domestic justice within a city requires that the just city be fairly small, which is to say that its borders will not spread very wide and there will thus be many cities and nations that exist outside it, some of which will inevitably be enemies. The just city will thus require some sort of foreign policy and ability to wage war. But in truth Socrates says very little about foreign relations in the Republic and the soldiers he describes seem to spend much more time preserving order within their city than they do fighting abroad (450c-d, 499a-d, 540d). The fact that Socrates says so little about foreign policy and keeps his focus almost exclusively

¹⁴⁶ Strauss, The City and Man 138, Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," The Republic of Plato (New York: BasicBooks, 1968) 410.

on the domestic life of the just city is one of the main reasons why Plato became a target of one of Machiavelli's most serious criticisms in the Prince (the fact that Machiavelli does not even condescend to mention Plato directly by name suggests how little he thought of him as a political analyst):

But since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation. For a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity. (ch. 15)

Implicit in Machiavelli's criticism is the view that a just city like Plato's Socrates describes—one that is small, that encourages the practice of the traditional virtues, and that discourages innovation—will, whatever its justice, “come to ruin among so many who are not good.” In other words, for Machiavelli the requirements of the complete dedication to justice are at odds with a city's survival. Only by abstracting from the harsh necessities of foreign policy is Socrates able to create a just city. But this abstraction necessarily means that Socrates' just city will only exist “in speech” or in the imagination. In Machiavelli's estimation, a new analysis of politics is thus needed, one that looks not at cities as they should be, but rather as they are in fact.

Read alongside the Republic, the Cyropaedia emerges as an ancient critique of Plato that rivals that of Aristotle, one that in many ways also anticipates Machiavelli's modern criticisms. Though they are not identical, the Persian republic of the Cyropaedia and the just city or *kallipolis* in the Republic are quite similar; and this

similarity provides the basis for interpreting the *Cyropaedia* as a critique of the *kallipolis*. Both the Persian republic and the *kallipolis* provide a rigorous and systematic education aimed at inculcating similar virtues in the young. Both create a system of hierarchical social classes, such that only the most talented and educated of the citizens can rise into the elite positions. Insofar as Cambyses's discerning wisdom marks him as a king with philosophic aspirations and understanding, both are ruled by philosopher-kings. Finally, both, despite their merits, eventually fall apart and meet a disappointing and rather bleak end. In the case of the *kallipolis*, the philosopher-kings' ignorance results in failure to completely control procreation by overseeing procreation and through an ambitious program of social engineering. This in turn results in the birth of individuals who lack the requisite natural aptitude and whose existence therefore pollutes the ruling class, which spells the beginning of the end for the just city as the unity of the rulers gets destroyed and faction sets in (*Republic*, 545c-547c). But on Xenophon and Machiavelli's reading, the possibility that the philosopher-kings' ignorance would cause the demise of the just city is quite idealistic, implausible, and even a bit naïve. From their more sober and realistic point of view, the philosopher-kings' epistemological failures are only problematic for an imagined city in speech. In reality, they suggest, there is no need to make up fantastical causes such as the failure of city-wide breeding programs to explain why cities will eventually "go down" or be destroyed. As they see it, instead of postulating imaginary causes for the decline of cities that themselves exist only in the mind, political analysis is better served to take account of cities and nations as they actually exist. Real nations that exist in the real world are constantly beset by other countries. If one seeks to analyze what factors

cause these real or actual regimes to decline, Xenophon and Machiavelli suggest that the existence of other nations and the perils of foreign policy must be at the top of the list.

The emphasis that Xenophon places on foreign policy is not to suggest that he discounts the role that domestic causes can play in a nation's decline. In this sense, through his *Cyrus* Xenophon strikes a prudent balance in his analysis of the interrelatedness of domestic and foreign policy, one that deftly avoids the temptation to counter Plato's Socrates' inordinate emphasis on domestic policy with an equally extreme analysis that focused solely on foreign policy. By showing how easily Cyrus exploits external threats to Persia's continued existence, Xenophon suggests that cunning and ambitious leaders can use foreign adversaries, entanglements, and wars to alter a regime's traditional way of life and to help themselves secure power domestically, all in the name of better dealing with foreign adversaries. In the case of Cyrus, because the Persians feel their very existence is threatened by the Assyrian, and because Cyrus goes out of his way to accentuate that fear (2.1.11-12, 7.5.52), the Persians are willing to grant him unprecedented power that they never would have otherwise considered giving him in the absence of a foreign threat. With his unprecedented powers, Cyrus enacts revolutionary restructurings of the Persian social classes and alters their view of what it means to be virtuous, both of which have serious long-term consequences for the Persian republic, which becomes dedicated *en masse* to pursuing gain and empire. As Machiavelli recognized, waging war can be a useful means by which the prince distracts his subjects from noticing the full import of what is going on at home (*Prince*, ch. 21).

Having mentioned a few similarities between Xenophon and Machiavelli, I wish to close by pointing out one difference between them, which I think shows how Xenophon, for all of his anticipation of Machiavelli, nonetheless retains a good deal of his ancient and Socratic heritage. While Xenophon and Machiavelli agree that the Persian Empire fell apart because the Persians became increasingly soft and effeminate and because they hired mercenaries. Xenophon's analysis probes deeper to the final or most foundational cause of Persia's collapse: The fact that Cyrus himself, despite his considerable talents, was in truth not fit to rule. While he certainly possessed an uncanny ability to acquire power, once he has it, he has little positive idea of what to do with it, short of making sure that he does not lose it. When he sets out to rid the world of tyranny, it is tempting to want to root for Cyrus. Yet in the end, as we have seen, he has become in many ways indistinguishable from his tyrannical grandfather Astyages. On his way to power, he glows with energy and ardor that dissipates once he has the imperial throne he spent his entire life trying to capture. Free to do as he pleases, Cyrus can apparently conceive of no better way to spend his days than parading around in front the herd of his adoring subjects as a rather conventional oriental despot. Like the many (1.1.1), Cyrus too has deep-seated longings for tyranny that fully reveal themselves only once he acquires absolute power. But his rather conventional idea of the good life, in Xenophon's estimation, leaves much to be desired. Xenophon's own conception of the good life is essentially that of his teacher, Socrates. Xenophon indicates this in many ways, not least of which is the fact that, as we have seen, whereas Cyrus pronounces himself "happy and blessed" (*makarios*) (8.7.9), Xenophon himself never calls Cyrus that, reserving this characterization instead for Socrates.

These two individuals —Cyrus, the man of action, and Socrates, the man of thought— are the two major poles in Xenophon’s writings. Through Cyrus, Xenophon shows rulers how to achieve and maintain their power, but says little about what to actually do with it once they have it. Conversely, Xenophon’s Socratic writings help supply the education a just ruler would need to have in order to use his power wisely, but Socrates says little about how to acquire power. Contrary to the conventional reading of the Cyropaedia, for Xenophon the perfect ruler is therefore not Cyrus per se but rather would be someone who combined Cyrus’s ability to acquire power with Socrates’ knowledge of what to do with it so as to truly benefit others. Herein, from Xenophon’s point of view, is one of the shortcomings of Machiavelli’s writings. Though Machiavelli was a keen observer of Cyrus, I have not found a single instance where he refers to Socrates in any of his writings. As Strauss observes, it is as if Machiavelli somehow forgot about Socrates.¹⁴⁷ However impressed Xenophon would have been with Machiavelli’s reading of the Cyropaedia, he surely would have been disappointed that Machiavelli did not consider his Socrates. For just as Cyrus never really finished his education, from Xenophon’s point of view, anyone who studies his Cyrus but has not spent time with his Socrates still has much to learn.

¹⁴⁷ Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli 294.

Chapter 4

DECEPTION

Introduction

This chapter focuses on a discussion of one important element of Cyrus's knowledge. Xenophon implies in the prologue that one facet of Cyrus's knowledge involved knowing how to deceive others, which becomes a recurring theme throughout the Cyropaedia. In his analysis of the difficulty of ruling, Xenophon notes that "human beings unite against none more than against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them" (1.1.2). As Xenophon presents the problem, part of the difficulty inherent to rule is that individuals typically perceive that those who wish to rule over them do in fact seek power (*dunamis*). Like Machiavelli, Xenophon argues only that that individuals do not wish to be ruled by another, not that everyone desires to rule (1.1.1-2; Prince, ch. 9). But if, as Xenophon suggests, human beings resist being ruled by anyone they perceive trying to rule over them, then one way for an aspiring ruler to avoid this seemingly inevitable resistance would be to disguise his true intentions. As the prologue implies and the Cyropaedia as a whole confirms, one way for a potential ruler to avoid others' resistance is to deceive them, which explains why, as this paper endeavors to show, along the way in his meteoric rise to power Cyrus of necessity deceives both friend and foe alike at every turn.

Cyrus's Deception of Cyaxares

Cyaxares, Cyrus's uncle on his mother Mandane's side who at the outset of the narrative is the heir to the Median throne (1.4.7, 1.5.2, 5.5.8), is one of the most prominent and important characters in the Cyropaedia. According to Miller, the translator of the Loeb Edition of the Cyropaedia, "Cyaxares, the son of Astyages, is probably not a historical personage, but was invented by Xenophon to bring out Cyrus's perfect discipline in obedience as well as in ruling."¹⁴⁸ While Miller is right to stress Cyaxares' general importance, his assessment of Cyaxares' specific role is problematic to the extent that Cyrus does not in fact obey Cyaxares and, to the contrary, repeatedly and quite deliberately seeks to deceive him and undermine his authority. In contrast to Miller's reading, Machiavelli's interpretation in the Discourses of the role that Cyaxares plays in the Cyropaedia is far more accurate. On Machiavelli's reading, Xenophon makes his Cyrus "deceive Cyaxares...in several modes; without which fraud he shows that Cyrus could not have attained that greatness he came to" (Discourses, 2.13.1). As Machiavelli recognized, Cyrus's repeated deception of Cyaxares brings to light as clearly as any passages in the Cyropaedia the lengths to which Cyrus is willing to go in order to secure power for himself.

The first time Xenophon mentions Cyaxares by name and the first time he speaks is at 1.4.9, which is to say that Xenophon did not see fit to give him a proper introduction until slightly past the midpoint of Cyrus's childhood visit in Media (1.3.1-

¹⁴⁸ Walter Miller. "Introduction." Cyropaedia. Vol. 51. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914, 468.

1.4.28). On the one hand, the fact that Xenophon does not introduce Cyaxares until approximately halfway through his account of Media is odd, given Cyaxares' importance as the heir to the Median throne. On the other hand, by delaying the introduction of Cyaxares, Xenophon reinforces the suggestion he makes in the prologue that what is most important about the account of Media is the education Cyrus received there (1.1.6). As he does throughout the Cyropaedia, in the account of Media Xenophon keeps the focus almost entirely on Cyrus, such that other characters are typically important only to the extent that they play a role in Cyrus's life. In the case of Cyaxares, his importance as far as Cyrus is concerned lies in the fact that he is the heir to the Median throne, such that Cyrus must find a way to undercut his uncle's authority in order to incorporate Media into his empire under his sovereign rule. The principal means by which Cyrus deposes Cyaxares involve repeatedly deceiving his uncle about his true intentions and his burning desire to rule. Though Cyaxares comes as close as anyone in the narrative to grasping the true nature of Cyrus's plans to thwart his (and everyone else's) authority, every time Cyaxares comes close to unearthing Cyrus's plots and schemes, Cyrus throws his uncle off his trail by deceiving and mollifying him so as to create the illusion that his intentions are entirely benign.

Cyrus's initial deception of Cyaxares occurs in the course of their conversation regarding how ill-equipped the combined Persian and Median forces are in comparison with those of the bellicose Assyrian king and his allies. Upon learning that the Assyrian is marshalling his forces for an impending attack on Media (1.5.2-3), Cyaxares, who witnessed firsthand Cyrus's prodigious abilities as both a warrior and a military strategist during his nephew's stay in Media (1.4.18-24), sends a request to Cyrus to

personally command any soldiers the Persians might be able to spare (1.5.4-5). Cyrus, who even as a youth was already quite attune to what Machiavelli would see as opportunities that fortune occasionally bestows (1.4.18), accepts his uncle's offer and in so doing assumes command of the Persian contingent dispatched to help defend Media (1.5.5). When Cyrus arrives in Media, Cyaxares inquires as to how many soldiers Cyrus expects Persia to send. Most translations of the *Cyropaedia*, including the Loeb Edition, render Cyrus's response at 2.1.2 as "thirty thousand" so as to make his answer accord with Xenophon's comment that Cyrus was allotted "ten thousand archers, ten thousand targeteers, and ten thousand slingers" (1.5.5). In contrast, Ambler's translation of the *Cyropaedia* renders the figure at 2.1.2 as "twenty thousand," which accords with the number stated in the texts of all surviving manuscripts.¹⁴⁹ As Nadon correctly notes, "The usual emendation neither corrects a lapse on the part of Xenophon nor removes a corruption in the original text. Rather, it creates an additional impediment to a genuine appreciation of the character of Xenophon's writing."¹⁵⁰

While Xenophon's quiet, understated, and rather polite style certainly does not highlight or unduly stress the discrepancy between the respective figures at 1.5.5 and 2.1.2, he no doubt means for the perceptive reader to note that Cyrus's initial report to his uncle upon returning to Media is a lie, the true purpose of which can be gleaned from their ensuing conversation.

After Cyaxares tallies the number of enemy soldiers likely to march on Media, Cyrus summarizes the rather grave situation in which they find themselves, noting that

¹⁴⁹ Eric Buzzeti, "New Developments in Xenophon Studies," *Interpretation* 30.2 (2003): 160. Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," 290 n. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 61.

their infantry will be about half and their cavalry roughly one-third that of the Assyrian (2.1.6). In response to this bleak assessment, Cyaxares inquires as to whether he should send for additional reinforcements, given that the size of the Persian force is—at least so far as he knows, since Cyrus lied and said that only 20,000 troops were coming rather than the actual number of 30,000—fairly small (2.1.7). But Cyrus states that he wishes to postpone the question of reinforcements and would rather learn from Cyaxares what the predominant method of fighting is likely to be. Cyaxares answers that on both sides the armies consist predominantly of archers and spearmen, which Cyrus understands to mean that the fighting will take place at a distance (2.1.7). Since the war will apparently be one of attrition whereby through a series of indecisive skirmishes the side with the greater numbers will eventually grind down the opponent and win, Cyaxares again suggests that he and Cyrus send to Persia for a larger army, stressing that if anything bad should happen to the Medes the danger will extend to her ally Persia as well (2.1.8). But Cyrus declares that “even if all the Persians should come, we would not exceed our enemies in number,” which prompts Cyaxares to ask if his nephew has a better plan (2.1.8-9).

Referring to the different social classes in Persia, Cyrus proposes that Cyaxares have armor like that with which the “so-called Peers (*homotimoi*)” possess made for the Persian commoners (*dēmotai*), who will also need to fight but who because of their poverty do not possess armor, corselets, shields, and sabers suited to hand to hand combat (2.1.9). If the commoners were to join the ranks of the peers and were better equipped to fight at close range against the enemy, Cyrus reasons that the Persians and Medians could thus avoid the inevitable defeat that they would incur were they to fight

a long distance war of attrition. By deliberately understating the number of Persian troops, Cyrus makes the need to arm the Persian commoners seem all the more pressing to Cyaxares, who agrees to supply the funds needed to arm them (2.1.10, 2.4.9). In what emerges as a familiar pattern throughout the Cyropaedia, Cyrus provides the vision and someone else provides the funds to help bring his plans to fruition.

In addition to the logistical reason, Cyrus's proposal that Cyaxares arm the Persian commoners has an additional, unstated, and in many ways more important motivation as well. Cyrus uses Cyaxares' concern over their forces being outnumbered as a pretext to institute a revolutionary and far reaching political reform that involves arming the Persian commoners and making them, for the first time, the equals of the heretofore-elite peers. This change is necessary in order for Cyrus to begin his journey toward empire, insofar as it provides him with more troops at his disposal and, more importantly, serves to abolish the ancestral Persian customs, including especially the peers' education in justice (*dikaioṣunē*) and moderation (*sōphrosunē*), that are at odds with his imperial ambitions. If Cyrus needs to overcome the traditional Persian education which instilled justice and moderation so that the Persians can be encouraged to desire gain (*kerdos*) via imperialistic expansion, then one way to encourage them to abandon their education would be to encourage association and intermingling between the peers and commoners, since the commoners were not themselves the beneficiaries of the traditional education. In fact, prior to Cyrus the Persians institutionally segregated the peers and commoners for fear that the commoners' commercial and bawdy way of life would distract and corrupt the peers (1.2.3). By abolishing the traditional class distinctions and encouraging the peers to desegregate and intermingle

with the commoners, Cyrus hopes to create a situation whereby the peers will abandon their moderation in favor of the pursuit of gain. With this reform, he in effect institutionalizes in deed the revolutionary proposal he had previously made in speech when he boldly proclaimed:

I consider our ancestors to have been no worse than we. At least they too spent all their time practicing the very things that are held to be works of virtue (*aretē*). What good they acquired by being such, however, either for the community of the Persians or for themselves, I cannot see. And yet I do not think that human beings practice any virtue in order that those who become good have no more than do the worthless. Rather, those who abstain from the pleasures at hand do so not in order that they may never have enjoyment, but through their present continence they prepare themselves to have much more enjoyment in the future...If any who have labored at these things see themselves become incapacitated by old age before they have reaped any fruit from them, they seem to me to suffer something similar to someone who, enthusiastic to become a good farmer, sows well and plants well, but when it is time for the harvest, lets his ungathered crop fall down to the earth again. And if an athlete, after undertaking many labors and becoming deserving of victory, should pass his life without a contest, it would not seem to me to be just that he not be blamed for folly. (1.5.8-10)

As Cyrus's speech shows, immediately upon assuming control of the Persian army, he began contemplating reforming the traditional Persian education and with it the entire Persian regime by essentially equating virtue with delayed gratification or enlightened hedonism, which becomes a recurring theme. The impending Assyrian attack and Cyaxares' concern about the troops in effect provides Cyrus with the opportunity to institute his reforms in practice.

The arrival of an Indian embassy in Media affords Cyrus the opportunity to substantially increase his power in the eyes of others by manipulating, humiliating, and further deceiving his uncle. When the ambassadors arrive, Cyaxares sends a messenger

to Cyrus ordering him to report to him immediately wearing his most beautiful (*kalos*) robe. As Cyrus well knows, Cyaxares wants him to dress splendidly as a sign of respect and deference to his elder, so as to make Cyaxares appear all the more powerful in the eyes of the Indian delegation (2.4.5). But after hearing the messenger —and in accord with Machiavelli’s advice that the prince “should never lift his thoughts from the exercise of war and in peace he should exercise it more than in war” (Prince, ch. 14)—Cyrus takes it upon himself to assemble 30,000 troops in formation and lead them to Cyaxares “at a brisk run” (2.4.2-3). Cyaxares ordered Cyrus to appear wearing his finest Median dress, but instead Cyrus brings the army. When Cyrus and his considerable contingent appear before Cyaxares, his uncle notices that Cyrus’s shabby Persian dress “was in no way ostentatious (*hubrizomai*)” (2.4.5). Cyaxares is pleased with his nephew’s promptness but annoyed by the drabness of his attire, for which he scolds his nephew (2.4.5). Cyrus pacifies his uncle a bit by pointing out that he came so promptly that he did not have time for elaborate dress and was instead “adorned with sweat and zeal” (2.4.6). Though Cyrus’s *apologia* satisfies Cyaxares, the fact remains that Cyrus deliberately disobeyed his uncle, presumed to know better than him what the best course of action was, and publicly embarrassed him.

The events following an important victory of the allied Persian, Median, and Hyrcanian forces over the Assyrians, Phrygians, and Arabians further illustrate the way in which Cyrus coolly manipulates and deceives Cyaxares. After the victory, far from decadently celebrating, the Persians under Cyrus enjoy a moderate dinner before diligently securing the camp from potential attackers and deserters (4.5.5). In contrast to the Persians’ discipline, “the Medes were drinking, feasting, having flutes played,

and sating themselves with every delight, for many such things had been captured, so those awake were not at a loss for something to do (*ergon*)” (4.5.7). Never one to miss an opportunity for carousing, Cyaxares partook of the festivities, delighted with his good fortune as the victor and secure in his belief that the Medes were still present in camp, “for he heard a great commotion” (4.5.8). However, contrary to Cyaxares’ assumption, the ruckus that he hears is not that of the Median soldiers celebrating, but rather the sound of the unsupervised Median servants making merry. Unbeknownst to Cyaxares, Cyrus took the Median troops in the middle of the night under the cover of darkness, ostensibly to further secure their position and to seek additional gain, maneuvers that just happen to further cement Cyrus’s authority and undercut that of his uncle.

The next morning Cyaxares wakes to find that not a soul reports to his headquarters and that his camp has been abandoned while he was leisurely sleeping off a night of merrymaking (4.5.9). Known for bouts of being “savage and without judgment (*agnōmē*),” Cyaxares curses Cyrus and the Medes for departing without his knowledge or consent and leaving him all alone (4.5.9). He sends a message to Cyrus chastising him and demanding that the Medes return to camp as promptly as possible. To emphasize the urgency of his message, Cyaxares threatens the Medes, and even the messenger himself, such that the envoy became “distressed that he had not himself gone before with Cyrus” (4.5.13). Upon hearing Cyaxares’ demand that they return immediately even if Cyrus himself wished to stay, the Medes fell silent, owing to the fact that they could not conceive of disobeying Cyaxares and further aggravating his

anger, though they also feared returning to him because he was in such a rage (4.5.18-19).

Sensing the soldiers' indecision, Cyrus makes a speech and provides a rather duplicitous reading of Cyaxares' message that is designed to persuade the soldiers to remain with him rather than return to Cyaxares (4.5.20-21). As Nadon points out, Cyrus's "interpretation" of Cyaxares' message differs from the original in several ways and is in fact a "gross misreading."¹⁵¹ Cyrus begins by attributing Cyaxares' rage to the fact that his uncle is concerned for the Medes' well being, a situation Cyrus implies can be easily remedied once Cyaxares learns that the Medes are in fact faring quite well. Yet in point of fact Cyaxares never expressed any concern for the Medes or anyone else other than himself (4.5.10). Moreover, while Cyaxares expressed dismay at being deserted, contra Cyrus's presentation he never stated that he was afraid; rather, as Cyaxares told the messenger, the true basis for his anger is the fact that Cyrus did not see fit to tell him about the Hyrcanian deserters who agreed to serve as Cyrus's guides or about his nephew's decision to leave in the middle of the night with nearly all the Medes (4.5.11-12). Finally, Cyrus's argument that the Medes "came only after having been so ordered" by Cyaxares is not entirely true (4.5.21). It would be more accurate to say, as Cyrus himself privately admits, that Cyaxares merely agreed to permit those who wished to accompany Cyrus to do so, without compelling anyone to go against his will (4.1.19, 5.5.21). Viewed in its proper light, Cyaxares' anger stems in great measure from the fact that nearly everyone under his command chose of his own volition to follow Cyrus's lead when given the opportunity. But however questionable

¹⁵¹ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 94.

Cyrus's interpretation of Cyaxares' message is, Cyrus's speech works like a charm and Cyaxares' demands prove futile as the Medes and even the messenger who was personally charged with delivering Cyaxares' scathing rebuke decide to ignore his order and remain with Cyrus, which of course only further enrages Cyaxares.

In his letter of explanation to Cyaxares, Cyrus attempts on some level to reconcile with his uncle, but the message is also filled with condescension and loosely veiled threats. Even the most conciliatory line in the entire letter is simultaneously remarkably haughty, with Cyrus noting that he will not stoop to Cyaxares' level and treat his uncle the way Cyaxares has treated him by trying to recall his cavalry (4.5.24, 31). Cyrus also lectures his uncle regarding the proper way for a leader to comport himself, advising him not to take back what he had previously given as he now attempts to do, "lest enmity be owed to you instead of gratitude (*charis*)" (4.5.32). Cyrus further advises Cyaxares not to summon with threats those he desires to come quickly and not to threaten large numbers of soldiers when he himself admits to being deserted and vulnerable. Given its pedantic tone, Cyrus's letter is not at all the sort of respectful letter one would expect a nephew who has not yet inherited the Persian throne to send to his elder uncle, who is after all (at least nominally) the reigning king of Media. Far from showing proper respect to his senior uncle, Cyrus's pompous tone leaves little doubt that he sees himself as the natural and rightful ruler of Media and his uncle as in every way his inferior. The last line of Cyrus's letter leaves little doubt about who is really in charge of the Median forces and their allies, given that he repeatedly employs the singular 'you' (as he does throughout the letter) so as to make Cyaxares feel as isolated, small, and weak as possible as compared to Cyrus and his forces: "We will try

to be back with you as soon as possible as we accomplish what we believe would, when done, be goods in common for both you and us” (4.5.33). In other words, Cyrus wants his uncle to rest assured that he will make every attempt to return when he is good and ready.

After Cyrus summons Cyaxares and “invites” him to rejoin the troops, Cyaxares makes what amounts to his most moving and persuasive speech in the Cyropaedia, in which he articulates to Cyrus the precise nature of his grievance with his nephew’s behavior (5.5.25-34). While he grants that Cyrus did help to weaken his Assyrian enemies, with each successive victory against them Cyrus’s stock rises in the eyes of the Medians and their allies and the honor (*timē*) accorded to himself diminishes. As Cyaxares candidly admits to Cyrus, he would rather extend his nephew’s dominion by his own power than sit idly and watch his own territory increased by Cyrus, “for your deeds are noble (*kalos*) to you who do them, but somehow the same deeds bring dishonor to me” (5.5.25-26). Cyaxares cannot help but feel that the more Cyrus enriches him, the poorer he actually becomes (5.5.27). Since he bears little responsibility for advancing his own fortune, Cyaxares likens himself to a woman, whereas Cyrus alone appears in the eyes of his subordinates to be a man (*anēr*) worthy of rule (*archē*) (5.5.33).

Before Cyaxares can finish his impassioned and moving speech on the causes of his discontent, Cyrus abruptly interrupts him by swearing an oath (5.5.35). Cyrus proposes that they put aside their differences and reconcile, a suggestion that Cyaxares accepts (5.5.36). But this sudden reconciliation is most unsatisfactory in the sense that Cyaxares had nearly finished establishing why, Cyrus’s protests and avowals of good

faith to the contrary, he had just cause to be distressed by Cyrus's behavior. Perhaps, as Tatum suggests, Cyrus interrupts because Cyaxares comes dangerously close to unearthing and articulating his nephew's strategies and methods for ruling over others.¹⁵² For example, when Cyaxares states that he would be less displeased to see his subjects harmed a bit by Cyrus rather than seeing them receive great benefits at the hands of his nephew, he comes very close to unearthing one facet of Cyrus's knowledge. As Cyrus knows well, and as Cyaxares begins to learn all too well for himself by observing Cyrus, he who consistently benefits others seemingly (but only seemingly) without regard for his own advantage thereby rules them. In this sense the title of the book —The Education of Cyrus— refers not only to the education Cyrus received, and not only to the education Xenophon conveys to the reader through Cyrus's life, but also to the education Cyrus imparts to other characters in the Cyropaedia who, as in the case of Cyaxares, come to learn the secrets and consequences of Cyrus's rule for themselves only once it is too late to halt his meteoric rise to power.

After Cyrus "reconciles" with his uncle, he orchestrates a series of events that provides a nice summation of the extent to which he deceives Cyaxares and shows how he deliberately tricks his own soldiers as well. Following a contrived embrace with his uncle that Cyrus insisted upon, Xenophon notes that the soldiers who had been watching —for Cyrus had presciently taken care to dismiss them all prior to speaking privately with his uncle (5.5.7)— "took immediate pleasure and beamed with joy" (5.5.37). Cyrus masterfully contrives the whole situation such that the soldiers are privy neither to the litany of Cyaxares' grievances with Cyrus nor to the mostly inadequate

¹⁵² James Tatum, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 132,

replies Cyrus gives to his uncle's primarily sound and well-articulated objections. The soldiers hear not a word and see only the purely theatrical embrace at the end of the discussion, which calls to mind Machiavelli's advice to princes to be mindful that their subjects will only be able to see how the prince appears with their eyes and will not be able to touch him with their hands (Prince, ch. 18). After the contrived embrace, the Medes dutifully fall into line behind Cyaxares, though only because "Cyrus gave them a nod to do so" (5.5.37). Remarkably, the soldiers who are willing participants in Cyrus's manipulation of Cyaxares apparently never suspect that when they witnessed the embrace between Cyrus and Cyaxares they too were being manipulated by Cyrus. Part of Cyrus's success can thus be attributed to the fact that he allows others to feel as though they are his trusted confidantes who help him manipulate others, even as he simultaneously deceives those same "confidantes" so as to promote his own advantage.

When they arrive back at camp, Cyrus orders several of the Medes to bring presents to Cyaxares, which reinforces Cyrus's authority in the eyes of his soldiers and further obfuscates in Cyaxares' mind the dramatic coup that has occurred, such that Cyaxares rather blithely changes his mind and decides that Cyrus was in no way alienating the Medes' affection for him (5.5.40). Believing himself reconciled to Cyrus, Cyaxares invites his nephew to join him to dine, but Cyrus declines, noting that he has other matters to which he must attend. Before leaving his uncle, Cyrus remarks that having successfully repelled the Assyrians, he, Cyaxares, and the chief aides (*epikairioi*) will deliberate the next day about whether to continue the campaign or dissolve the army (5.5.43). The specific reason why Cyrus declined his uncle's invitation to dine is because he desires to meet secretly and in advance with his chief

aides —and without Cyaxares— to decide in private whether to press onward or go home. The next morning, after everything had already been decided in private in accord with Cyrus’s wishes to continue the campaign, Cyaxares appears in his finest dress and takes his seat on the Median throne, ready to “deliberate” about a decision that has in truth already been made.

In the case of both the soldiers and Cyaxares, Cyrus is, as always, fully cognizant of the importance of appearances and the way in which he can best manipulate what others see so as to suit his own advantage. As is so often the case in the Cyropaedia, both Cyaxares and the soldiers see only what Cyrus wishes them to see and do not see events in their proper context. By employing deception and manipulation at every turn, Cyrus successfully wrests power away from his uncle, who for the most part is unaware that a coup has occurred and is for the remainder of his days only a nominal ruler. Whereas Cyrus might not have been able to quite so easily construct his legendary and all-important reputation as a benevolent (*philanthrōpos*) ruler had he simply killed his uncle or if it became known that he opted to have him killed, he assumes near total control of Media fairly early in his life without having to kill his uncle and risk being thought of as a regicide (1.4.7, 9, 2.4.1-8, 3.3.24, 30-33, 4.6.11, 6.2.8, 6.3.2). In essence, Cyrus is content to bide his time until Cyaxares formally offers him Media as a dowry (8.5.17-20, 28), secure in the fact that he is already as a young man the de facto ruler of Media and that his uncle is merely a thoroughly deceived and pitiable figurehead.

Cyrus's Deception of Enemies in Battle

As he steadily wrests control of the armed forces away from Cyaxares, Cyrus employs them in his ongoing pursuit of gain, which requires deceiving and defeating enemies in battle. Whereas Cyrus's manipulation of his uncle (and ostensible ally) Cyaxares is at odds with his Persian education (1.6.29-33), his deceptions of enemies in battle accords not only with his Persian and kingly educations (1.5.27-9, 38-41), but also with his Median education (1.4.19-20), which is to say that in Xenophon's view even regimes whose principles are as disparate and antithetical as Persian republicanism is with Median despotism must both alike deceive their enemies. Deception of enemies in Xenophon's view would thus seem to be part and parcel of foreign policy and war.

Cyrus's early campaign against the Armenian king who refused to render the proper tribute to Cyaxares exemplifies the sorts of cunning and trickery he routinely employed against enemies. For example, Cyrus knows that if he were to bring his forces to the Armenian border for a surprise attack he would excite no suspicion since he frequently hunted in this region (2.4.16). Because he wishes to bring more soldiers than usual, prior to leading his men toward Armenia Cyrus circulates the pretext that he wants to hold a great hunt (2.4.17-18). His deception works perfectly and catches the delinquent Armenian king off-guard, leaving him little choice but to make a desperate retreat to the top of a hill, which Cyrus's forces quickly surround (3.1.1-5). Having tricked and thoroughly outmaneuvered the Armenian, Cyrus forces him to endure a humiliating line of questioning in which he concedes his own wrongdoing and admits

that death would be a fitting punishment for his crimes (3.1.12), though Cyrus decides it would be advantageous for several reasons to spare him (3.1.31-7).

The deceptive tactics Cyrus employs against the Armenians are indicative of the ruses he employs against his enemies throughout his life. As a youth in Media, Cyrus scores an initial victory against the son of the Assyrian king by leading a dangerous and unexpected charge, which catches the enemy completely by surprise (1.4.19-20). After conquering and befriending the Armenians, Cyrus uses them as a decoy to lure the Chaldeans into a trap (3.2.8). Camping while on campaign against the Assyrians, Cyrus typically burned fires at the front of his camp, though he also burned fires behind the camp so as to deceive his enemies about his position and cause them to wander completely unaware into his camp due to their mistaken belief that they were still far away from his forces (3.3.25). Whereas the Assyrians camped surrounded by a ditch but in plain sight, Cyrus kept his forces out of sight so that they could flash suddenly into view, thus inspiring terror in the enemy (3.3.28). Upon learning that Gadatas, a neighboring prince subject to the Assyrian's son, seeks revenge against the Assyrian crown prince for castrating him (5.3.8, 10), Cyrus contrives a plot whereby he will pretend to "attack" Gadatas, who will then "flee" to a key Assyrian base of operations as if seeking "shelter" from Cyrus, at which point Gadatas will provide "information" about Cyrus's forces to the enemy; once Gadatas is inside, he leads an attack from within while Cyrus assaults the perimeter (5.3.10-18). As Cyrus makes final preparations for the great battle against the Assyrians, he instructs the Kurd Carduchas to place the women's carriages in the rear so as to give the appearance of a larger force (6.3.30). Once the great battle begins, Cyrus realizes that the Persians have been lodged

from their position, but he halts the enemy's progress by riding around to their rear and striking them "as they looked the other way" (7.1.36). As all of these examples indicate, it is hardly a careless oversight on Xenophon's part that among Cyrus's many virtues he mentions in the prologue and throughout the Cyropaedia, he never says that Cyrus was honest.

Cyrus's Deception of His Subjects in Speech

Along with his repeated deceptions of his uncle Cyaxares and his enemies in battle, Cyrus also manipulates nearly everyone else he meets, including his own subjects, most of whom he treats as little more than pawns to help him further his imperial ambitions. If Cyrus rises to power in part because of his prodigious talent in deed as a crafty military tactician, no less important is his capacity to deceive his own subjects in speech by feeding them a steady diet of half-truths and outright lies.

At a young age, the talkative Cyrus showed an impressive burgeoning capacity to manipulate others through his speech so as to further his own interests. One facet of Cyrus's Persian education in the schools of justice involved issuing judgments and obtaining accounts from others, activities that contributed to his loquaciousness (1.2.6-7, 1.3.16-17, 1.4.3). As a boy Cyrus was fond of chattering and enjoyed asking many questions of those around him (1.4.12). Moreover, when others questioned him, he had no difficulty answering (1.4.3). In fact, the main reason why Cyrus's mother Mandane was able to temporarily remove him from the Persian curriculum and bring him to Media for an extended visit with his grandfather Astyages was that Cyrus was so precocious, talented, and far ahead of his classmates in all aspects of the Persian

curriculum, including arguing cases in court (1.3.1, 1.3.15-16).¹⁵³ However, in Xenophon's judgment, Cyrus was not only talkative, but also "was perhaps *too ready with words*" (1.4.1, 3 my emphasis). Given Cyrus's extraordinary forensic talents, why does Xenophon suggest that he was as a child perhaps a bit "too ready with words"? And to what extent does the Cyropaedia as whole bear out Xenophon's cautionary judgment regarding the verbal dexterity Cyrus exhibited at such a young age?

Xenophon harbors reservation about Cyrus's verbal skill because Cyrus was not above employing his talent sophistically to win arguments and thereby promote his own self-interest. For example, on the heels of Cyrus's attempt to persuade his mother Mandane to let him remain in Media, Xenophon notes that "Cyrus often chattered *like this*" (1.4.1, my emphasis). The context for Xenophon's remark is important because Cyrus's attempt to allay his mother's fears as to whether an extended stay in despotic Media will undermine his republican Persian education is at times quite sophistical and thus highly dubious. In response to Mandane's concern that he will return home to Persia believing in the tyrannical principle that it is right for one person to have more than everyone else, Cyrus sophistically responds that he is no danger, because his tyrannical grandfather Astyages actually teaches his subjects to make do with less, not more (1.3.18, 1.4.26). Yet Mandane's valid concern is not whether Cyrus will return home from Media with too much loot, which Cyrus knows full well that the austere Persians would never permit him to return with anyway (1.4.26), but rather whether he will come back believing that it is proper for a single hegemonic individual to hold all

¹⁵³ W.R. Newell, "Tyranny and the Science of Ruling in Xenophon's 'Education of Cyrus'," The Journal of Politics 45 (1983): 893.

the power. The rest of the Cyropaedia, which details Cyrus's incredible rise to absolute authority, vindicates Mandane's concern and serves as an extended meditation on the evasiveness and weakness of Cyrus's response to her. To return to the quotation in question, when Xenophon notes that "Cyrus often chattered like this," in context he means that Cyrus was not above sophistically dodging the issue and deceiving others in order to get what he wants, a comment that explains and reinforces his belief that Cyrus "was too ready with words."

Xenophon's reservations about Cyrus's extraordinary rhetorical skills come into sharper focus when viewed against the background of the Memorabilia, which consists of Xenophon's recollections of his teacher, Socrates. The charge that Xenophon relates in his Memorabilia that Socrates should not have taught Critias and Alcibiades rhetoric and dialectic until he ensured that they were moderate (to which incidentally Xenophon does not provide much by way of an adequate defense) would also seem to apply to the Persians who educated Cyrus. Like Critias and Alcibiades, Cyrus displays occasional signs of immoderation (*aphrosunē*) after he has become quite skilled in forensics (1.3.16-7), which from Xenophon's point of view is a sign that the Persians should probably have waited until Cyrus was a bit older before teaching him the finer points of dialectic. Moreover, just as Cyrus and Alcibiades remained moderate when they were with Socrates but began to fall away from the virtue Socrates had encouraged when they were no longer with him, so too did Cyrus act moderately on the whole while he remained in Persia, only to behave more immoderately when he left Persia and traveled to Media, where he was free from his austere teachers' watchful eyes (1.3.3, 1.4.8-9). Despite the Persians' systematic institutional attempt to make their young moderate

—to “bend” them and give them an external “push” in the direction of virtue, as Newell puts it¹⁵⁴— they ultimately failed in the case of Cyrus, much like Socrates in his attempt to do the same with Critias and Alcibiades, in part because they began teaching rhetoric and dialectic before they should have. Contrary to the view of those who argue that Xenophon was in no way critical of the Persia of Cyrus’s youth,¹⁵⁵ Xenophon in fact shows that the Persians were a bit imprudent to the extent that they taught rhetoric before the Persian boys’ “moderation” could be tempted and tested by the immoderate urges puberty typically incites and insofar as they (perhaps with the exceptions of Cambyses and Mandane) did not anticipate that Cyrus would begin to stray from his virtuous education when he visited the comparatively morally lax kingdom of Media.

By examining the context for Xenophon’s claim that “Cyrus often chattered on like this” and by briefly interpreting the Cyropaedia against the background of the Memorabilia, we have thus arrived at an answer to the first question raised at the outset of this section as to why Xenophon believed that Cyrus was “too ready with words.” The answer, we have suggested, is that Cyrus’s rhetorical skills superseded his moderation, a situation that rendered Cyrus willing to resort to sophistry in order to get what he wanted.

We turn now to the second question we raised at the outset of this section regarding the extent to which the Cyropaedia as a whole bears out Xenophon’s judgment that Cyrus was overly skilled in rhetoric at too young an age. As we shall endeavor to show, Cyrus’s repeated deception and manipulation of Cyaxares in order to

¹⁵⁴ Newell, "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," 146.

¹⁵⁵ Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 181.

promote his own advantage is hardly exceptional or unique, insofar as this is consistent with the way he treats most everyone with whom he speaks throughout his life, including his own subjects.

Taken together, Cyrus's separate speeches to the Persian peers and then to the combined peers and commoners proposing that the commoners be admitted into the class of the peers and judged according to merit illustrate the sense in which he gives very different accounts to various audiences and omits relevant details when it suits his purposes. Cyrus opens his address to the peers by noting that he is "afraid" for them since they are few in number and without the help of the commoners in battle (2.1.11), a circumstance that he proposes to remedy. The peers are delighted with Cyrus's proposal, since they saw that they would henceforth be going into battle with greater support to help them avoid the kind of unsavory demise on the battlefield that Cyrus predicted was in store for them if they did not agree to his recommendation (2.1.11, 13). Cyrus's appeal to the peers' fear and self-interest causes them to overlook his tacit and rather insulting suggestion that the commoners can adequately learn in a very short time skills that the peers apparently needed their entire lives to master.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, while Cyrus goes out of his way to stress the advantages that will accrue to the peers if they adopt his proposal, he is altogether silent about what they will have to give up in order to enhance their security. In contrast, when Cyrus later addresses the commoners and the peers together, he states that the commoners are to receive honor and an equal share of the spoil for their efforts, which he neglected to mention previously to the peers (2.1.14-15, 19). At this point, even if some of the peers caught the discrepancy, once

¹⁵⁶ Leslie Rubin, "Cyrus for President?" *The World and I* Nov.1992 (1992): 456.

the commoners have been apprised of Cyrus's plan all the momentum inexorably careens toward blending the two classes into one. Any peer who was troubled by the discrepancies between Cyrus's two accounts would have had to have spoken up not only in front of Cyrus, but also in front of the commoners, who Xenophon notes were staring at a mass of weapons Cyrus had arranged and at which he encouraged them to look during his speech (2.1.14, 18).

Cyrus's address to the peers differs in other ways from his speech to the combined group of peers and commoners. For example, whereas he tells the peers that the commoners are stout of body and that the peers thus need only steel the commoners' souls (2.1.11, 13), he tells the combined group that the commoners' souls are in all likelihood no less brave than those of the peers (2.1.15).¹⁵⁷ While this discrepancy between the two accounts no doubt owes something to Cyrus's desire to flatter the commoners, who are acutely aware of the disparity between their own lack of honors as compared to those accorded to the peers (2.1.13), it also points to the fact that he needs to devalue the traditional Persian education that was designed to make the peers' souls moderate and just. As he shrewdly discerns, the old regimen is antithetical to his imperial ambitions, which require unleashing the desire for gain. As one who seeks to acquire and found an empire, it is in Cyrus's interests to tacitly devalue the education of the peers without stressing the point, since from the perspective of the Persian education in moderation and justice Cyrus's imperial project looks most immoderate and unjust (1.6.45). Whereas the Persians prior to Cyrus practiced moderation and justice, did not turn covetous eyes on their neighbors' property, and successfully defended and

¹⁵⁷ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 65.

perpetuated their morally decent if unspectacular way of life, Cyrus encourages immoderation, seeks always to acquire more, and creates a decadent empire that in the end can neither defend nor perpetuate itself. If, contrary to Gera's interpretation but as Nadon correctly argues, Cyrus's deathbed scene shows that he did not trouble himself until his final moments to provide his sons who were the heirs to the throne with a moral education,¹⁵⁸ then Cyrus's speech to the peers and commoners shows that he self-consciously sought to deny and minimize the importance of moral education from the very beginning of his rise to power. On the one hand, it is part and parcel of Cyrus's genius that he grasped entirely the way in which the traditional Persian moral education was antithetical to his imperial enterprise. On the other hand, judged by his own criteria that it is a greater achievement to preserve an empire than to merely acquire one (7.5.76), Cyrus's temporary willingness to minimize the importance of moral education, only in the end to attempt to hastily return to something like it once he founds the empire, seems to have been a somewhat shortsighted gambit that, as judged by Cyrus's own criteria, failed. As the life of Cyrus shows, no matter how gifted the ruler, one cannot in Xenophon's estimation hope to suddenly and spontaneously create a virtuous citizenry on top of an empire whose very foundation was immoderation.

At times, Cyrus deceives not so much by saying different things in front of different audiences, as in the previous example, but by trying to appear more traditional and conservative than he actually is so as to mask some of the more questionable facets of his revolutionary actions. For example, after his impressive victory over the allied

¹⁵⁸ Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 125. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 135.

Phrygians, Assyrians, and Arabians, Cyrus makes a speech exhorting the victorious Persians to practice moderation, but without stressing the point he subtly alters the traditional Persian understanding of moderation so as to suit his own imperial ends. Whereas the Persians prior to Cyrus practiced moderation as a means to helping them preserve their way of life, Cyrus attempts to make moderation into a means to greater gain,¹⁵⁹ which is to say that he renders it little more than an enlightened and calculated means to immoderation. In essence, Cyrus promotes delayed gratification, which bears a passing, outward, and behavioral resemblance to genuine moderation, as a means to increased future pleasures (4.2.39, 42-45, 8.1.32). For this reason, despite his outwardly moderate behavior, he is—as incidentally his uncle Cyaxares correctly discerns and Cyrus himself admits—in fact a hedonist (8.2.20). For example, when Cyrus recommends to the Persians that they entrust the division of the treasure to their allies, he notes that “seizing the advantage now would provide us with wealth that is short lived,” whereas if they allowed their allies a share of the spoil, they would thus acquire “that from which wealth naturally springs...the power of providing ageless riches to us and ours” (4.3.44). By acting “moderately” and allowing the allies to have their proper share of the loot despite the fact that the Persians could take it all, Cyrus promises the Persians that they will cement their bond with their current allies and will gain the allegiance of valuable additional allies that will help them ensure even greater gain in the future. By subtly altering the meaning of moderation, Cyrus shrewdly gains for himself the advantages of having an outwardly moderate army, which helps promote

¹⁵⁹ Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," 231, Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," 95.

discipline and secure allies, even as he channels his subjects' "moderation" and puts it in the service of the endless pursuit of gain. At the end of the *Cyropaedia* when the empire has been established and there is little chance of securing further gain, the game is up and the Persians' moderate veneer cracks to reveal the hedonism present just below the seemingly virtuous exterior as the Persians abandon any pretence to virtue (8.8.2-27).

Once Cyrus establishes the empire, he lays additional stress on the need for something like the traditional Persian education in virtue, but when he tells the Persians that his prescribed educational regimen constitutes "nothing new," he deceives them yet again (7.5.85). Cyrus argues that just as in old Persia the peers spent their time at the government buildings, so too must the newly reformed and reconstituted upper class (*entimos*) likewise "practice the very things we did there...practicing what is noble and good" (7.5.85). But as Cyrus surely knows, his argument that the new education in the empire in no way alters the traditional Persian education and even constitutes a return to it is not entirely true. While there are certainly similarities between the two curricula, there is one crucial difference that reflects the monumental difference between old Persia and the empire under Cyrus. Whereas in old Persia the government buildings that Cyrus mentions were places where the young were instructed in justice, which for the Persians meant adherence to law (*nomos*) and knowledge about how to prudentially apply the laws to specific cases (1.2.6, 1.3.16-7), under Cyrus there are no laws. In the absence of laws, the empire is governed solely by adherence to Cyrus's absolute will

(1.1.5, 8.1.22, 8.8.1).¹⁶⁰ Similarly, while Cyrus correctly stresses a similarity between old Persia and the empire when he explains that in both cases the men were to serve as virtuous examples to the boys (7.5.86), he fails to mention that in old Persia the boys were to be formed not only by imitating their elders, but also by following the law (3.3.53). Under Cyrus the old virtue of justice defined as adherence to the law gets replaced by the new virtue of obedience, not to law, which no longer exists, but to Cyrus's omnipotent will.

If the moral of Cyrus's speech is that the leaders under him must continue to practice virtue as in old Persia, it must be said that the virtues Cyrus endeavors to conflate are in fact different and even somewhat antithetical insofar as Persian republicanism is at odds with Cyrus's despotism, however benevolent. While Cyrus seems to hope that the Persian denizens of his empire will remember their old education and be able to return to something reminiscent of it, in the interim Cyrus's subjects have grown accustomed to always following Cyrus's will, so much so that many of them forget how to think for themselves. The bleak conclusion of the *Cyropaedia* that documents the degenerative decline of the empire after Cyrus's death cannot be understood apart the novel education that Cyrus instituted under the guise of the ancestral. Without Cyrus's will to guide them, and no longer with laws to look to for guidance, Cyrus's subjects spiral downward into the depths of vice once Cyrus dies in a way that has led some commentators to conclude that Cyrus's successors—not Cyrus himself—are responsible for the empire's collapse. While it is certainly true that

¹⁶⁰ Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," 158, 99. Gary D. Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," *Law and Philosophy*, eds. John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992) 153. Joel Farber, "The *Cyropaedia* and Hellenistic Kingship," *American Journal of Philology* 100 (1979): 503-04.

Cyrus's successors were incompetent, once one grasps the key difference between the old Persian education and the new education under Cyrus, as well as the radically new kinds of "virtue" Cyrus introduces under the guise of the ancestral, one sees that far from absolving Cyrus for what came after him, in fact the conclusion of the Cyropaedia follows directly from the reforms Cyrus institutes on his march to empire.

Along with the revolutionary nature of the education the peers are to receive under Cyrus, Cyrus also deceives his subjects about what he repeatedly characterizes as the defensive nature of their imperialistic enterprise. He repeatedly tells them that they are engaged in a defensive war of necessity that they did not themselves choose but that they must fight to the end, confident that they will prevail because both justice and the gods are on their side (4.3.12, 7.5.73, 77). Cyrus employs this line of argument in part to help banish the vestigial fears of the Persian peers who must surely sense on some level that the imperialistic enterprise of which they are a part is not wholly just and who likely fear divine retribution. Though Cyrus's reassurances are remarkably successful in mitigating their fears, it must nonetheless be said that in truth Cyrus's argument that the Persians are in no way guilty of injustice since they are not the aggressors and are fighting a purely defensive battle is not entirely persuasive.

At one point at which Cyrus argues that the Persians, Medes, and their allies are fighting a defensive war (4.3.12), the Persians have entered into Assyria so as to continue the heavy fighting on the enemy's soil. At this point in the narrative, Cyrus's argument that the Persians are fighting defensively rings only halfway true. On the one hand, though the Persians decided not to wait and to instead preemptively attack the Assyrians by marching against them, they do so only once it is abundantly clear that the

Assyrians were preparing to launch a major offensive against them (1.5.2-3, 3.3.24).

On the other hand, for many soldiers the initial decision to preemptively attack the Assyrians stemmed less from fear than from the fact that they were “desirous” (*erōtikos*) of the enterprise (3.3.12). The term *erōtikos* implies that, far from embarking on the campaign begrudgingly, merely out of a sense of duty, or as a last resort, some of the soldiers were positively attracted to the spoil that would await them should they prove victorious.

When Cyrus later makes similar arguments justifying the Persians’ ever deeper advance into Assyria toward Babylon, these speeches are even more dubious in light of the deliberation that occurs between Cyrus and the allies regarding whether or not to continue the campaign after having inflicted substantial losses on the Assyrians (6.1.6-19). The various speeches by Cyrus and his chief aides all express vehement support for continuing on with the campaign and for not disbanding the army. But a few of the arguments reveal that some of the allies see themselves as fighting offensively insofar as they are trying to seize the Assyrian’s wealth. For example, the Mede Artabazus notes that his new life in Assyria is better than his old life in Media, in part because he sees the campaign as a “holiday” and a “festive gathering,” one in which he can drink and feast on what belongs to the enemy (6.1.9-10). By advocating war in the name of gain, Artabazus simply reiterates and perhaps makes somewhat more explicit a principle that motivated many of Cyrus’s followers from the beginning (1.5.7-14), which is to say that Cyrus’s characterization of the Persians’ campaign as purely defensive is from the outset of the campaign somewhat dubious. At every stage of the conflict, for every one of Cyrus’s subjects who legitimately fears the reprisals that the Assyrian might visit

upon them in the future if he is permitted to rearm and regroup (6.1.11), there are others who are motivated not so much by fear or even the desire to avenge past wrongs, but primarily by the desire for wealth (3.3.8, 4.2.46). Along with his subjects, and despite his talk of fighting defensively, Cyrus himself has ulterior motives centered on his desires for gain and especially for preeminence in honor, both of which have nothing to do with fear of the enemy and fighting defensively (1.2.1, 3.2.31, 3.3.32, 4.1.20, 5.5.46). Because many of his allies and Cyrus himself wish to continue the campaign not so much out of necessity but in order to seek gain, his speeches testifying to the defensive nature of their enterprise are far from wholly persuasive.

In contrast to the previous examples, the final way in which Cyrus deceives his subjects is not by actively deceiving them with his own words but by failing to disagree and correct some of them when he knows they err, so long as their mistakes help contribute to the establishment of his empire. When he deems it personally advantageous, Cyrus allows his subjects to remain ignorant even when he knows their erroneous beliefs will likely result in harm to themselves or to others. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon can be seen by comparing Cyrus's full endorsement of a speech the Persian captain Chrysantas makes in support of Cyrus's proposition that the Persians acquire a cavalry (4.3.4-14) with the caution he urges the passionate Mede Araspas to heed (5.1.2-17). Because it suits his purposes, Cyrus responds very differently to the two men, despite the fact that their beliefs are at bottom very similar.

Chrysantas states that he is most eager to learn horsemanship because he fancies that he will become "a winged human being" (4.3.15). As he explains, the creature that he envies most is the centaur, whose advantageous combination of man and beast he

believes he will be able to approximate by becoming a horseman (4.3.17). In fact, he argues that he will be superior to a centaur, because he will be able to separate himself from his horse in a way that centaurs cannot and will thus become “a centaur that can be divided and put together again” (4.3.20). As his speech suggests, Chrysantas admires neither man nor beast so much as a combination of the two natures that can easily shift back and forth between them. Implicit in Chrysantas’ view that he will be able to alternate between the human and beastly natures is the premise that man’s primal and animalistic passions are like a switch that one can rather easily turn on or off. On his view, it would be advantageous to be able to transform himself into a beast so long as at the end of the day he could return to being a man, which calls to mind Machiavelli’s argument that it is necessary for a prince (especially a new prince) to know how to use the natures of both beast and man (Prince, ch. 18).

When the other captains voice their approval of Chrysantas’ speech, Cyrus adds his own (4.3.21-2). In fact, he proposes making it shameful for those Persians who possess a horse “to be noticed going on foot,” such that “human beings may think that we really are centaurs” (4.3.22). The metaphor of the Persians as centaurs nicely foreshadows the decadence and rapid decline of the Persian Empire. For the Greeks, centaurs were considered oversexed and prone to drunkenness, which calls to mind the debauchery that ensues among Cyrus’s subjects following his death. Moreover, Centaurs were thought to have problems reproducing insofar as they had the desire to be with human beings despite the fact that they possessed a horse’s equipment, which implies that to the extent that the Persians become centaurs, they will not be able to

sustain and reproduce their empire. The centaur is thus an apt metaphor for the Persians under Cyrus.

While Cyrus certainly agrees at the level of policy with Chrysantas' proposal for the creation of a cavalry that will prove useful in battle, there is evidence that Cyrus held his tongue regarding his doubts about the deeper theoretical issues concerning man's ability to alternately indulge and hold his bestial passions in check raised by Chrysantas' enthusiasm for the centaur. For example, Chrysantas' excitement at the prospect of riding horses is reminiscent of Cyrus's youthful elation in Media when he first felt the thrill of reckless abandon of riding into combat upon a horse (1.4.8, 20-1). In these encounters, Xenophon implies that had Cyrus not been so lucky and had he met a more disciplined foe, he could potentially have met a very bad end (1.4.21-23), which is to say that Cyrus himself knows full well and firsthand from personal experience how exhilarating riding horses into combat can be and how easy it is to be overcome by the moment and to lose one's head when fused to the awesome power of a horse. If Cyrus, who almost always strives to appear to others as a model of moderation, could so easily abandon his reason and be overcome by his passions as a horseman rushing into the heat of battle, what chance will his subjects like Chrysantas have to retain their rationality and judgment when fused to such awesome power? To take another example, when Cyrus petitions his allies to provide him with horses he restates Chrysantas' argument as if it were his own, arguing that if and when he and the Persian horsemen needed to become foot soldiers again, it would always be "open to us to dismount" (4.5.49). Taken literally, Cyrus's claim is of course quite true, insofar as riders who encounter the need to be on foot can simply dismount from their horses.

However, while Cyrus seems to wholly endorse Chrysantas' argument, he elsewhere firmly and unequivocally rejects the deeper level of Chrysantas' account, according to which the passions can quite easily and intermittently be indulged and then controlled. Speaking with Araspas, a lifelong friend from Media to whom Cyrus had as a youth given his beautiful Median robe prior to returning home to Persia (1.4.26), Cyrus entrusts the beautiful prisoner Panthea —whose name literally means 'wholly divine'¹⁶¹— to him for safekeeping, until such time as Cyrus should take her for himself or until "this woman could become something quite opportune" (5.1.3, 17). Given Cyrus's apparent interest in Panthea, it must come as quite a surprise to Araspas to learn that Cyrus has never actually seen (*heōrakas*) her and knows of her beauty only through the testimony of others (5.1.4). Flabbergasted to learn that Cyrus has not availed himself of the opportunity to behold her beauty, Araspas offers to take Cyrus to her, but Cyrus declines, citing his fear that in the future when he had no time to spare he would be compelled against his will to "sit gazing (*theaomai*) at her, neglecting what I need to do" (5.1.7-8). Though Araspas attempts to persuade Cyrus that desire is a matter of free will, Cyrus does not agree, for he has witnessed "people enslaved to those they love...bound by some necessity (*anagkē*) stronger than if they had been bound by iron" (5.1.9-12). When Araspas tries again to persuade Cyrus to come see Panthea by arguing that perfect gentlemen (*kaloι kagathoi*) like themselves have the power to faithfully execute their duties and to refrain from touching beautiful individuals in a way that is not just (*to dikaion*), Cyrus responds that Araspas simply did not allow himself sufficient time to become ensnared by Panthea's charms, similar to the way in

¹⁶¹ Newell, "Machiavelli and Xenophon and Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter," 119.

which wood does not immediately burst into flames when initially brought into contact with fire (5.1.13-16). Cyrus rather cautiously concludes by advising Araspas not to allow himself to gaze at beautiful individuals, while Araspas resolutely promises Cyrus that Panthea's beauty could never overwhelm him so as to make him do anything improper (5.1.17). Of course, it need hardly be said that shortly thereafter the naïve Araspas assaults Panthea and tries to force himself on her, thus falling prey to everything Cyrus warned him he would if he continued to permit himself to gaze at the beautiful woman.

As evidenced by his own experience of riding horses and especially his discussion with Araspas —and contrary to his non-responsive silence regarding the main premise of Chrysantas' argument, according to which one can turn the passions on and off like a switch— Cyrus believes that one cannot long endure living a divided life spent intermittently indulging one's passions without eventually being overcome by them, shirking one's duty, and becoming a slave to oneself. For Cyrus, allowing one's desires to become enflamed without being satisfied is a bit like playing with fire, which eventually totally consumes everything in its path the way Araspas' desire for Panthea quickly consumes him. While Araspas haughtily boasts that Panthea's beauty could never cause him to commit any action unworthy of a *kaloï kagathos* like himself, Cyrus more realistically and prudently recognizes that he himself would probably not be any more capable of resisting Panthea's beauty and charms than Araspas turns out to be, which is why he does not permit himself to look at her. If *erōs* passionately inclines one toward specific individuals in the way that Araspas focuses his attention on Panthea, then someone like Cyrus who sought to bring entire nations under his universal

dominion would of necessity need to suppress his erotic attraction to particular individuals. Cyrus, who is wholly focused on ruling and being honored and loved by the whole human species, has no time to be distracted even by the most beautiful of individual human beings. One of the keys to his success is that he does not permit himself to be divided or tempted from his single-minded devotion to duty in the way that others like Araspas do. Cyrus, whose every waking moment is spent plotting how to gain an empire, refuses to allow himself to be diverted by the erotic activities to which most men inevitably succumb.¹⁶² His remarkable capacity to sublimate his own desire for particular individuals in favor of establishing a universal empire enables and apparently requires him to duplicitously use others' desires as weapons against them by making them into slaves who are ensnared by their own passions.

The fact that Cyrus warns Araspas about the dangers of his passions but says nothing to Chrysantas, despite the fact that the two individuals express very similar ideas regarding how easy it is to alternately indulge and control one's passions, shows the sense in which Cyrus is willing to deceive and scheme in order to promote his imperial ends. Since on a practical level Chrysantas' argument helps Cyrus obtain the cavalry he needs in order to establish his empire, he does not bother to point out the potentially dangerous theoretical shortcomings of Chrysantas' argument that the best life for a human being is one that alternates between the human and the beastly. In contrast, Cyrus does take the time to warn Araspas precisely *because* he knows full well that Araspas is not about to heed his advice. Despite his "misgivings," Cyrus still sees fit to put him in charge of guarding Panthea —not so much to teach him a lesson— but

¹⁶² Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 280.

rather primarily to put Araspas under his thumb and render him a slave who will be forever indebted to his master. After Araspas assaults Panthea, who he mistakenly believes to be Cyrus's future bride, he is willing to do whatever Cyrus asks to make amends. By warning Araspas in advance even though he knows his words will fall on deaf ears, Cyrus thereby maximizes the guilt that Araspas feels when he assaults Panthea, such that Araspas is willing to do anything so as to receive Cyrus's absolution.¹⁶³ Upon learning of Araspas' assault on Panthea, Cyrus concocts a plot whereby he feigns anger (initially he actually finds Araspas' attack quite humorous) and pretends to banish Araspas so that the young man will have a pretext for taking "refuge" with the Assyrians and spying on them. When Araspas returns from his "exile," to the surprise of those who were watching he and Cyrus embrace (6.3.14-7). Cyrus explains to the bewildered onlookers that he was never truly angry with Araspas, who has in fact served him well. While the embrace shows Cyrus's subjects that far from being enemies he and Araspas were actually in cahoots all along, it no doubt creates the mistaken impression that they also contrived the story about Araspas attacking Panthea. Strictly speaking, the assault on Panthea goes unpunished, as the spying mission Cyrus sends Araspas on is really more for Cyrus's advantage than to punish Araspas, much less to avenge Panthea. If Cyrus truly cared for Araspas, to say nothing of Panthea, he never would have placed the naïve and hot-blooded man in charge of her and in a position to harm her. But in point of fact, as he himself said, Cyrus knew all along that Panthea would someday prove useful to him. The opportunity that her capture created came to fruition when Cyrus quite deliberately allowed Araspas to fall under her spell.

¹⁶³ Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 402.

While we have noted the way in which the metaphor between the Persians and centaurs foreshadows the debauchery and collapse of the empire at the end of the Cyropaedia, we must note in closing how Cyrus’s policy of turning the Persians into centaurs both furthers his imperial ambitions and contributes to the overall unity of the Cyropaedia. What exactly does Cyrus hope to gain by turning the Persians into animals? The answer may be found in the prologue to the book, where Xenophon notes: “It is easier, given his nature (*phusis*), for a human being to rule all the other kinds of animals than to rule human beings” (1.1.3). Recognizing this problem, Cyrus’s solution is quite elegantly ruthless — he turns men into beasts. This is the deepest and most important reason why Cyrus does not bother to point out to Chrysantas that it is not as easy to alternate between man and beast as he believes, without losing his humanity. If Chrysantas is content to go down a path that will gradually render himself less and less human, then Cyrus is perfectly content to let him. Unlike most of his possessions that he is happy to give away, Cyrus keeps this most subterranean aspect of his knowledge to himself.

Conclusion

Insofar as Cyrus misleads others every step of the way in his march toward empire, Machiavelli quite correctly offers him as an example of the principle “that is necessary for a prince who wishes to do great things to learn to deceive” (Discourses, 2.13.1). Machiavelli’s recognition that Xenophon saw fit to have his Cyrus deceive others at every turn surely helps explain why Machiavelli speaks more —and more

highly— of Xenophon than he does of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero combined.¹⁶⁴ But despite their fundamental agreement about the need for princes to deceive, by comparing the manner in which Xenophon and Machiavelli make their respective arguments about the need for deception, one can begin to gauge the differences, both rhetorically and in principle, that separate them.

Whereas Machiavelli boldly proclaims in his own name that princes who wish to do great things must deceive their subjects (Prince, chs. 18-19), Xenophon's fictional narrative very quietly and obliquely points to the need for princes to deceive without wishing to stress or belabor the point, apparently least of all in his own name. If Machiavelli helped initiate the facet of modernity that culminates with Nietzsche and that boldly throws caution to the wind through rhetorical pyrotechnics, then Xenophon is particularly representative of the classical view regarding the need for prudence and delicacy when conveying certain potentially dangerous truths. If from Machiavelli's point of view many of Xenophon's central conclusions regarding what a prince needs to do to be successful—including the need for deception—are correct, even though his delicate and rather quiet style makes it far too unlikely that most princes could actually unearth and implement the deepest facets of Cyrus's knowledge for themselves, from Xenophon's point of view Machiavelli would appear on a practical level to be somewhat reckless and imprudent, however theoretically sound his arguments and historical illustrations regarding the need for deception. Machiavelli apparently believed that he needed to be comparatively up front and straightforward with at least his practically-minded readers and, unlike Xenophon, leave little to their imaginations if

¹⁶⁴ Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli 291.

he was going to arm them with the kind of knowledge that could potentially help expel the barbarian French, Swiss, German, and other invaders from his fatherland of Florence and perhaps lead to the reunification and restoration of order in Italy. To see what from Xenophon's point of view can only appear as a bit of latent idealism running beneath the surface of Machiavelli's narrative in the Prince, consider that whereas the Prince ends with a passionate and rousing call to arms, the Cyropaedia ends with a sober depiction of the dissolution of the Persian Empire and the reemergence of the problem of political rule, which Cyrus was supposed to have solved. In contrast to Machiavelli's more practically-minded Prince, Xenophon's Cyropaedia is less a practical treatise than a theoretical exploration, one designed less to change the world than to help a few discerning individuals grasp intellectually the necessities, possibilities, limits, and alternatives to political rule, which for Xenophon include the need for deception, the dazzling prospect of empire, the fleeting nature of imperial rule, and the resigned serenity of intellectual life, respectively. Since Socrates is not one of the characters in the Cyropaedia (though a Socrates-like figure is mentioned in passing) and since philosophy does not play an extensive role in the book (though it too is mentioned in passing), within the Cyropaedia the most profound alternative and rival to Cyrus's imperial ambitions that culminated in the Persian Empire is Xenophon's own desire for wisdom, the product of which is the Cyropaedia itself.

Having noted a few differences between Xenophon and Machiavelli, we wish to close by raising a question, our answer to which indicates a point of agreement regarding their view of Cyrus. One question that we believe no one who studies the Xenophon-Machiavelli connection can avoid is: Given that Machiavelli is a republican

(Discourses, 1.58.1-4), and given that Cyrus was the great subverter of the Persian republic, why does Machiavelli praise and speak so highly of Cyrus? But this question rests on a premise that, while not false, is still somewhat misleading. As Nadon correctly argues, some of Machiavelli's most favorable references to Cyrus are actually to Herodotus' Cyrus, not to Xenophon's Cyrus.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, though Machiavelli praises Xenophon's Cyrus (Prince, ch. 16), he also finds fault with him, at least indirectly. For example, in his comparison of the Roman captains Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvinus, Machiavelli favors Manlius, which is important for our purposes insofar as Machiavelli twice mentions that many of Valerius' qualities were identical to those of Xenophon's Cyrus (Discourses, 3.22.4-5). To take another example, Machiavelli writes, "And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how little (*quanto*) glory that imitation brought him" (Prince, ch. 14). Machiavelli finds fault with Scipio for being —like Xenophon's Cyrus— too merciful (Prince, ch. 14, 17). While a more nuanced study of Machiavelli's view of Cyrus is beyond the scope of this study, it seems fair to conclude that Machiavelli's overall view of Xenophon's Cyrus was at least somewhat ambivalent. But if that is correct, then our question becomes: Why would the republican Machiavelli harbor even ambivalence for Xenophon's Cyrus, rather than outright scorn and condemnation? The answer, we believe, is that Machiavelli is ambivalent about Cyrus because Cyrus has Machiavellian characteristics, including an impressive capacity to deceive, but employs his talents in the service of decidedly non-Machiavellian ends, including the subversion of the Persian republic and the

¹⁶⁵ Nadon, Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia 14.

effeminatization of his subjects in the Persian Empire. We maintain that Xenophon and Machiavelli are both ambivalent about Cyrus, and for very similar reasons; for all of his impressive qualities, Cyrus destroyed a virtuous republican regime and replaced it with a comparatively effeminate empire, one that quickly fell into disorder and ruin. The world, as Xenophon endeavors to illustrate, is both dark and chaotic. If he is right, even the most gifted of princes cannot make the world less chaotic for more than a brief moment in time without employing deception at every turn and thereby making a dark world darker still.

Chapter 5

CYRUS'S IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD: AN ARISTOTELIAN READING OF THE CYROPAEDIA

Introduction

Chapter one focused on why the revolutionary transition from the old Persian republic to the Persian Empire was in Xenophon's judgment highly problematic for Persia. Here I propose to explore the question of what effects empire has on subjects from a wide variety of nations who are subsumed under imperial rule. I aim to show why in Xenophon's estimation empires that are ruled by a single autonomous leader harm those nations and subjects who fall under their sovereignty.

Reading the Cyropaedia Through an Aristotelian Lens

In order to help clearly explicate Cyrus's knowledge of rule and the consequences it has for his subjects, I propose to provide an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia. Since this is admittedly an unusual way to proceed, a few justifications are in order. First, strictly speaking, this essay seeks to show not so much what the historical Aristotle's view of Xenophon or the Cyropaedia actually was —indeed, it is not clear that Aristotle ever read the Cyropaedia¹⁶⁶ — but rather to explore the lessons

¹⁶⁶ While the two men were contemporaries (Aristotle was about 30 years old when Xenophon died around 354 B.C.), as far as I can tell neither author clearly refers directly to the other in any of his works. Aristotle does mention Cyrus twice in the Politics (1310b36, 1312a12). Though the first reference to

one informed by the insights of Aristotle's political science might draw from Cyrus and his empire. By framing the question of what Aristotelian political science might make of Cyrus and his empire, rather than endeavoring to show what if anything Aristotle himself actually thought of the Cyropaedia, this essay seeks to avoid the criticisms of careless and anachronistic interpretation. Second, though Aristotle himself may not have read Xenophon, an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia may be justified on the grounds of shared intellectual content between the two philosophers. For example, both Xenophon and Aristotle are highly critical of sophistry, and for very similar reasons. For both, sophists fail to recognize the limitations of speech, and thus they attribute to rhetoric an importance it does not truly possess. Both philosophers conclude that politics can never be reduced to rhetoric, since the *polis* cannot be governed by speech alone.¹⁶⁷ While rhetoric is a part of politics, it is not identical with politics itself. As Strauss puts it, for the ancient philosophers "the sophistic reduction of the political art to rhetoric is absurd."¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Xenophon and Aristotle also agree that sophistry is a petty imposter of genuine philosophic inquiry insofar as sophists seek money, not truth. Philosophers try to find a way out of the verbal impasses to which conversations often lead by retracing their steps so that the truth may become visible, whereas sophists delight in contradictions, by which they attempt to tie others' thinking into knots so as to be able to bully them and establish whatever conclusions they please, irrespective of

Cyrus does not seem to me to necessarily refer specifically to the Cyropaedia, it is at least consistent with Xenophon's account of Cyrus. In Aristotle's second reference to Cyrus, where he notes that "Cyrus attacked Astyages," he clearly has in mind a source other than Xenophon's Cyropaedia (such as Herodotus), since Xenophon's Cyrus never attacked Astyages.

¹⁶⁷ Nicomachean Ethics, 1179b4-13, 1181a12-17; Anabasis, 2.6.16-20.

¹⁶⁸ Strauss, The City and Man 23.

the truth.¹⁶⁹ Another point of agreement between Xenophon and Aristotle is that, again in contradistinction from the views of many sophists and rhetoricians, they hold that justice is not synonymous with the will of the stronger.¹⁷⁰ For both philosophers, just rule is over consenting human beings, whereas unjust rule is over the unwilling.¹⁷¹ Finally, while Aristotle develops the point in much greater detail, both he and Xenophon conceived of the world teleologically, that is, as possessing natural ends.¹⁷²

But even if it may be granted that an Aristotelian reading of Xenophon is possible, what work does such a reading accomplish? I believe an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia helps accomplish two things. First, it brings out crucial but implicit facets of Cyrus's knowledge that are likely to remain unrecognized, as I believe they have been heretofore, without such a reading. Aristotle provides the conceptual machinery to help us see Cyrus's statecraft for what it is — an attempt to create an empire that Cyrus and Cyrus alone will rule as if it were a giant household. Second, an Aristotelian analysis of the Cyropaedia helps establish an important and hitherto under appreciated point of agreement between the thought of the classical political philosophers regarding their shared skepticism and disapproval of Cyrus, the Persian Empire he founded, and empire generally. For example, Plato's Athenian Stranger explicitly criticizes Cyrus for neglecting to educate his sons and for entrusting their

¹⁶⁹ Nicomachean Ethics 1146a22-1146b8; Metaphysics 1004a33-b26; Memorabilia 4.6.13-14; On Hunting 13.1-9; see also Plato, Sophist 233a-d; Republic 493a; Philebus 58a-d;

¹⁷⁰ In Plato's Republic, the rhetorician Thrasymachus argues that justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c).

¹⁷¹ Politics 1313a15-16; Oeconomicus 21.12; Memorabilia 4.6.12; Cyropaedia 1.3.18.

¹⁷² Memorabilia 1.4.5-7; Metaphysics book I; Parts of Animals iii 15.568b20-26; On the Soul 434a16-21; Politics 1252b28-1253a19; Physics 198b1-11. See also Monte Ransome Johnson, Aristotle on Teleology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

education to women and eunuchs.¹⁷³ Similarly, while the traditional and once-dominant view of the *Cyropaedia* dating back to Cicero holds that Cyrus was Xenophon's "hero" or "ideal leader,"¹⁷⁴ many scholars —nearly all of whom have been influenced by Strauss's pioneering writings on Xenophon¹⁷⁵— have argued that Xenophon was actually highly ambivalent toward Cyrus and disapproved of many of his actions.¹⁷⁶ If the argument that Xenophon was at least somewhat critical of Cyrus is by now well-

¹⁷³ Plato, *Laws* 694c-695b.

¹⁷⁴ Godfried Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000) 180. Sarah Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 267. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 1, 7, 11, 59, 98, 112, 122, 124, 280, 285, 286. Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 62, 65, 67, 85, 89, 92, 99, 112, 117, 118, 128, 135, 139, 140, 145, 147, 170, 171, 174, 180, 192, 202, 206, 207, 208, 210, 212, 215, 218, 227, 233, 234, 238. James Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) xv, 11, 37, 39, 62, 63, 68, 76-77, 82, 177, 207, 209, 233. W.E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 44, 53, 54, 55. Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1970) 133. Neal Wood, "Xenophon's Theory of Leadership," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 25 (1964): 64. Werner W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) 162. Stadter, "Fictional Narrative in the *Cyropaedia*," 467-68.

¹⁷⁵ Leo Strauss, "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon," *Social Research* 6 (1939). Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1963). Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). Leo Strauss, "Xenophon's *Anabasis*," *Interpretation* 4.3 (1975). See also Christopher Bruell, "Strauss on Xenophon's Socrates," *The Political Science Reviewer* 14 (1984).

¹⁷⁶ Whidden, "Cyrus's Persian Education and the Persian Regime in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*". Christopher Whidden, "Deception in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 34.2 (2007). Robert Faulkner, "Justice Overruled: The Ambition of Xenophon's Cyrus the Great," *Enlightening Revolutions: Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner*, ed. Svetozar Minkov (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006). Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*". Gary D. Glenn, "Prudence in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*," *Tempered Strength: Studies in the Nature and Scope of Prudential Leadership*, ed. Ethan Fishman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002). Robert J. Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 2002. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia*. Wayne Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," *Xenophon: The Education of Cyrus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). John Ray, "The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman'," *Interpretation* 19.3 (1992). Gary D. Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," *Law and Philosophy*, eds. John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992). Walter R. Newell, "Xenophon's Cyrus and the Democratization of Virtue," *The World and I* (Nov. 1992). Leslie G. Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," *Interpretation* 16.3 (1989). W.R. Newell, "Machiavelli and Xenophon and Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter," *The Journal of Politics* 50.1 (1988). Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon," *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). W.R. Newell, "Tyranny and the Science of Ruling in Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," *The Journal of Politics* 45 (1983). Waller Randy Newell, "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981. Christopher Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1969.

traveled ground, and perhaps itself now even the dominant view, my suggestion that Aristotelian political science also provides the theoretical basis for such a critique of Cyrus and the Persian Empire brings something new to the table. If my central arguments that Aristotelian political science helps us appreciate Xenophon's critique of Cyrus's empire and compels us to view it with a good deal of disapproval are correct, then we may add Aristotelian philosophy to the list of Cyrus's critics that already includes Plato and Xenophon. This is to say that we will have taken a step toward showing an important point of agreement among classical political philosophy as a whole. Moreover, if that is right, we may contrast the ancients' predominant disapproval of Cyrus with Machiavelli, the founder of modern political philosophy. In contrast to the ancients' skepticism about Cyrus, Machiavelli speaks comparatively highly of him and even holds him up as a model for princes to imitate.¹⁷⁷ This is to say that Cyrus provides a distinctive and useful entry point into the debate between the ancients and the moderns, the philosophic conversation *par excellence*.

All of these preliminary reasons regarding the possibility and purpose of this essay are offered to help suggest that reading Xenophon through an Aristotelian lens is not as odd or implausible as it might initially seem. But as Cyrus's grandfather Astyages tells him, the real proof is always in the tasting (1.3.5). I turn therefore to an Aristotelian reading of Xenophon's Cyropaedia.

¹⁷⁷ Prince ch. 6, 14, 16.

Aristotle on the Absence of Politics in the Primitive Household

In the course of founding his empire, Cyrus treats his subjects as women, children, and slaves. Viewed through an Aristotelian lens, Cyrus's conception and management of his subjects is striking, insofar as each of the roles to which he relegates them are part and parcel of the household (*oikos*) that Aristotle discusses, especially in book one of the Politics. For this reason, on an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia, Cyrus's empire is in essence tantamount to a single vast household, or what I shall call an 'imperial household.' Whereas in Xenophon's Hiero we have no way of knowing whether or not Hiero the tyrant acted on the poet Simonides' advice to treat his kingdom as he would his household since the dialogue abruptly and rather inconclusively breaks off (Hiero 11.14), in the Cyropaedia Xenophon depicts what it would mean in practice and the sense in which it would be advantageous for a ruler to act on Simonides' advice. If the Hiero asks what it would mean to treat a kingdom as a household, then the Cyropaedia answers this question. Viewed in light of the Hiero, the similarity between Aristotle's discussion of the various members of the household and the way Cyrus conceives of his subjects provides a valuable way of seeing the way in which Cyrus was able to avoid the problem of political rule. As I shall argue, Aristotle's argument that political life and political deliberation are not possible within the individual household separate from or temporally prior to the city (*polis*) is particularly helpful for understanding how Cyrus avoided the problem of political rule.

For Aristotle, politics cannot be present within the household that exists wholly apart from a city. He argues that separate from a city, “every household was under the eldest as king” (Politics 1252b20). He continues: “This is what Homer meant when he says that ‘each acts as a law to his children and wives’; for [men] were scattered and used to dwell in this manner in ancient times” (Politics 1252b22-23). Aristotle’s quotation of Homer refers to a passage from the Odyssey where the poet depicts what life was like for the race of Cyclopes. According to Aristotle’s reading of Homer, the Cyclops Polyphemus represents life within an isolated or primitive household (*oikia prōtē*) as they existed prior to or apart from villages (*kōmai*), cities (*poleis*), and laws (*nomoi*).¹⁷⁸ Aware of no restraints outside his own will, a Cyclops is an *oikoturranos*, one who rules his household despotically with an iron fist.¹⁷⁹ For Aristotle, households that are completely isolated from larger communities are places where, as Homer so vividly illustrates, one expects to find despotic rule by the father over the other members of his household. When Aristotle argues that one who is not a part of a city is either a beast or a god (Politics 1253a28), it would seem that the beast he has in mind is the Cyclops.

Aristotle argues that one must venture beyond the isolated household characteristic of the Cyclopes and enter into contact with a *polis* in order for political deliberation to come into being, which helps fulfill man’s nature as a rational political

¹⁷⁸ According to Nagle, in a “stand-alone *oikoi*... each householder, in Cyclopean fashion, rules his little facsimile *polis*.” D. Brendan Nagle, The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 21.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Davis, The Politics of Philosophy (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996) 29. Nagle argues that the Cyclopean household was “a dreary prison.” Nagle, The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis 143.

animal (Politics 1253a2-18).¹⁸⁰ On Aristotle's account, a village, which differs from the household in that it is "for the sake of nondaily needs" but falls short of the *polis* in that it is not self-sufficient, comes into existence once a household enters into a partnership with other households (Politics 1252b15). The initial formation of a village thus represents a pivotal turning point in human history, insofar as at that moment human beings first began thinking about matters not solely tied to their own bodily preservation, including the desire for justice. When enough villages come together so that the aggregate is self-sufficient, Aristotle argues that the *polis* comes into being. Whereas prior to cities each head of household "acts as law to his children and wives," once the primitive household becomes part of a city and thereby becomes finished or perfected, wives discover for the first time an alternate and binding law that may contradict their husbands' will.¹⁸¹ From this point on, wives must be ruled politically through discussion rather than despotically (Politics 1252a40), because for the first time they have the opportunity to use their capacity for reasonable deliberation and must make choices about what to do. When the husband's will conflicts with the law of the *polis*, which is to be obeyed? From the point at which this question arises, the household ceases to exist in its primitive form and deliberation and speech between

¹⁸⁰ Arendt correctly argues that for Aristotle and the other ancients, a man who lived only a private life without participating in public affairs was not fully human. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 35. See also Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides, Peloponnesian War 2.40.

¹⁸¹ I follow Dobbs' argument that Aristotle means to distinguish between primitive and finished or perfected households. As Dobbs puts it, the *polis* helps "to elevate paternal government out of its primordial patriarchalism. The *polis* thus plays a critical role in helping the household to realize its own perfection as a community." Darrell Dobbs, "Family Matters: Aristotle's Appreciation of Women and the Plural Structure of Society," American Political Science Review 90.1 (1996): 76, 86. Nagle also recognizes the same distinction between primitive and perfected households, noting that "the *oikos* [is] a place quite hospitable to the development of virtue... though not without the support of the enveloping *polis*." Nagle, The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis 159, n. 9.

husbands and wives regarding justice and injustice becomes both possible and necessary (Politics 1253a15). At this point, the household is finished or perfected; from here out, wives are to be ruled in a political fashion that acknowledges their reason and freedom (Politics 1252a 35, 1259a40), rather than despotically:

For it is peculiar (*idion*) to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good (*agathos*) and bad (*kakos*) and just (*dikaious*) and unjust (*adikous*) and other things [of this sort]; and partnership (*koinōnia*) in these things *is what makes a household* and a city. (Politics 1253a15-18, my emphasis)

Like the city, the finished household is a community of speech and reason, insofar as both husbands and wives have the deliberative capacity (*to bouleutikon*) to distinguish between right and wrong.¹⁸² For Aristotle, the incorporation of the household into the *polis* resulting in the finished household introduces concerns such as justice that are not present within the primitive household as it exists apart from the *polis* (Politics 1253a37-39), owing to the fact that in a primitive household the head of household's will in practice always appears to be a law from which there can be no appeal.¹⁸³

Herein, from an Aristotelian point of view, lies the connection between Cyrus's imperial household and the reason he was able to avoid the problem of political rule. If politics defined as shared deliberation in speech is not present within the primitive household that exists separate from a *polis*, then one would not expect to find the

¹⁸² Eudemian Ethics 1242a40-1242b1.

¹⁸³ Nagle is correct that "some way must have existed for the young of the Cyclopes to evolve morally to replace their aging fathers," but he does not specify how this process would occur. Nagle, The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis 146. Davis catches Aristotle's meaning exactly: "Without the city, growing up means parricide." Davis, The Politics of Philosophy 25. Nichols recalls a story about Zeus that makes a similar point and that Aristotle no doubt knew well: "Zeus became ruler only by overthrowing the father who wanted to preserve his absolute authority (see 1252b24-27)." Mary P. Nichols, Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992) 34. For Arendt, "violence is the prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of the world." Arendt, The Human Condition 31.

problems concurrent with politics to be present in this isolated household, either. To take the most relevant example to the Cyropaedia, wives, children, and slaves in the isolated household do not typically revolt against the head of household's absolute authority. On an Aristotelian analysis, the key part of Cyrus's knowledge is his keen recognition that one way to avoid revolution and the problem of political rule is to do away with political rule altogether by turning the world into his imperial household, which, insofar as his authority therein is unquestioned and does not admit of any appeal, closely resembles Aristotle's primitive household. In the sections to follow, I discuss the sense in which in founding the empire Cyrus reduces his subjects to women, children, and slaves, all of whom become peaceful and orderly but less than fully human denizens of his imperial household.

Women

This section examines the sense in which Cyrus encouraged some of his subjects in his imperial household to become increasingly effeminate and aims to show what he hoped to accomplish by encouraging his subjects to act like women.

Xenophon foreshadows the sense in which Cyrus reduces his subjects to women in his introduction to the Cyropaedia.¹⁸⁴ In the prologue, he states why he decided to narrate the life of Cyrus: "So on the grounds that this man (*anēr*) was worthy of wonder, we examined who he was by birth, what his nature was, and with what education he was brought up, such that he so excelled in ruling human beings

¹⁸⁴ On Persian effeminacy and its use by others to help them achieve dominance, see Hellenica 3.4.18-19 and Agesilaus 1.27-28.

(*anthrōpoi*)” (1.1.6). The Greek term *anthrōpoi* that Xenophon uses in this passage designates a class of fairly unremarkable or undistinguished individuals and in particular calls to mind human beings who are lacking in those virtues thought to be uniquely masculine. Xenophon and other Greek authors often contrasted an *anthrōpos* with the *anēr*, the manly man who possessed recognizably superior, elite, and masculine virtues that were not thought to be possible for the comparatively weaker *anthrōpoi* (1.1.6).¹⁸⁵ For example, in a famous speech in Plato’s *Gorgias*, Callicles argues that the *anēr* emphatically refuses to suffer injustice (483a-b). He continues: “But, I think, if a man (*anēr*) having a sufficient nature comes into being, he shakes off our writings, spells, charms, and the laws that are almost all against nature, and the slave rises up to be revealed as our master; there the justice of nature shines forth...this is the just by nature, that the worse and weaker men’s cows and all other possessions belong to the better and stronger man” (484a-c). In Xenophon’s *Hiero*, Simonides states that a real man (*anēr*) strives above all for honor. He states that “ambition does not arise naturally either in the irrational animals or in all human beings (*anthrōpoi*). Those in whom love of honor and praise arises by nature differ the most from, and who are also believed to be no longer human beings merely, but real men” (*Hiero* 7.3). In Xenophon’s view Cyrus *qua* ruler is an *anēr*, whereas his subjects are *anthrōpoi*.¹⁸⁶ By referring to Cyrus’s subjects as *anthrōpoi*, Xenophon suggests that the men Cyrus ruled over were

¹⁸⁵ On the *anēr*, see also *Oeconomicus* chapter 4-5; *Anabasis* 1.9.29; *Hellenica* 6.1.12.

¹⁸⁶ Xenophon does suggest that a few of Cyrus’s subjects were not content to be *anthrōpoi*. For example, he briefly mentions a character named Daiphernes who, unlike his servile companions, wished to demonstrate a measure of independence by not obeying Cyrus too hastily (8.3.21). However, when Cyrus noticed Daiphernes’ haughty behavior, he ceased to send for him. From that point, Daiphernes is never heard from again in the narrative.

not in fact real men, which raises the question: What happened to real men under Cyrus's rule?

As the narrative progresses, Xenophon elaborates on the *anēr/anthrōpoi* distinction he establishes in the introduction and vividly illustrates the sense in which the Persians became more and more effeminate under Cyrus's rule. In the course of founding his empire Cyrus discovers, to his amazement, that many of his male subjects are not only willing but also even quite pleased to be treated as if they were women (7.2.29). For example, after conquering the wealthy city of Sardis, Cyrus has a curious dialectical exchange with Croesus, the king of Lydia and the commanding officer in charge of defending Sardis from the advance of Cyrus's forces (7.2.9-29). Far from feeling any enmity toward Cyrus, who defeats him, Croesus actually expresses his gratitude. He tells Cyrus that he has come to realize that prior to his defeat at Cyrus's hands he did not know himself (7.2.23). But his crushing defeat, he says, has given him self-knowledge. Having been granted self-knowledge by Cyrus, the only question left for him to ponder is whether he will be happy now that he knows himself (7.2.25).

Cyrus magnanimously restores Croesus' wife, daughters, and servants to him, but he also stipulates that he will no longer permit Croesus to wage war (7.2.26). Croesus rather gleefully accepts Cyrus's terms and replies that, in light of Cyrus's generosity, he will now be able to "lead the very life that others have believed to be most blessedly happy (*makarios*), and on which I agreed with them" (7.2.27). Apparently Cyrus does not quite catch Croesus' meaning, because he enquires as to exactly which fortunate persons Croesus has in mind (7.2.28). Croesus' answer is worth quoting in full:

“My wife, Cyrus,” he said. “She shared equally in all of my good, refined, and delightful things, but of my cares about how to secure these things, and of war and battle, she did not partake. You seem to be putting me in just the same condition in which I put her whom I loved especially of human beings (*anthrōpoi*). Consequently, I think I shall owe other tokens of gratitude to Apollo.” (7.2.28)

By his own admission, Croesus is happy and considers himself fortunate to be treated like a woman by Cyrus because, as he sees it, women share in all the perquisites of war without having to be anxious about doing battle. Croesus is thus perfectly content to let Cyrus wage his imperialistic wars, and to let Cyrus keep for himself all the glory that accrues to him in victory as the *anēr* (1.2.1), provided that Cyrus keeps him safe and occasionally throws him a scrap or two. Like many of Cyrus’s subjects, Croesus is delighted to play the part of a woman and to let Cyrus be the man, provided that he can live a comfortable and peaceful life.

Xenophon repeatedly illustrates the sense in which Cyrus’s empire became populated with other *anthrōpoi* like Croesus whose effeminacy Cyrus actively encouraged. Once Cyrus conquers Babylon, he himself took to wearing the lavish and elaborate Median dress that his grandfather Astyages wore, which included tunics, necklaces, and bracelets (1.3.2, 8.1.40). Cyrus also followed his grandfather’s Median custom of encouraging men “to use color beneath their eyes, so that their eyes might appear nicer than they were, and to rub on colors so that they might be seen as having better complexions than they did by nature” (1.3.2, 8.1.41).¹⁸⁷ While according to

¹⁸⁷ Cosmetic is one of the many ways in which the Medians used art or expertise (*technē*) to improve upon nature (*phusis*). In Media, Cyrus learns about the malleability of *phusis* in light of *technē*, a lesson to which he returns later in life (1.4.5, 8.6.22).

Xenophon Cyrus is by nature a lover of beauty (*philokalos*) (1.3.3.),¹⁸⁸ he also learns that he can use beauty to manipulate appearances to his advantage. For example, Cyrus used the Median dress and makeup to help him “bewitch” his subjects by casting a kind of spell on them (8.1.40, 8.3.14).¹⁸⁹ His majestic appearance caused others to desire to dress like he did, such that gifts like beautiful robes that he bestowed came to be highly prized, not only for their beauty, but more importantly because they were a sign of his favor and esteem (1.4.26, 8.2.8).

Having illustrated several ways in which Cyrus caused his subjects to become effeminate, Xenophon sums up the cumulative and lasting effects of Cyrus’s increased emphasis on the feminine within his imperial household, noting that after Cyrus died the Persians continued to become even more effeminate than they had been under Cyrus (8.8.15). The fact that the Persians became more effeminate and less virtuous after Cyrus’s death has contributed to the view shared by many commentators that Cyrus was Xenophon’s ideal prince. On this view, Cyrus’s death inevitably resulted in a decline in the Persians’ virtue and an increase in their decadent behavior once he was no longer alive to keep careful watch over them. However, in point of fact Xenophon illustrates

¹⁸⁸ When Cyrus arrives in Media, the first thing he notices is his grandfather Astyages’ appearance, which includes purple coats, cloaks, necklaces, and bracelets. Cyrus exclaims, “Mother, how handsome (*kalos*) my grandfather is!” (1.3.2). Astyages gives him a robe, necklaces, and bracelets, which please Cyrus (1.3.3). Nadon notes that Cyrus experiences “an immediate attraction for something both beautiful and foreign.” Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 46. As Phillips and Ray point out, since Cyrus has never seen such lavish clothing, his favorable reaction to it must be natural and cannot be attributed to custom or convention. Phillips, “Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership,” 84. Ray, “The Education of Cyrus as Xenophon's 'Statesman',” 228.

¹⁸⁹ Based on his description of Cyrus’s use of cosmetics, Xenophon would seem to agree with Socrates’ argument in Plato’s *Gorgias* that cosmetics is a branch of flattery (*kolakeutikē*) that, like sophistry, aims not at the best but at the pleasant (*Gorgias*, 463a-b, 464b-465a). Cyrus’s ability to manipulate appearances for his own benefit links him not only to the sophists but also to Machiavelli, who advised princes to manipulate appearances, since, as he argues, subjects will be taken in by what their eyes see and will not be able to get beyond appearances to touch the prince for themselves (*Prince*, ch. 18).

throughout his narrative that the Persians had been becoming more decadent and less virtuous under Cyrus's influence, even while Cyrus was still alive (5.5.33). For example, while it is certainly true that Xenophon believes that the Persians became much more effeminate after Cyrus's death (8.8.15-27), he also states in his own name that Cyrus's subjects initially began becoming effeminate under his rule:

But they are also more delicate now than in Cyrus's time. Then they still made use of the education and continence they received from the Persians, *as well as the dress and luxury of the Medes*. Now they look with indifference on the extinction of the Persians' perseverance, while they *conserve* the Medes' softness. (8.8.15, my emphasis)

Whereas under Cyrus some of the Persians adhered to the old and comparatively manly Persian education and moral regimen even though they simultaneously embraced the effeminate Median dress, once he died the last vestiges of their manly rigor (*karteria*) faded away and the Persians wholly embraced an effeminate, soft, and decadent way of life. Contrary to the view that Cyrus was Xenophon's model prince, Xenophon in fact did not think that Cyrus was an ideal ruler so much as he believed and endeavored to show that Cyrus's rule represented a volatile midpoint and uneasy compromise between the manly Persian way of life Cyrus grew up with as a boy and the comparatively womanly way of life that he first encountered in Media and then inaugurated *en masse*.

In light of the Persians' increased emphasis on creature comforts such as couches, carpets, cookery, gloves, and artificial shade, Xenophon asks, "As for things military, is it not likely that they are worse than before in every way?" (8.8.20). He also notes that of the Persians who survived after Cyrus's death, "none of them will any longer enter into war without Greeks, neither when they make war on each other nor

when the Greeks go on campaign against them. But they have decided to make their wars even against Greeks with Greeks” (8.8.26). By the end of the *Cyropaedia* the once manly and brave Persians of Cyrus’s boyhood have been replaced by the womanly denizens of Cyrus’s imperial household who are afraid to fight and who must therefore pay mercenaries to do their fighting for them.¹⁹⁰

On an Aristotelian reading, Cyrus renders his subjects effeminate so that he, as the manly *anēr*, can more easily rule over them without having to worry about them revolting against him. As Aristotle argues, “women do not conspire against tyrants” (*Politics* 1313b35). While in Xenophon’s view encouraging effeminacy among his subjects helped Cyrus in his endeavor to establish his imperial household in which he, as the *anēr*, ruled over his docile and effeminate subjects, the *anthrōpoi*, he also endeavors to show how Cyrus unwittingly sewed the seeds for the rapid dissolution of his empire insofar as he created subjects who could be easily ruled but who could not defend themselves against those spirited armies who did not count themselves among the denizens of Cyrus’s imperial household and for whom manly courage was not an antiquated artifact of a bygone era.

Children

Another important relationship within the imperial household is that between Cyrus and the more puerile of his subjects, who he views as his children (*paidēs*) and who in turn address him as father (*patēr*) (8.1.44, 8.8.1). According to Cyrus’s Persian

¹⁹⁰ Xenophon’s contrast between the manly Persians of old and the later effeminate Persians who replaced them calls to mind Herodotus’s distinction between “hard” and “soft” peoples. For discussion of this contrast in Herodotus, see J. Redfield, “Herodotus the Tourist,” *Classical Philology* 80 (1985).

companion Chrysantas, Cyrus is uniquely qualified to rule because he understands that “a good ruler is no different from a good father” (8.1.1). But however promising rule patterned on the father/child relationship might seem to be, an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia nonetheless compels the reader to question whether or not this relationship is in fact a proper model for political rule.¹⁹¹

As a boy, Cyrus discovered that by acting benevolently (*philanthrōpos*) toward others he could make himself loved with a level of affection typically reserved for one’s own family members (1.3.6-7, 1.4.25-26, 8.7.13). Xenophon writes that while in Media Cyrus

quickly became involved with his agemates so that he became on familiar terms with them, and he quickly attached their fathers to him, both by visiting and by making plain that he was affectionate toward their sons. Consequently, if they needed anything from the king, they used to bid their sons to ask Cyrus to accomplish it for them, and Cyrus, because of his benevolence and his ambition (*philotimia*), was very concerned to accomplish whatever the boys asked of him. (1.4.1)

In this instance, a harmony exists between Cyrus’s self-interest and the interests of his companions, insofar as he wins their fathers’ hearts and admiration by showing favor to their sons, whom of course they themselves love. However, in other situations in the Cyropaedia this fortuitous harmony does not exist, despite Cyrus’s best efforts. As Xenophon illustrates, depending on the circumstances, affection and esteem can sometimes be a zero-sum game, one in which love is in finite supply. Insofar as Cyrus gains someone’s affection, he often takes that love from another to whom it had previously been given. For example, during Cyrus’s stay in Media, the despot Astyages

¹⁹¹ The debate over whether paternal power provides an appropriate model and justification for political rule survives into modernity. For example, Locke argues at length against Sir Robert Filmer that paternal power is different from political power, especially since the latter involves the right to kill. See Locke, Second Treatise of Government, ch. 1, 6, 15.

comes to favor his grandson Cyrus at the expense of his own son (Cyrus's uncle) Cyaxares. By constantly making a great show of dotting on his grandfather (1.3.2), Xenophon states that Cyrus "won Astyages over to the highest degree," (1.4.2) which eventually leads Cyaxares to dejectedly but presciently tell Cyrus, "it looks like you are now our king" (1.4.9). Because of Cyrus's uncanny ability to make himself loved through his benevolence, Xenophon asks, "Who else, by the magnitude of his gifts, is said to make people prefer himself to their brothers, to their fathers, and to their children?" (8.2.9). As this passage shows, an important part of Cyrus's knowledge that enables him to avoid the problem of political rule is his discovery that many human beings put more of a premium on gain (*kerdos*) and the conferral of material benefits than they do on blood relations.¹⁹² Cyrus realizes that he can make himself loved by many people more than they love their own brothers, fathers, and children simply by "giving the most gifts" and "by the magnitude of his gifts," which include "bracelets, necklaces, and horses with golden bridles" (8.2.7-9). If, as Cyrus apparently believes, most people hold that a primary function of a parent is to confer benefits, then it follows that he can in effect become a kind of surrogate father to many in his imperial household simply by conferring more goods on his "children" than their own natural fathers do (8.2.9). Cyrus in turn gains for himself the kind of honor, adoration, and obedience from his subjects typically reserved for one's parents.

Once Cyrus dies, his biological children who were the heirs to his empire fell into dissension with one another and the nations that comprised his imperial household

¹⁹² The emphasis on material benefit rather than or even at the expense of family is undoubtedly one aspect of Xenophon's narrative that must have made an impression on Machiavelli, although one must hasten to add that Machiavelli's way of articulating this view is far more explicit and gruesome than the comparatively delicate way Xenophon makes the same point. See Prince, chapter 8.

began to revolt and break apart (8.8.2). The fact that the empire quickly fell apart after Cyrus died suggests an important and telling similarity between Cyrus's treatment of his subjects and his conduct toward his own biological sons, one that goes to the root of what Xenophon, despite his great admiration for Cyrus, nonetheless sees as his shortcomings. Just as Cyrus made little effort to educate the vast majority of his subjects beyond conditioning them to always follow and obey his sovereign will (1.1.5, 8.8.1), so too did he make little effort to educate his sons. While on his deathbed Cyrus did attempt to exhort his sons to virtue (8.7.5-8.7.28). Xenophon means for this episode to be seen as an isolated, last-minute, and perfunctory attempt on Cyrus's part, rather than the culmination of a rigorous and sustained instruction in the art of rule, like the one Cyrus received while growing up in Persia. As Cyrus himself knew well, the sort of isolated moral exhortation he gives his sons is either superfluous for those already trained in virtue or destined to fail with those who have not been so educated (3.3.51-55). Given the collapse of the empire under his sons, Cyrus's exhortation to his sons was clearly not superfluous; rather, the fact that he thought it necessary to provide a last minute exhortation in which he resorts to arguments the veracity of which he himself expresses doubt (8.7.22) and even to blatant scare tactics (8.7.18, 8.7.22) is a sign that he did not trouble himself much to educate his sons.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Cyrus's deathbed speech also raises questions about the adequacy of his own education, because many of his arguments leave much to be desired and he seems not to have reflected very deeply on some of life's deepest questions, particularly those that pertain to the soul and the prospect of an afterlife. While some of Cyrus's arguments remind somewhat of those Socrates makes on his deathbed in Plato's *Phaedo* (see 100b), a crucial difference is that while Socrates seeks to comfort his companions, Cyrus seeks above all to warn and threaten his sons. Moreover, unlike Socrates, Cyrus has given little serious consideration to what completes or perfects his nature, apart from seeking glory and empire. For these reasons, Xenophon may have intended the title of the book —*Cyropaedia*— to refer in part to the education that Cyrus, unlike Socrates, never pursued. Apart from his deathbed speech, Cyrus rarely speaks of the soul (*psuchē*). Whereas Socrates spent his life examining the soul and argued that “those

Cyrus's failure to educate his sons can also be seen by comparing his conversation with them with the extended discussion he himself has with his father Cambyses before he sets out to defend Media from Assyria (1.6.3-46). Over the course of their conversation, both Cyrus and Cambyses refer repeatedly to their previous conversations and the lessons they drew from them. In contrast, on his deathbed Cyrus makes only relatively scant and vague references to previous conversations that he had with his sons, who for their part give no indication whatsoever that they have any memory of those discussions. In addition, Cyrus tells his sons that he "educated you like this from the beginning, to honor those who are older and to be honored ahead of those who are younger. So accept this, on the grounds that I am saying what is ancient, habitual, and lawful" (8.7.10). But Cyrus's revolutionary actions throughout his life (see esp. 1.5.7-14) can hardly be reconciled with the rather conservative principle he advocates to his sons, who, whatever their intellectual shortcomings, cannot have failed to perceive that their father's decidedly traditional speech hardly squares with his lifelong revolutionary deeds. Moreover, by keeping his audience completely in the dark about even the very existence of Cyrus's sons until his deathbed scene, Xenophon subtly invites the reader to further wonder whether Cyrus devoted too much time to founding and administering his empire and too little time with his sons and their education.¹⁹⁴ Surely it is no accident that Cyrus, who was educated to raise questions

who philosophize rightly make dying their care," (*Phaedo*, 67e) Cyrus's interests rarely extend beyond his earthly and bodily existence. While in his deathbed speech Cyrus seems uncertain and fairly unconcerned about what will become of his soul after his death, he is adamant that after he dies no one, not even his sons, is to gaze upon his body (8.7.26). Though Cyrus himself loved to gaze at the dead bodies of others (1.4.24), his *thymos* cannot abide the thought of others doing the same to him.

¹⁹⁴ Plato's Athenian Stranger finds fault with Cyrus for exactly this reason, noting that Cyrus left the education of his sons to women and eunuchs (*Laws*, 694c-695b). Citing *Cyropaedia* 8.7, Gera argues that

and to enjoy spirited debate (1.4.1-3), engages in dialogue with his father, whereas his sons, who apparently have not been the beneficiaries of anything at all like the loquacious Persian education their father received, remain wholly passive and completely silent throughout his soliloquy. Given all of these reasons, is it any wonder that Cyrus's admonitions to his sons apparently went in one ear and out the other (8.8.2)?

While some commentators have found the bleak conclusion of the *Cyropaedia* surprising, inconsistent, and even spurious,¹⁹⁵ in truth, the fact that the empire splits apart once Cyrus dies is a rather predictable consequence of the fact that he did not properly educate his sons. The fact that Cyrus makes little effort to educate his sons means that in Xenophon's judgment he must be at least partially culpable for the collapse of his empire after his death. If for Xenophon the fact that Cyrus alone could hold the empire together magnifies his greatness, then the fact that he was unable to help ensure the survival of the empire after his death by educating his sons must be considered a serious strike against him. Cyrus's general inability to educate the future rulers of his imperial household is thus one reason why, whatever else his considerable merits, Xenophon is nonetheless deeply ambivalent about him. Given Cyrus's apparent

the fact that Cyrus did try to educate his sons anticipates and virtually refutes the Athenian Stranger's criticism. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* 125. But, as Nadon correctly points out, Gera's criticism of the Athenian Stranger's analysis is problematic given that the paucity of time and energy Cyrus puts forth to educate his sons falls far short of his own explicitly stated standards for moral instruction at *Cyropaedia* 3.3.51-55. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 135, n. 53.

¹⁹⁵ For example, Miller goes so far as to recommend to the reader that he "close the book at this point [8.8] and read no further." Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G.P. Goold, vol. 52 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914) 439. Hirsch also argues that the conclusion is spurious. Hirsch, *The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire* 91-97.

failure to properly educate his sons, the fact that he treated his subjects like they were his own children is thus in truth not necessarily a good thing.

One cannot forget that the fact that Cyrus treats his subjects as children means that he in effect treats grown men and women as children. By treating his subjects as children, Cyrus facilitates a perverse state of affairs where they are encouraged to have a kind of perpetual childhood, with Cyrus the parent assuming all of the “adult” responsibilities on their behalf. The most important result of this scenario is that he accordingly has all the power commensurate with his fatherly role, while his childlike subjects are totally dependent on him and at his mercy. In a speech the ostensible purpose of which is for Cyrus to stress his good-hearted fatherly benevolence, he also unwittingly reveals that in fact his kindness comes at a price — he must have absolute power, so as to better be able to do favors for others:

Men, you must hold all these things to be no more mine than yours, for *I am gathering* them neither to spend them myself nor to use them up myself (for I would not be able). I do so rather so that *I am able* to give gifts whenever one of you does something noble and, if any of you believes he needs something, so that he may *come to me* and take whatever he happens to need. (8.4.36, my emphasis)

In the end, Cyrus has absolute power over his subjects (8.8.1), including the right to confiscate and redistribute their property whenever he pleases (8.1.17, 8.1.20, 8.4.36). After he conquers Babylon, Cyrus—who is always the first to give away “his” possessions (1.3.6-7)—owns everything. Moreover, one byproduct of Cyrus’s absolute power is the fact that his subjects become progressively unable and unwilling to think for themselves and increasingly happy to always follow Cyrus’s judgment. Indeed,

Cyrus's imperial household is populated by subjects the vast majority of whom have been conditioned to obey through bribes and threats, rather than habituated to virtue. For example, the Armenian Tigranes tells Cyrus, "Never be surprised...if I am silent, for my soul (*psuchē*) has been made ready not to deliberate but to do whatever you order" (5.1.27).

Given an Aristotelian analysis, insofar as Cyrus's absolute rule relieves his subjects of the tasks of ruling and political deliberation, it follows that he thereby infantilizes them and in effect prevents them from becoming fully human. For Aristotle, man can only fulfill his *telos* or natural end by actively taking part in political deliberation within the *polis* and thereby developing his reason, which is the distinctively human capacity that sets human beings apart from the beasts.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, according to Aristotle, the relationship between parents and children is supposed to take the form prescribed by a field of knowledge that he calls "expertise in parental rule" (*technopoiētikē*) (Politics 1253b10), according to which children are to be ruled in a kingly (*basilikōs*) fashion (Politics 1259a41). Children both require and benefit from being ruled by their fathers because, as Aristotle argues, while children have the latent capacity for reason and deliberation, that potential is in a process of ongoing development and thus necessarily undeveloped or incomplete (*ateles*) (Politics 1259b1). Since by nature children possess the innate potential capacity to become adults who possess the deliberative element, by encouraging the development of the child's inchoate capacity for reason and deliberation, fathers who demonstrate what Aristotle

¹⁹⁶ Wayne H. Ambler, "Aristotle on Acquisition," Canadian Journal of Political Science 17.3 (1984): 499. W.L. Newman, The Politics of Aristotle, vol. I (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 26.

calls “expertise in parental rule” prepare their sons to someday rule the household and to take part in the larger political community of which the household is a part.¹⁹⁷

On an Aristotelian reading, the fact that Cyrus does not educate his subjects to rule and be ruled in turn (Politics 1252a14-16) is an unfortunate yet logical consequence of the fact that he conceives of and likens his empire to an imperial household under his autonomous rule (8.5.7). Lacking any real semblance of politics internally, since Cyrus controls everything and in so doing renders his childlike subjects incapable of political deliberation, Cyrus’s imperial household is also unconnected to any larger or overarching political community. Whereas Aristotle argues that parents should educate their children so that someday they can take part in the political community of which the household is a part, strictly speaking, there is no larger political community to be found anywhere within Cyrus’s imperial household, because there is no need for deliberation among Cyrus’s subjects, given that he controls everything. By keeping his subjects in a state of perpetual childhood devoid of political reasoning and deliberation, Cyrus renders them dependent, docile, and compliant. For Xenophon, empires governed by an autonomous leader like Cyrus are apt to be excessively paternalistic, and this paternalism comes at a price. The cost of security under Cyrus’s protection for the more childlike of his subjects is their very humanity.

¹⁹⁷ Thornton C. Lockwood, "Justice in Aristotle's Household and City," Polis 20.1 and 2 (2003): 8.

Slaves

Along with the *anēr/anthrōpoi* and *patēr/paides* relationships Cyrus cultivates, he also encourages relationships with many of his subjects that remind of nothing so much as that between a master (*despotēs*) and his slaves (*douloi*).

Cyrus's lifelong companion Artabazus, who first fell in love with Cyrus when the two were youths (1.4.27-28), is one of the most striking examples of the sense in which some of the most devoted of Cyrus's subjects become his slaves. Artabazus could not stand to be away from Cyrus, such that even the briefest time apart from his beloved seemed to him to be an eternity. As he tells Cyrus, even the simple act of blinking was burdensome to him because it deprived him of precious time that could have been spent beholding his beloved (1.4.28). Artabazus remains steadfastly in love with Cyrus throughout his life, as evidenced by the fact that as an adult he is willing to fight through crowds with his fists and do "without eating or drinking," all for the opportunity to be near his beloved (7.5.53). On Artabazus' view, after Cyrus establishes the empire it is not fair that he should have to contend with others for Cyrus's attention, especially given that he has been loyal to his beloved as long as anyone. Accordingly, he proposes that Cyrus issue a proclamation stating that everyone who has not been allied with him from the beginning must keep away from him, so that

he might spend his days in the company of his most constant and devoted friends (7.5.54).

Cyrus laughs upon hearing Artabazus' proposal, which he apparently finds very amusing (7.5.55). As Xenophon does not comment in his own name on Cyrus's laughter, the reader is left to infer the reason why Cyrus finds Artabazus' proposal so humorous. One commentator plausibly suggests that Cyrus laughs because he sees how transparently self-serving Artabazus' argument is, given that Artabazus has of course been his friend longer than anyone else.¹⁹⁸ I would suggest that another possible explanation is that Cyrus laughs not so much at the blatant self-interest that motivates Artabazus' argument so much as at Artabazus' steadfast yet pitiable devotion, which Cyrus is happy to receive and make use of, but which he has no intention of ever reciprocating. On my interpretation, Cyrus laughs out of sheer and unabashed delight upon realizing that Artabazus' erotic feelings toward him in effect render Artabazus his slave for life. Whereas Artabazus longs to gaze at and to be with Cyrus at all times, Cyrus is completely consumed with founding his empire and never even gives Artabazus a passing thought, except on one occasion when Artabazus proves useful to his imperial ambitions (6.1.34-40). Upon hearing Artabazus' earnest testimony about the constancy of his devotion, Cyrus apparently cannot help himself from rather cruelly laughing at his admirer's servile condition.¹⁹⁹

The final conversation between Cyrus and Artabazus further suggests the nature of the slavelike relationship between Artabazus the lover and Cyrus the beloved.

¹⁹⁸ Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 112.

¹⁹⁹ Lateiner argues that laughter plays a similar role in Herodotus, for whom it is often a sign of hubris. D. Lateiner, "No Laughing Matter: A Literary Tactic in Herodotus," *TAPA* 107 (1977).

Hosting a banquet in which he distributes many gifts (8.4.9-27), Cyrus gives Artabazus a golden goblet before kissing Chrysantas (8.4.24-26). Artabazus swears, “By Zeus, Cyrus, the cup you gave to me and your gift to Chrysantas are not of similar gold,” implying that he would rather have a simple kiss from Cyrus rather than an elaborate gift made of the finest gold (8.4.27). Upon hearing Artabazus’ dissatisfaction, Cyrus promises to give him a kiss too. Artabazus no doubt hopes that Cyrus’s kiss will be immediately forthcoming, so it must come as quite a shock to him when he inquires as to when he can expect to receive his gift and Cyrus quite coldly replies: “After thirty years” (8.4.27). Uttering his final line in the Cyropaedia, Artabazus replies, “Be prepared, then, for I will be waiting and will not die,” which suggests that Cyrus alone gives meaning to his life and provides his entire reason for living (8.4.27). Throughout this exchange, and throughout their relationship generally, Cyrus cruelly toys with Artabazus’ affection for the sheer sport of it while Artabazus, for his part, is so hopelessly in love with Cyrus that he allows himself be cruelly manipulated if that is what it takes to be near his beloved. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the unrequited character of the erotic attraction Artabazus feels for Cyrus is so pronounced and pathetic that it renders Cyrus Artabazus’ cold-hearted master and Artabazus Cyrus’s devoted slave.

But if Artabazus consents to his servile condition as the unrequited lover of Cyrus even though he would prefer it to be otherwise, then one must wonder: Is he really a slave? Through his description of the relationship between Cyrus and Artabazus, Xenophon tacitly calls to mind foundational questions regarding the relationship between consent and slavery that recur throughout the Cyropaedia. To take

another example, Chrysantas, a Persian peer who seconds Cyrus's proposal to issue rewards on the basis of merit (2.3.5-6), gives a speech that also touches on the relationship between consent and slavery. Chrysantas holds that "slaves serve their masters involuntarily," by which he seems to mean that the act of consenting is necessary and sufficient to preclude one from being a slave (8.1.4). With an eye toward assessing the important role that I believe slavery plays in the Cyropaedia, the question now becomes: Does Xenophon share Chrysantas' view regarding who is and who is not a slave? Did Xenophon think that consent is necessary and sufficient to prevent one from being a slave? This question is of the utmost importance for classifying and evaluating Cyrus's rule, insofar as Xenophon states that Cyrus ruled over both willing and unwilling subjects (1.1.4-5, 7.5.77). What is at stake with regard to the veracity or adequacy of Chrysantas' definition regarding who is and who is not a slave is whether only the minority who did not consent to Cyrus's rule were slaves or whether even some of those in the majority who did consent to Cyrus's rule, such as Artabazus, might be slaves as well. If the latter scenario can be shown to be Xenophon's view, then Cyrus's rule would have to be considered more tyrannical than even those few discerning commentators who have quite correctly identified various tyrannical aspects of Cyrus's rule have recognized.²⁰⁰

A proper answer to the question of whether for Xenophon consent necessarily precludes one from being a slave requires that we transcend the Cyropaedia and turn briefly to his Memorabilia, one of his Socratic writings that explicitly broaches

²⁰⁰ For example, Rubin holds that "the most generous category for Cyrus's type of rule is benevolent despotism." Rubin, "Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 409.

philosophic topics such as the relationship between consent and freedom in greater detail and with more precision than the Cyropaedia. Another potential advantage to be gained by considering the Memorabilia is that unlike in the Cyropaedia, Xenophon himself actually appears among the *dramatis personae* who converse with Socrates. Most importantly for our purposes, the lone exchange between Xenophon and Socrates in the Memorabilia directly addresses the question at hand about the relationship between consent and slavery. For these reasons, no analysis of Xenophon's conception of the relationship between consent and slavery can ignore the Memorabilia.

In the exchange in the Memorabilia between Socrates and Xenophon (Memorabilia 1.3.8-15), Xenophon records his recollection that Socrates did his best to convince him that one can become enslaved to the beauty of one's beloved, even when one deliberately chooses or consents to allow oneself to gaze at the object of one's affections. The occasion that prompted their discussion was the behavior of Crito's son Critoboulus, who Socrates apparently of late had noticed kissing the beautiful son of Alcibiades. Surprisingly, Socrates takes up the issue not with Critoboulus, but rather with Xenophon. The conversation between Socrates and Xenophon is worth quoting at length:

"Tell me Xenophon," he said, "didn't you hold Critoboulus to be one of the moderate rather than the rash human beings, and one of those with forethought rather than senseless and reckless?"

"Certainly," said Xenophon.

"Well, hold now that he is hotheaded and heedless in the extreme. He would even make somersaults into daggers and leap into fire."

"And what did you see him doing," said Xenophon, "that you have formed such judgments about him?"

"Did he not dare to kiss the son of Alcibiades, who is most fair and in his bloom?" he said.

“But if that is the reckless deed,” said Xenophon, “in my opinion, I, too, would endure this risk.”

“You wretch!” Socrates said. “And what do you think you would suffer after kissing someone beautiful? *Would you not immediately be a slave rather than free*, spend a lot for harmful pleasures, be in great want of leisure for attending to anything noble and good, and be compelled to take seriously what even a madman would not take seriously?”

“Heracles!” said Xenophon. “What a terrible power you ascribe to a kiss.” (Memorabilia 1.3.9-12, my emphasis; see also Memorabilia 1.2.29-31)

Socrates’ view, which serves as the basis for his playful yet stern rebuke to Xenophon,²⁰¹ is that the fact that one happens to consent to an activity in no way necessarily entails that the state of affairs to which one consents will not wind up rendering one a slave. On the contrary, for Socrates human beings can become all too voluntarily and willingly enslaved to their own desires, a situation which, as Socrates points out, lessens the amount of freedom they will have in the future to choose the noble and the good when confronted with a similar situation.²⁰² The Socratic view is that the fact that individuals happen to consent to their servitude is actually of little consequence, because it in no way changes the fundamental fact that they are still slaves to their own desires.

Unfortunately, Xenophon did not record whether or not he followed Socrates’ advice to refrain from kissing beautiful youths. Since Socrates tailored his discussions to his individual interlocutors (Memorabilia 4.1.3), the very fact that he saw fit to

²⁰¹ In the Anabasis, Xenophon records another conversation between himself and Socrates (Anabasis 3.1.4-7). On this occasion Socrates also expressed his dissatisfaction with him, this time for failing to go to Delphi to consult the god (as Socrates had advised) about whether to join Cyrus the Younger and instead simply deciding for himself to go on the voyage. Contrary to Socrates’ instructions, Xenophon asks the god only about the best way to travel to meet up with Cyrus, not *whether* he should go. Thus, in the two passages in Xenophon’s writings where he himself speaks with Socrates, the philosopher scolds him for his behavior. Whatever his undeniable affection and admiration for Socrates, it seems that Xenophon nonetheless sometimes acted contrary to his advice.

²⁰² See also Memorabilia 1.2.22. Aristotle also makes a very similar argument. See Nicomachean Ethics 1104a30, 1114a10.

discuss the problems associated with kissing the beautiful with Xenophon suggests that Xenophon likely had a penchant for such activities. But if Xenophon agreed at least in theory with the soundness of Socrates' argument —as seems reasonably likely, even if he himself occasionally fell short in practice— then this agreement sheds new light on the nature of Cyrus's rule in the Cyropaedia. If Xenophon agreed with Chrysantas' view that one is not a slave provided that one consents, then the majority of Cyrus's subjects could not justifiably be considered slaves by virtue of the fact that they consented (1.1.3-4), which would place Cyrus's rule in a relatively just and favorable light. However, if Xenophon disagreed with Chrysantas and instead agreed with Socrates' argument that one's consent to a particular state of affairs in no way rules out the possibility that this situation can still render one a slave —as we have suggested he did— then we must resist the easy temptation to divide Cyrus's subjects into slaves who did not consent and free men who did consent to his rule. Rather, in addition to those slaves Cyrus ruled by force and without their consent, in Xenophon's view there were other *consenting* slaves under Cyrus's rule who approved of him and who he deliberately kept mired in their slavery. Regarding Cyrus's treatment of the free men and the consenting slaves, Xenophon writes:

So thus, by himself, he prepared those who he thought must rule, both by their training and by presiding over them with dignity. On the other hand, regarding those whom he was preparing for slavery, he neither urged them to train in any of the labors of freemen nor permitted them to possess weapons. He did take care that they would never go without food or drink for the sake of the training undertaken by freemen, for when they drove game onto the plains for the knights, he allowed them —but none of the freemen— to bring food for the hunt. And when there was an expedition, he led them to water like beasts of burden. And when it was time for dinner, he waited until they might eat something, so that they might not be so terribly hungry. Consequently, even these called

him ‘father,’ as did the best, because he took care that they might pass their time as slaves forever and without dispute. (8.1.43-44)

Whereas on a cursory reading of the introduction to the Cyropaedia one initially has the impression that in the empire there were only free men who consented to Cyrus and slaves who did not (1.1.4-5), upon closer inspection of the Cyropaedia as a whole we believe that there were actually a handful of free men who received an education in virtue similar to the one Cyrus received in old Persia as a boy (8.1.44), some slaves who did not consent to Cyrus’s rule (7.4.15, 7.5.36, 8.1.43-44), and a great many slaves who did consent (8.1.44). Given that the class of free men in the empire would seem to be a very small and select group, it would seem that the empire was therefore populated predominantly by slaves. The consequence of this argument for Cyrus’s rule is that far more of his subjects were slaves than most commentators have noticed. Despite his generosity and benevolence, Cyrus’s rule is thus from Xenophon and Socrates’ point of view more tyrannical than it might initially seem. To return to the question that prompted our brief examination of the Memorabilia, Artabazus would seem to be exactly the sort of consenting slave that Socrates counsels Xenophon not to become. For Xenophon and Socrates, consent does not necessarily preclude one from being a slave.

Xenophon notes that Cyrus treated the Babylonians as “beasts of burden,” (8.1.44) which on an Aristotelian reading requires that we raise the question of exactly what kind of slaves they were. To borrow Aristotle’s language, were the Babylonians under Cyrus natural or conventional slaves? In his discussion of slavery, Aristotle carefully distinguishes between those who are slaves by nature and those who are slaves

only by law or convention. For Aristotle a natural slave (*physei doulos*) is an individual whose natural mental faculties are such that he can only perform the most basic physical labor (Politics 1254b15-20). Aristotle argues that such a person is “one who does not belong to himself by nature but is another’s,” which means that the natural slave is wholly a tool for accomplishing a task and entirely a possession of the master (Politics 1254a13-15). As Aristotle puts it, “the body is the soul’s tool born with it, a slave is...a member or tool of his master, [and] a tool is a sort of inanimate slave” (Eudemian Ethics 1241b23; see also Politics 1254b16-17). The connection between the body/soul and slave/master analogy to which Aristotle points is that the natural slave depends on his master for his every direction in life, much like the body depends on the soul. The slave has the minimal mental capacity needed to execute orders given by a master, but he cannot determine his own ends any more than the body can absent the direction supplied by the soul (Politics 1254a28-b16).²⁰³ According to Aristotle, it is thus in no way unjust and is in fact entirely according to nature for a master to make use of one who is by nature a slave, since those who lack reason should by nature follow the commands of those who have it. In this way the slave becomes a kind of bodily extension of the master’s reason (Politics 1255b10), which Aristotle describes as a mutually beneficial situation that results in “a certain advantage — and even affection of slave and master for one another” (Politics 1252a34, 1254b20, 1255a1-3, 1255b10-16).²⁰⁴ In contrast to natural slaves, those who are slaves only by convention are

²⁰³ Strauss, The City and Man 38.

²⁰⁴ According to Ambler, the master and natural slave “both find their advantage served by their association, and neither would find it still more advantageous to associate on terms other than those of master and slave. These standards...emerged from reflection on what a complete defense of despotic rule

considered slaves not because nature has rendered them severely deficient in reason, but rather simply because they happen to find themselves treated as slaves due to contingent and unfortunate circumstances beyond their control, such as being captured in battle. In contrast to the natural slaves who feel affection for their masters, Aristotle notes that conventional slaves despise their masters because their association benefits only the master and in no way serves the interest of the slave (Politics 1255b14-15).

Aristotle's distinction between natural and conventional slaves helps shed light on the nature of Cyrus's rule, insofar as Aristotle provides a conceptually acute and highly applicable theoretical framework to help classify and evaluate Cyrus's system of slavery. The Aristotelian distinction between natural and conventional slaves introduces questions of justice or, what is the same, questions regarding what one is owed; questions about which Cyrus from a young age claimed to know all the answers (1.3.16). For instance, as a child in the Persian schools of justice, Cyrus was asked to adjudicate a dispute between a large boy with a small coat and a small boy with a big coat (1.3.16-17). The big boy had helped himself to the small boy's big coat and gave the small boy a small coat in exchange. Rather than decide the case according to Persian law, as he had been instructed to by his Persian teachers, Cyrus instead rendered his decision based on what he himself deemed was fitting (*harmottō*)—both figuratively and quite literally— for each boy to have. Though he was supposed to render his decision based on who was lawfully entitled to which coat, Cyrus instead looked to nature (or “fit”) rather than to convention (or “title”) in his verdict, which

would require.” Wayne Ambler, "Aristotle on Nature and Politics: The Case of Slavery," Political Theory 15.3 (1987): 405.

allowed each boy to keep the coat that fit him. While the young Cyrus looked to nature to help him resolve disputes concerning justice, once he founds his empire he intentionally seeks to obfuscate the natural under the veneer of the conventional. Most notably, once he founds his imperial household, he no longer uses nature as his guide and opts instead to rely mostly on convention—in the form of his own will (1.1.5, 8.8.1)—in deciding who is owed what. From an Aristotelian viewpoint, Cyrus's rule must be considered unjust to the extent that he treated many individuals who were not natural slaves as if they were. With regard to the question of who within his imperial household should be a master and who should be a slave, Cyrus, rather than looking to nature and evaluating each individual on a case-by-case basis as he did as a boy in the case of the coats, instead simply ignores nature and willfully and conveniently decrees that many of the Persians who were loyal to him from the beginning should be masters, while the Babylonians who happen to have the bad fortune to be the last to be conquered should be slaves (7.5.36). This scenario within Cyrus's imperial household is exactly the type of situation Aristotle has in mind when he argues that the act of capturing the enemy in battle does not thereby necessarily render him fit to be treated as a slave, since the origin of war is not always just and, even in the case of just wars, one should still refrain from treating someone as a slave who does not by nature deserve to be so. Ignoring the latter prohibition would be tantamount to admitting that anyone, including oneself, may be justly enslaved (Politics 1255a21-33; see also Memorabilia, 1.2.50). As a child, when Cyrus judged whether or not to let the boys keep the coats that fit each of them, he decided to substitute his judgment for that of the law and to subject convention to the light of nature. But as an adult, he rules his imperial

household at least as arbitrarily, capriciously, and unjustly as the old Persian republic of his childhood that he demolished had ruled its subjects (1.2.4, 1.2.9, 1.2.15). Cyrus exploits the occasional injustices of the old Persian regime in order to help him overturn it, but the imperial household he establishes on the ruins of old Persia is, by any reasonable estimation—including most importantly that of Xenophon (8.8.1-27)—less decent, more unjust, and more tyrannical.²⁰⁵

The first institutional reform Cyrus made in his effort to transform the Persian republic of his childhood into an empire was his revolutionary reorganization of the Persian social classes, which had traditionally been separated into peers (*homotimoi*) and commoners (*dēmotai*), into a more egalitarian and homogenous mass class where the previous distinctions present during his childhood no longer applied (2.1.11-19).²⁰⁶ In order to convince the peers to accept the commoners into their ranks, Cyrus appealed to their desire for security, noting that they will have greater numbers and thus more assistance in battle if they agreed to his proposal (2.1.11-13). For the commoners, Cyrus held out the prospects of honor and equality that they had long desired in order to entice them to take on the responsibilities of the peers (2.1.13-19). But despite Cyrus's promises, in the end his revolutionary reorganization of the Persian republic's social classes does not result in the homogenous mass class that he led the peers and especially the commoners to believe that it would.

²⁰⁵ See also Gary D. Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," *Law and Philosophy*, eds. John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992) 158-59.

²⁰⁶ The fact that talented individuals like Pheraulas start off as commoners in Persia but eventually serve in positions of distinction under Cyrus suggests that the class distinctions in Persia prior to Cyrus's revolution were often based on convention (*nomos*) rather than nature (*physis*) (8.3.2, 8.3.5). Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* 40, 76. Ambler, "Introduction: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*," 5. Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* 75, 214.

In light of Cyrus's decision in the end to reestablish in a more extreme form the hierarchical social classes that he had abolished, as well as his patently unjust enslavement of so many individuals —some of whom are not themselves slaves by nature and who become forcibly subsumed within his imperial household, and some of whom with a little prompting from Cyrus become voluntarily enslaved by their own desires— one can only conclude that his seemingly benign egalitarian proposal that abolished the conventional class distinctions in old Persia was in fact little more than a convenient and opportunistic, if keenly effective, means of furthering his imperial ambitions.

The Imperial Household as a Response to the Problem of Political Rule

This paper has argued that reading Xenophon's Cyropaedia through an Aristotelian lens helps bring Xenophon's view of Cyrus's empire into focus. On an Aristotelian reading of the Cyropaedia, Cyrus's empire comes to light as what we have called an imperial household, in which Cyrus alternately treats his various subjects as women, children, and slaves.

The fact that Cyrus used his *epistēmē* to create an imperial household filled with docile women, children, and slaves goes to the root of both how he avoided the problem of political rule and why he ultimately failed to render his solution lasting (8.8.2-27). As we have seen, for Xenophon the central problem of the Cyropaedia and political life generally is that human beings do not want others to have authority over them and thus revolt against their rulers (1.1.2). On an Aristotelian analysis, Cyrus ingeniously circumvented the problem of political rule by attempting to do away with political rule

altogether and replacing it with household management on an imperial scale. For Aristotle, political rule in its fullest sense is not possible within the household because, in contrast to the various kinds of rule whereby the household manager governs women, children, and slaves, political rule in its fullest sense involves a relationship between free and equal persons, one in which “there is an alternation of ruler and ruled” between those who “tend by their nature to be on an equal footing and to differ in nothing” (Politics 1255b20, 1259b1-6). Though Aristotle does state that wives are to be ruled by their husbands in the “political fashion,” he immediately differentiates political rule of husbands over wives from political rule in its full and robust sense, noting that in marriage, in contradistinction from political life, there is no alternation of ruler and ruled (Politics 1259a41, 1259b1-9). For Aristotle, the household manager—who rules within the household as husband, father, and master (Politics 1259a37)—is the sole ruler in the household. Similarly, Cyrus as the autonomous ruler is the only household manager in his imperial household. Aristotle’s argument about the absence of political rule in the household in the robust sense of alternation between ruler and ruled perfectly captures the way in which Cyrus avoided the problem of political rule. Quite elegantly, Cyrus avoids the problem of political rule within his imperial household by eschewing political rule altogether. Surrounded by subjects who have no interest in ruling and who are on the whole content to be treated as women, children, and slaves, Cyrus the *anēr* has no equal anywhere in his imperial household (1.1.5, 8.8.1). For Aristotle, given that Cyrus has no equal in his imperial household and that he rules autonomously, it necessarily follows that political rule, which takes place between equals who take turns ruling, cannot exist within the empire. If political rule does not exist, then the problem

of political rule apparently disappears. By using the household as a blueprint for his empire, Cyrus discovers an incredibly effective means by which to create an empire the sheer size of which the ancients had never seen (1.1.4-5, 8.8.1) and to avoid the problem of political rule that other less visionary rulers had, according to Xenophon, always faced — at least until Cyrus established his imperial household (1.1.1-1.1.3).

Conclusion: Xenophon on the Household

I have argued that an Aristotelian analysis of the Cyropaedia helps bring the underlying conceptual blueprint and predominantly tyrannical nature of Cyrus's empire and rule into focus. In closing, I wish to briefly consider Xenophon's Cyropaedia in light of his own writing on the household, the Oeconomicus. I will suggest that while Aristotle and Xenophon's respective analyses of the household differ in important ways, Xenophon's analysis of the household, like Aristotle's, leads to a critique of Cyrus and his empire. If that is correct, then there would seem to be broadly shared skepticism about Cyrus among the ancient political philosophers that may be contrasted with Machiavelli's more modern and somewhat more optimistic view of him.

According to Arendt, "*all* ancient political thought" took as "self-evident and axiomatic" that there was a distinction "between the sphere of the *polis* and the sphere of household and family."²⁰⁷ But a few pages later, she qualifies this claim in a curious way: "[T]he Socratic school...*at least in Plato and Aristotle*, remained so strong that the distinction between the spheres of household and political life was never doubted."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Arendt, The Human Condition 28, my emphasis.

²⁰⁸ Arendt, The Human Condition 37, my emphasis.

Why did Arendt see fit to qualify her generalization and restrict it to Plato and Aristotle? I believe the answer, in a word, is Xenophon.

The Oeconomicus, one of Xenophon's Socratic writings, consists primarily of a conversation between Socrates and Critoboulus (son of Crito), the subject of which is "management of the household" (Oeconomicus 1.1). The major difference between Xenophon's Socrates and Aristotle's respective presentations of the household is that for Aristotle household rule and political rule are qualitatively different, whereas for Xenophon's Socrates they are only quantitatively different (Oeconomicus 21.2). For example, Socrates chides Nicomachides for being contemptuous toward household management, since "attending to private affairs differs only in terms of multitude from attending to public ones" (Memorabilia 3.4.12; see also Memorabilia 3.6.14, 4.2.11). Thus, when Socrates discusses the art of household rule in the Oeconomicus, it follows that he is also tacitly discussing political rule, since there is in his view no essential difference between ruling a household and a *polis* other than size. When Socrates offers advice to Critoboulus on how to rule his household, his advice therefore may be applied to political rule as well. For this reason, one who considers Xenophon's writings as a whole cannot avoid the following question: What would Xenophon's Socrates have said about Cyrus's rule? Would he have approved or disapproved, and why?

Given Socrates's arguments it seems likely he would have approved of a few aspects of Cyrus's rule. For example, Critoboulus claims to have learned from Socrates that successful rulers are able to "whet the souls of human beings and cause them to toil willingly," (Oeconomicus 21.2) which reminds very much of Cyrus (1.5.7-14; 2.1.11-19, 4.1.2-6). Throughout the Cyropaedia when Cyrus addresses his soldiers and

subjects, again and again he creates new desires in the souls of his listeners, who are willing to toil and follow his lead in hopes of satisfying the desires he has created. Moreover, Critoboulus also mentions that he understood Socrates to mean that whereas bad rulers have subjects who oppose them at every turn, “divine, good, and knowing rulers” dispose their subjects toward obedience (Oeconomicus 21.4-5, 21.12). On this account, Cyrus was clearly one of the blessed rulers, insofar as he and he alone ruled primarily over docile subjects who were content to let him rule (1.1.4-5, 8.8.1). Finally, Critoboulus claims to have learned from Socrates that good rulers do not learn the art of rule “by seeing it or hearing of it once,” but rather by possessing a good nature and receiving a sound education over time (Oeconomicus 21.12). This account reminds very much of Xenophon’s remark that it is crucial to understand Cyrus’s nature and his education if one is to understand his rule (1.1.6).

If Xenophon’s Socrates approved of parts of Cyrus’s rule, it seems he would have been more ambivalent about other facets of Cyrus’s reign. For example, according to Socrates, a possession is “whatever would be beneficial for the life of each” (Oeconomicus 6.4). If we recall my earlier discussion of the case involving the coats Cyrus adjudicated, we see that on the one hand Socrates’ view of property was essentially the same as Cyrus’s (to say nothing of the Platonic Socrates who advocates communism in the Republic.) Given Socrates’ argument that property *qua* property must be beneficial to the owner, it follows that he would have rendered the same verdict Cyrus did — both boys should have coats that fit (1.3.16-17). On the other hand, whether Xenophon’s Socrates would have institutionalized this view the way Cyrus did in the empire, where Cyrus’s sovereign will decided who owned what, must be a matter

of considerable doubt. It is striking that while Xenophon's Socrates seems to agree in theory with Cyrus that property should benefit the owner, he —unlike Plato's Socrates— never explicitly advocates institutionalizing communism. It may be that Xenophon's Socrates eschewed such a radical proposal in practice because he doubted whether any human being would possess enough knowledge to always know for sure what should belong to whom. For Xenophon's Socrates such omniscience only was available to the gods (Memorabilia 1.1.7, 1.1.9). A prudent person would therefore be very cautious about assuming too much and enacting radical reforms based on knowledge that he does not in fact possess (Memorabilia 4.2.26). To do otherwise would be “madness” (Memorabilia 3.9.6). This is to say that even if for Xenophon's Socrates property *qua* property should benefit the owner, it does not necessarily follow that any one ruler would ever possess adequate knowledge of what should belong to whom in an entire *polis*, much less in an imperial household. All of this means that Xenophon's Socrates would probably have agreed in theory with Cyrus's desire to confiscate and redistribute his subjects' property more equitably, but not in practice with what he actually did. That Xenophon's Socrates would be in some ways ambivalent about Cyrus can also be gleaned from his argument that it is “great proof of virtue in a ruler when others willingly obey him” (Oeconomicus 4.19).²⁰⁹ Xenophon notes that while Cyrus ruled many of his subjects with their consent, he also resorted to force and instilling fear and terror to govern those who resisted his rule (1.1.4-5).

While Xenophon's Socrates would have approved of a few aspects of Cyrus's leadership and would have been ambivalent about other facets of Cyrus's rule, the fact

²⁰⁹ See also Oeconomicus 21.2 and Memorabilia 4.6.12.

remains that he also would have strongly disapproved of many of Cyrus's actions. It must be said that from Socrates' point of view, Cyrus is one of those "slaves" who are imprisoned by their own "foolish and expensive ambitions" (Oeconomicus 1.22). Cyrus's boundless ambition is one of his defining characteristics (1.2.1); and it is "foolish and expensive" to the extent that he expends a great deal of blood and especially treasure (albeit mostly others') in establishing the empire, only to have it degenerate quickly after his death. Socrates' disapproval of Cyrus's project can also be inferred from his argument that "it is no less necessary...to fight for freedom against [gluttony, lust, and drunkenness] than against those who attempt to enslave by arms" (Oeconomicus 1.22). On this analysis, Cyrus's subjects too readily gave their consent to him, insofar as while for the most part he did not conquer by arms, he did corrupt the majority of his subjects by appealing to their lower and immoderate desires, especially for gain. Since Cyrus did not typically impose his will by force, his subjects who lacked Socrates' insight that benevolence can be a means to tyranny failed to see that Cyrus was actually enslaving them. From Socrates' vantage point, the mere satisfaction of desire should not always simply be equated with benefiting one's subjects. Cyrus's corruption of the Persians is apparent especially when they adopt the opulent and effeminate Median dress, which Cyrus himself favored and encouraged (8.3.1). Socrates could have predicted the debauchery that followed on the heels of this physical transformation in the Persians' appearance. He observed: "when bodies are made effeminate, the souls too become much more diseased" (Oeconomicus 4.2).

For all of the colorful and memorable characters one meets in Xenophon's collected writings, for him the two most important are Cyrus and Socrates. Xenophon

all but asks his readers to compare the two individuals in the final sentence of his Memorabilia (4.8.11). For him, the question of what kind of life to lead comes down in the end to action or thought, politics or philosophy, or Cyrus or Socrates. According to Socrates, there is no essential difference other than size between the economic art that pursues gain within the household and the political art practiced by the statesman, which seeks gain for the *polis*. Thus, the natural perfection of the gentlemanly or political economic art pushed to its logical and fantastic extremes is Cyrus, who gained more for himself and his small band of countrymen than any other individual ever had. The following order, relation, and natural progression among Xenophon's works is thereby suggested: The Oeconomicus presents the economic art, a fundamental part of which is the science of gain (Oeconomicus 1.4); in the Cyropaedia, Cyrus possesses the economic art and pushes it to the ends of the earth, yet he leaves the Persians and the rest of his empire much worse off than they were prior to his revolution; Xenophon thus invites his readers who want to make sense out of Cyrus's failure to turn to the Memorabilia, which is a much deeper and more philosophic work than either the Oeconomicus or the Cyropaedia. To take but one example of that fact, consider that in the Oeconomicus the conversation takes place between Socrates and the gentleman Critoboulus, but Socrates never attempts to lead him beyond his own limited horizon or out of the cave of political life. When Critoboulus tells Socrates he is interested in gain, Socrates begins cranking out the means to this end, rather than trying to moderate Critoboulus (Oeconomicus 1.4). In contrast, the Socrates of the Memorabilia repeatedly tries to moderate his companions and claims that he practices two kinds of rhetoric — one meant for the many, and one meant for the few. The addressees of the former

included those such as Critoboulus, while the latter would seem to have comprised those with philosophic aspirations, including Xenophon himself. Most importantly, when one turns to the Memorabilia after the Oeconomicus and the Cyropaedia, one discovers that Socrates has no need to seek gain and increase his possessions because he held his desires—including his desire to be honored by others, which gnawed at Cyrus's insides—in check.

This brief sketch of the Oeconomicus is intended to suggest that the thought and arguments of Xenophon's Socrates, like those of Plato's Athenian Stranger as well as Aristotle, point to a critique of Cyrus's rule. If that is correct, then Cyrus provides a valuable lens through which to see an overlooked point of broad agreement among the ancient political philosophers. If the respective thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon lends itself in each case either explicitly (Plato), implicitly (Aristotle), or a bit of both (Xenophon) to a critique of Cyrus, then we may say that broadly the ancients were extremely skeptical about whether Cyrus's empire was a good thing. One can point to one of the most important differences between the ancients' sober resignation to the imperfectability of political life and the moderns' comparative optimism and idealism by noting that whereas Machiavelli speaks fairly highly of Xenophon's Cyrus, Xenophon himself harbors serious doubts about his prince.

CONCLUSION: HARES, HOUNDS, HERDS, AND HIVES

Introduction

The primary thesis of this dissertation is that one of the reasons that Xenophon's Cyropaedia deserves to be regarded as one of the classic and foundational texts of political philosophy is because it thoughtfully examines the extent to which politics and political life are amenable to reason, method, and knowledge. In the Cyropaedia, which is a philosophic novel about the life of the Persian Cyrus the Great that is loosely based on various historical accounts, Xenophon explores the extent to which central problems of politics, including especially the problems of legitimizing authority and preventing revolution, can be mitigated by human reason. By thinking through Cyrus's life, his rule, and the massive Persian Empire that he founded, Xenophon claims to have unearthed a fundamental truth about politics. While his study of history and current events impressed on him that in almost all times and places political life precariously teeters on the brink of chaos, Xenophon saw in Cyrus a potentially wondrous alternative to the comparatively bleak view that political history is destined to be little more than one violent revolution followed by another, ad infinitum:

But when we reflected that there was Cyrus, a Persian, who acquired very many people, very many cities, and very many nations, all obedient to himself, we were thus compelled to change our mind to the view that ruling human beings does not belong among those tasks that are impossible, or even among those that are difficult, if one does it with knowledge (*epistamenōs*). (1.1.3)

By calling attention to the central theme of Cyrus's knowledge and its potential to help consign revolution to the dustbin of history, Xenophon invites his readers to dialectically discern for themselves from his narrative what Cyrus and Cyrus alone knew so as to make human beings from dozens of nationalities and across three continents submit to his rule. This dissertation has provided an analysis of the various facets of Cyrus's knowledge of rule. Chapter One argued that Cyrus's Persian education was not one thing, but rather twofold, consisting of his conventional and heterodox educations. The former emphasized the rule of law, the latter stressed the need for absolute rule by a single leader. I suggested that in the end, the Cyropaedia comes to sight as a deeply ironic work because despite Cyrus's prodigious wisdom, the empire he founded was for Xenophon neither unequivocally lasting nor good. In this sense, Xenophon's own knowledge rivals and supercedes that of Cyrus, insofar as Xenophon realized that wisdom is no match for the chaotic world of politics, a sobering and realistic outlook still applicable today. Chapter Two examined what Cyrus learned in theory from his tyrannical and kingly educations, as well as how he utilized them in practice in the course of founding and governing his empire. I suggested that one may state the broad relationship between Cyrus's Persian, Median, and kingly educations by noting that Cyrus's father Cambyses does his best to minimize Cyrus's grandfather Astyages's tyrannical influence on Cyrus by showing him that there was far more to his conventional Persian education than meets the eye, that is not nearly as innocent and naïve as Cyrus believes it to have been, and that, contrary to what he learned from the despot Astyages while in Media, nature itself sets certain limits before which even

tyrants' wills must inevitably bend. Insofar as Cambyses was skeptical about Cyrus's quest from the beginning and many of his warnings come true, he would seem to be the closest thing to Xenophon's mouthpiece in a novel where Xenophon himself is not among the *dramatis personae*. Chapter three argued that part of Cyrus's knowledge involved his remarkable ability to deceive others every step of the way in his meteoric rise to power. I maintained that Xenophon is fundamentally ambivalent about Cyrus. For all of his impressive qualities, Cyrus destroyed a virtuous republican regime and replaced it with a comparatively effeminate and decadent empire. The world, as Xenophon endeavors to illustrate, is both dark and chaotic. If he is right, even the most gifted of princes cannot make the world less chaotic for more than a brief moment in time without employing deception at every turn and thereby making a dark world darker still. In chapter four, I argued that a key part of Cyrus's knowledge is his keen recognition that one way to avoid revolution is to do away with political rule altogether by turning the world into his imperial household, wherein his authority is unquestioned and does not admit of any appeal. I discussed the sense in which in founding the empire Cyrus reduces his subjects to women, children, and slaves, all of whom become peaceful and orderly but less than fully human denizens of his imperial household.

This brief concluding chapter suggests that another important if unsettling part of Cyrus's knowledge is his ability to strip his subjects of their humanity and make them into beasts. I give an account of the various ways in which Cyrus conceives of his subjects as animals and suggest that the models and images of hares, hounds, cattle, and bees play particularly important roles in the *Cyropaedia*. On this analysis, in forming the empire Cyrus sees his soldiers as dogs and his enemies as hares, while the empire

under his rule alternately resembles a herd of cattle and a beehive, with Cyrus as the herdsman and the lead bee. My argument that Cyrus reduces many of his subjects to animals helps explain his unprecedented successes in making others submit to his rule and creating an empire the sheer size of which had never been seen. If, as Xenophon states in his prologue to the Cyropaedia, herds are “more willing to obey their keepers than are human beings their rulers,” then it would seem to follow that the secret to making humans obey is to make them into animals that will be wholly dependent on their keeper (1.1.2). Nonetheless, for all of Cyrus’s stunning achievements, in the course of showing how he frequently conceived of his fellow man as brutes that were less than human, Xenophon compels his readers to wonder whether Cyrus’s remarkably effective methods were in fact good and thereby helps cast some light on the bleak and notoriously enigmatic conclusion of the book.

Hares and Hounds

Early in the Cyropaedia during the course of an extended conversation between Cyrus and his father Cambyses, the king of the small republic of Persia where Cyrus spent portions of his childhood and youth, Xenophon foreshadows that in the course of establishing the empire and as its ruler Cyrus will treat some of his enemies and subjects as hares and hounds. In the course of teaching Cyrus how to take advantage of enemies, Cambyses advises him to use the same tactics on his enemies that he once used to hunt animals:

But son, if you should do nothing more than apply against human beings the stratagems that you used to use even against very small animals, do you not think that you would go a long way in getting the advantage over your enemies? (1.6.39)

He continues:

Against the hare, because he grazes at night and runs away in the day, you used to raise dogs that would find him out by his scent. Because he used flee quickly when found, you had other dogs that had been trained to take him in pursuit. If he should escape even these, you learned their paths and to what places hares go when they run away, and you would spread out nets that are hard to see; and since he was frantic to escape, he would fall in them and himself entangle himself. So that he not escape even from here, you would station scouts of what would happen; and they, from close at hand, would be ready to set upon him quickly. And you yourself from the rear—but with a cry that did not lag far behind the hare— would by your shouting so startle him that he was senseless when taken. Yet teaching those in front to be silent, you would make them escape detection as they lay in ambush. So, as I said before, if you should be willing to contrive such things against human beings as well, I am inclined to think that that you would not come short of any enemy in the world. (1.6.40-41)

On Cambyses' account, rulers are to analogize the world into three distinct classes.

They themselves as rulers are like hunters; their soldiers resemble hounds bred by them to seek gain; and enemies are like hares that are hunted by the hounds.

Cyrus wastes little time putting his father's admonitions into practice on his campaign to defend Persia's ally Media against the bellicose son of the Assyrian king. He takes some of his soldiers to the border between Media and Armenia under the pretext that he wishes to hunt, a ruse that is particularly plausible in light of the fact that he has often hunted there before (2.4.16). When his contingent arrives at the frontier, he takes care to hunt as advertised so as not to arouse the Armenian king's suspicion (2.4.20). But after the hunt, Cyrus explains to his captains the true reason for their excursion. The Armenian king was formerly an ally and subject of Cyrus's uncle

Cyaxares, the ruler of Media, but the Armenian had of late ceased to pay Cyaxares his tribute because he thought that the Medes would be too preoccupied with the recent offensive waged by the son of the Assyrian (2.4.22). Cyrus thus reveals that the true nature of the foray into Armenia is to bring the Armenian under heel and concludes that the Armenian himself “is the game we have come to catch” (2.4.22). Formulating his plan and encouraging deception at every turn, he continues, “Remember, then, that the paths must be secured before the game is roused. And those stationed at the mouths [of the paths] must not be noticed, if the game approaching is not to turn away” (2.4.25). In successfully executing his plan, Cyrus follows his father’s advice to a tee.

If Cyrus views his soldiers as analogous to hounds and his enemies like hares in the course of establishing his empire, then as ruler of the empire he continues to view some of his subjects and even some of his closest associates as dogs. For example, when Cyrus honored those among his servants who merited commendation with fine food and delicacies, Xenophon notes that he took special care to have their food served from his own table, because he thought that this would inspire good will in them, “just as it does with dogs” (8.2.4). Similarly, he believed that the eunuchs who served him were in need of a master, but contrary to the view of the many, he did not think that because of their condition eunuchs were necessarily destined to be weaklings. To the contrary, he saw that under the guidance of a master they could be useful for the same reason and in the same way that dogs that have been castrated are. Just like the eunuchs he surrounds himself with as bodyguards, “dogs, when castrated, stop running away from their masters, but are no less useful for watching or hunting” (7.5.62).

As all of these passages taken together suggest, from the beginning of his quest for empire and rise to power, Cyrus conceived of and treated his enemies and subjects like hares and hounds. Viewed in this light, the fact that many of his subjects behave in some respects like animals after he dies, far from being a surprising aberration inconsistent with the bulk of the Cyropaedia as some have suggested,²¹⁰ much less a spurious addition clumsily tacked on by a second-rate author,²¹¹ is in fact the logical outcome of his policy of dehumanizing both his enemies and his subjects that he enacted from the beginning. Perhaps the only difference at the conclusion is that in the absence of their master after Cyrus's death, the undisciplined and unsupervised hounds become somewhat less prone to attack hares and more likely to viciously turn on one another in the effort to become the new top dog (8.8.2).

The Herd

Several passages in the Cyropaedia suggest that Cyrus saw some of his individual subjects as cows content to chew their cud and his empire as a whole as analogous to an enormous herd, over which he as its shepherd presided.

On one occasion, Cyrus is delighted with the account one of his captains provides regarding how he inculcates obedience, orderliness, and discipline in his troops, "in coming and going," "by night and by day," and by exercising both their bodies and their minds (2.3.22-23). Cyrus jokes that since the captain does everything "doubly," it is only just to offer him a "double feast" as well (2.3.23). This sort of

²¹⁰ Tatum, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction 216, 24, 35, 38.

²¹¹ Hirsch, The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire 91-97.

generous offer is par for the course for Cyrus, who throughout his life enjoyed sharing his provisions with others and ministering to their desires for food and drink that he himself by nature and because of his ascetic Persian education did not seem to feel very strongly (1.3.7, 8.2.7, 8.4.6). While Cyrus apparently believed that one of the quickest ways to gain a man's loyalty is through his stomach (8.2.2), for his part the captain answers Cyrus's jests with one of his own, stating that he must decline Cyrus's generous offer to him and his soldiers, unless Cyrus "will furnish us with double stomachs as well" (2.3.24).

As is Xenophon's penchant, the humorous and playful chit-chat between Cyrus and the captain has a few serious, albeit tacit, philosophic and theoretical subtexts. First, it is important to note that while the captain rejects Cyrus's invitation, he does not do so entirely. Rather, he only declines to take part in lavish feasting twice a day, but apparently still agrees to come to Cyrus's table daily (2.3.24). Insofar as he does not reject Cyrus's offer *in toto*, the captain thus represents a somewhat tenuous and volatile midpoint between the disciplined moderation regarding food and drink that formed a key part of Cyrus's childhood education in the little republic of Persia and the moral permissiveness and eventual decadence that begins to set in once Cyrus takes control of the Persian army, founds the empire, and especially once he dies. While we cannot be entirely certain about the captain's nationality, it would seem that he is very likely one of those Persians who, like Cyrus, was raised to believe that moderation is a virtue, but who nonetheless was attracted to Cyrus's imperialistic enterprise, the goal of which from the very beginning was at least as much about material gain as it was defense of an ally (1.5.8-10). In this sense, the character of the captain illustrates that Cyrus's

corruption of his subjects was often partial and that it frequently took place slowly and methodically through various stages over time. The speech Cyrus gives in praise of gain as the proper reward for virtue when he is chosen commander of the Persian army (1.5.8-10), the invitation to the captain and many others to feast with him along the way to Babylon (3.2.25-31, 8.4.6-27), and the custom of encouraging his subjects to adopt elaborate makeup and to don fine Median robes reminiscent of the Oriental despots of the day are all important stages on the way to the widespread unbridled decadence that ensues after his death (8.1.40-41, 8.8.2-27). Second, the captain's figurative reference to the "double stomachs" he and his men would need in order to feast twice a day with Cyrus cannot help but cause the reader to think of cows, which quite literally possess stomachs with multiple chambers. For all of the levity in their conversation, the captain nonetheless recognizes on some level that Cyrus is trying to corrupt him with a way of life more fit for a cow than a human being. Implicit in Cyrus's invitation is the view that virtue is not its own reward and that discipline is instead little more than an enlightened means to increased future pleasures, a philosophy that Cyrus articulated to his companions as a young man and that he never abandoned (1.5.8-10, 2.3.23-24, 8.2.20). But once Cyrus's revolutionary principle that virtue is but a useful means to pleasure catches on, what —other than the prospect of the ongoing gain to be had as country after country falls under Cyrus's thumb— is to prevent Cyrus's subjects from shirking their duties and decadently behaving as if they have "double stomachs"? As Xenophon notes, while even the disciplined captain was somewhat tempted by Cyrus's offer to feast twice a day, many who heard about it were less ambivalent and were chomping at the bit to receive similar invitations by displaying their devotion to Cyrus

(2.3.24). So long as Cyrus is alive, he can make sure that the upper class in the empire practices at least a modicum of virtue by rewarding them for it and holding out the promise of even greater gain in the future if they delay their gratification. But once he dies and there is no longer any real prospect of greater gain for his subjects, the game is up and they abandon any pretence to virtue, surrendering themselves to the pleasures of the moment. Enlightened hedonism under Cyrus degenerates into sheer decadence after his death. Xenophon thus suggests that public teachings like the one Cyrus promulgates that make virtue a means to increased pleasures are apt in the end to lead to widespread corruption and decline.²¹²

Along with leading his subjects down the road to immoderation and eventual decadence, Cyrus's policy of distributing food and inviting his subjects to feasts also has the effect of diminishing their liberty and independence. Xenophon states that Cyrus intuitively recognized that his subjects' bellies could be used to control them, and once again Cyrus took his cue directly from the animal kingdom:

It seemed to him that they were benefited by being fed together also in that they would be less willing to desert each other, because he saw that even animals that are fed together have a terrible yearning if someone separates them from each other. (2.1.28)

By encouraging his subjects to mess with one another, Cyrus helps ensure that like other animals he had observed they will never long for independence or wish to be separated from the herd without trembling and having a "terrible yearning" to remain with it always. As the Median commander Artabazus tells Cyrus, "And now, too, this is

²¹² Bruell, "Xenophon's Education of Cyrus," 95, 125.

our feeling, so that with you we are not afraid even in the enemy's land, while without you we are afraid even to return home" (5.1.26).

To the extent that Cyrus thought of most of his subjects as comprising a herd, there is also evidence he thought of himself as its shepherd:

People quote a remark of his to the effect that the duties of a good shepherd (*nomeus*) and of a good king were very much alike; a good shepherd ought, while deriving benefit from his flocks, to make them happy (so far as sheep can be said to have happiness), and in the same way a king ought to make his people and his cities happy, if he would derive benefits from them. (8.2.14)

In contrast to this more flattering account apparently still in vogue among the many even into Xenophon's own time, Cyrus's wise and prudent father Cambyses has a somewhat less generous characterization of his son's rule. While the many believe that under Cyrus's rule there was a mutually beneficial pact between subjects and king whereby the ruled were made happy and Cyrus in turn derived certain "benefits" for himself as their ruler, after Cyrus conquers Babylon Cambyses issues a warning to his son not to "attempt to govern the Persians as you do those other nations, with a view to self-aggrandizement" (8.5.24). He thus silently drops any reference to the conventional view that Cyrus beneficently ruled his subjects. Whereas the popular stories about Cyrus held that he made his subjects happy, Cambyses witnessed the style and effects of Cyrus's rule firsthand and apparently concluded otherwise. Still, despite this difference, the competing accounts are similar to the extent that they both hold that Cyrus benefited himself, albeit to varying extents, by ruling.

In light of the popular characterization and especially Cambyses' view of Cyrus, we are thus left to wonder: What benefits did Cyrus, who prided himself on giving

many of his possessions away (1.3.7, 1.4.26, 5.1.28, 8.2.7-9, 8.4.31), derive from his flocks as their shepherd? A handful of passages shed some light on this question. First, in a rare moment of candor, Cyrus admits to Croesus, the king of Lydia, that he cannot eradicate from himself “that passion for wealth which the gods have put into the human soul and by which they have made us all poor alike,” such that he himself is “as insatiate of wealth as other people are” (8.2.20). Cyrus also tells him “that if I make my friends rich I shall have treasures in them and at the same time more trusty watchers both of my person and our common fortunes than any hired guards I could put in charge” (8.2.19). In another passage, Xenophon states that Cyrus provided physicians and surgeons to care for his subjects, “in order to hold the first place in the affections of those by whom he wished to be beloved” (8.2.24-26). Finally, “Cyrus...endured all sorts of labor and faced all sorts of danger for the sake of praise” (1.2.1). In light of these passages, the answers to the question about what kind of benefits Cyrus derived from being the shepherd would seem to be that he thereby indulged his desires for preeminent wealth, security, affection, and honor.

The analogy between kings and shepherds is a common theme in classical political philosophy (Statesman, 264b-276e; Republic, 343a-344c, 345c-d; Memorabilia, 3.2.1). We can see the extent to which Cyrus’s understanding of the meaning of this analogy may be distinctive among the ancients by briefly comparing it with those suggested by Socrates’ interlocutor Thrasymachus in Plato’s Republic and by both Plato’s and Xenophon’s Socrates. In the Republic, in opposition to the rhetorician Thrasymachus’ argument that the shepherd’s art per se seeks to benefit the shepherd and exploit the sheep by fattening them for the slaughter, Socrates argues that

in fact, strictly speaking, the shepherd's art actually seeks to benefit his flocks (343a-344c, 345c-d). Similarly, in the course of examining the metaphor between kings and shepherds, Xenophon's Socrates argues that the virtue of a good leader is nothing but "the making of whomever he leads happy" (Memorabilia, 3.2.1-4). Viewed in light of the disagreement between Thrasymachus on the one hand and both Plato's and Xenophon's Socrates on the other, Cyrus would seem to represent a kind of midpoint on the continuum between their more extreme views that rulers either seek to promote their own interests by ruthlessly exploiting their subjects, as Thrasymachus argues, or that rulers *qua* ruler are devoid of self-interest and seek only to benefit their subjects, as both Plato's and Xenophon's Socrates maintain. In a nimble balancing act, Cyrus alternately pursues both strategies, which is to say there are probably aspects of his rule Thrasymachus would applaud and other facets that Plato's and Xenophon's Socrates would sanction. Cyrus seeks to benefit his subjects by providing them with equality of opportunity, material gain, honors, security, and the chance to seek revenge and avenge past wrongs; yet by ruling over the empire he also gratifies his own burning desires to be preeminently loved and honored throughout the world by his subjects. As he proves time and again, Cyrus has an uncanny knack for sizing up his subjects and deciphering what they want. As the conduit to their desires, all he asks in return from the upper classes in the empire is that they love, honor, and obey him as their shepherd, while the lower classes—including especially those unfortunates who happen to be the last to be conquered—must labor to serve his court and in return are from time to time permitted to content themselves by chewing their cud as if they were "beasts of burden" (8.1.44).

The Hive

Xenophon's final metaphor for Cyrus's empire is the hive, which Cyrus rules over as its leader or *hegemon*. The first allusion to bees in the *Cyropaedia* comes during a revolutionary speech where Cyrus suggests to his commanders that rewards in the army should be distributed according to merit and that those who are lazy should be "weeded out of the ranks" and replaced with others who are more willing to contribute, regardless of their countries of origin (2.2.23-26). Cyrus argues that "when people are bad...because of laziness and indolence, I believe that they, like drones, damage their associates...by the cost of their keeping" (2.2.25). He likens the least industrious among his soldiers to "drones," which are male bees that have no sting and gather no honey for the hive. Both of these characteristics are significant for understanding the reasons behind Cyrus's desire to reform his army with fresh recruits. To achieve his multinational empire, he needs soldiers who are willing and capable of harming enemies so as to achieve gain. For these tasks, "drones" who are unwilling to go on campaign and who are already content with their possessions and lot in life simply will not do. They are left behind, as Cyrus's swarm migrates outward in search of more and more honey.

To the extent that Cyrus's empire is similar to a hive, then Cyrus himself as its ruler is in some ways like the queen bee. As Artabazus tells his beloved Cyrus:

"But I, king," he said, "for you seem to me to have been born a king by nature, no less than is the naturally born leader (*hegemon*) of the bees in the hive, for the bees obey him voluntarily. If he stays in a place, not one leaves it; and if he goes out somewhere, not one abandons him, so remarkably ardent is their innate love of being ruled by him. And human

beings seem to me to be somewhat similarly disposed toward you..."
(5.1.24-25)

Perhaps out of fear that he might offend Cyrus, Artabazus converts the feminine 'queen bee' to which he refers into the masculine *hegemon* or 'leader' (it should be noted that there are no king bees in nature). But leaving aside the slight infelicity of the metaphor given Cyrus's sex, the comparison and indeed even its very limitations nonetheless work nicely on two different levels. First, Artabazus is quite correct that others are drawn to Cyrus as if by instinct. Many of Cyrus's loyal subjects, including Artabazus himself, follow him almost literally to the ends of the earth and wish to be near him always (5.1.25-26). Second, on a deeper level, the limitations inherent in Artabazus' metaphor actually presciently foreshadow the bleak conclusion of the *Cyropaedia* and help explain the rapid moral degeneration that occurs across the Persian Empire following Cyrus's death. Whereas when the queen bee dies nature promptly provides another for the hive, when Cyrus dies nature is apparently under no obligation to produce another leader with his prodigious talents.²¹³ After he dies, there is no one with his knowledge and vision to take his place. This is to say that the extent to which the analogy between Cyrus and the queen bee breaks down bodes very badly for the empire. In Xenophon's estimation, while reforming human political life by following the model of bees in a hive may produce extraordinary short-term results, in the long-term such a blueprint is imprudent and almost certainly destined to fail.

The empire is a shadow of itself without Cyrus because its entire way of life was dependent upon and centered on him. In the absence of law, Cyrus's sovereign will and

²¹³ Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," 155-56.

decrees became the guiding standard in the empire (1.1.5, 8.1.22, 8.8.1).²¹⁴ He is the sole judge of merit and of what is owed to whom (8.1.20). In fact, his subjects grow so dependent on him to make decisions that some of them lose the capacity to reason for themselves, preferring instead to simply always follow his judgment. As the Armenian crown-prince Tigranes tells Cyrus, “[N]ever be surprised when I fail to speak. For my mind has been disciplined not to offer counsel but to do what you command” (5.1.27).

By telling the story of Cyrus’s life and summarizing what came after it, Xenophon suggests that future generations would be wise to note the imprudence and long-term impracticability of basing an entire regime on a born leader such as Cyrus. For in practice, such supremely talented individuals are quite rare, and the possibility that nature will happen to give rise to one at the necessary time to replace another is unlikely. In this sense, despite the two millennia that separate them, Xenophon very likely would have agreed with Madison’s argument in the Federalist that “it is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust...clashing interests and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm.” If Xenophon and Madison are correct, then prudent founders and statesmen would do well to recognize that leaders of Cyrus’s caliber should be encouraged or if necessary forced to resist the temptation to try to use themselves and their talents as a foundation, model, or blueprint for their regimes, thereby creating a situation where they themselves become the *sine qua non* of their regimes’ ability to function. Born leaders will inevitably pass, and those who come after will almost certainly be unable to

²¹⁴ Whidden, "Cyrus's Persian Education in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," 146, Phillips, "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and the Problem of Extraordinary Political Leadership," 158, 99, Glenn, "Cyrus's Corruption of Aristocracy," 153, Farber, "The *Cyropaedia* and Hellenistic Kingship," 503-04.

maintain their achievements without succumbing to decline, particularly if the right kinds of laws, institutions, and traditions are not there to guide them. Such was the case with Cyrus's own sons. While the Persian Empire stubbornly persisted under their rule almost in spite of their incompetence, it was a shadow of what it had been under their father, just as they themselves were dim reflections of his greatness.

There is thus a puzzling yet delicious ambiguity at the heart of the Cyropaedia regarding how one should view nature and its relationship to humanity, one befitting an author like Xenophon who likes puzzles and is reluctant to solve every last one of them for his readers (Memorabilia, 1.1.1; Constitution of the Lacedaemonians, 1.1.1). To the extent that Cyrus improves his subjects' lives, the fact that nature does not provide for another leader like him suggests that she is indifferent or powerless to help control man's political fortunes. However, to the extent that Cyrus corrupted his subjects and treated some of them as if they were little more than animals and insects, by failing to replace him with another shepherd or *hegemon* nature would seem to support the human longing for freedom by decreeing that empires modeled on herds and hives contain the seeds of their own corruption and cannot last forever.

Conclusion

In the bleak conclusion to the Cyropaedia, Xenophon argues that immediately after Cyrus's death "everything took a turn for the worse" (8.8.2). While after Cyrus's death the Persian Empire would last for just over two centuries into Xenophon's own time, in his judgment the empire he observed firsthand during his travels and adventures had become "more impious regarding gods, more irreverent regarding relatives, more

unjust regarding others, and more unmanly in what pertains to war than were their predecessors” (8.8.27). For Xenophon, the problem with the Persian Empire that Cyrus created was thus less its instability and more its overall degeneracy, a precondition of which was Cyrus’s ability to make many of his subjects into something less than human, combined with their startlingly frequent willingness to let him. The fact that some of the hounds that had once served Cyrus turn on one another when their shepherd is no longer watching over them, far from being surprising or shocking, is actually quite logical and even predictable.

One lesson that Xenophon seems to have arrived at by studying Cyrus’s life is that under knowledgeable leadership like that of Cyrus political stability is indeed possible, just as he promised in his prologue to the Cyropaedia he would try to show (1.1.3, 1.1.6). But part of what Xenophon came to recognize and part of what he hopes his readers will take away from the Cyropaedia is that political stability per se is not necessarily good. In Xenophon’s judgment, stability at any cost is imprudent and apt to become dehumanizing. Over the course of the Cyropaedia he illustrates that any sort of stability whose inauguration and perpetuation depends on man’s moral corruption is ill-advised and in the end repugnant, not because it will not work, but rather precisely because under the knowledgeable direction of a born leader like Cyrus it *will*. Those like Xenophon who are led to philosophize about what is and is not possible to achieve through politics can learn from the Cyropaedia that the sort of stability that requires man’s debasement is always a potential possibility under a born leader like Cyrus who understands that legions of people will be willing to part with their freedom and even

their humanity in exchange for gain and security. But though such stability is possible, it is in Xenophon's estimation not good.

In Cyrus's eyes, the orderly empire he created was a thing of beauty, whereas for Xenophon it seems to have been a dubious enterprise from its inception and in the end unequivocally abhorrent. Cyrus's lifelong tendency to reduce the noble to the useful ultimately results in an empire that, while it existed in deed and not simply in the mind or speculations of a philosopher "in speech," was nonetheless in many ways rather low, base, and ignoble. But unlike Cyrus, Xenophon's unwillingness to simply equate the noble and the useful gives him a standard or horizon outside the empire's sheer size and existence by which to judge it. If some of those unfortunate souls who encountered Cyrus came to resemble beasts, as I have suggested, then those more fortunate readers who encounter Xenophon are reminded of their humanity and its fragility in the face of those ambitious leaders like Cyrus who would use their knowledge to make themselves shepherds and the world their herd. In the course of reading the *Cyropaedia*, it is therefore Xenophon himself, not Cyrus, who emerges as the true wise man.

I wish to close with a speculation about Leo Strauss, whose monumental and pioneering book *On Tyranny*, an interpretation of Xenophon's *Hiero*, will see its 45th anniversary this year. Strauss taught his students and argued in his three seminal books on Xenophon that Xenophon was in some ways the most modern of the ancient political philosophers.²¹⁵ I agree with Strauss's claims and would only add that Xenophon also seems to me to be unique in one respect among Socrates' students, in that his view of

²¹⁵ Strauss, *On Tyranny* 24-25, Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* 203-04, Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* 57.

the relationship between knowledge and the *polis* in the Cyropaedia fundamentally differs from Plato's understanding suggested by his Republic. Herein lies the sense in which I think Xenophon can lay claim to having hit upon a kind of realism that is, as I suggested in my introduction to this dissertation, unique among Socrates' students and possibly even among the classical political philosophers taken as a whole. Plato would seem to be less optimistic about the potential of knowledge to actually impact the *polis* in practice, but more sanguine about the innate prospect of knowledge to benefit the *polis*, if only it would listen. In contrast, for Xenophon it would seem to be just the reverse. Under the leadership of a born leader like Cyrus, knowledgeable methods can have a profound impact in practice on not only an individual *polis*, but also on political life nearly the world over; nonetheless, Xenophon would seem to be more skeptical than Plato about whether or not the rationalization of politics is apt to lead to improvement or decline. Cyrus boasts an impressive knowledge of how to make others submit to his rule and his methods are tremendously effective, but in many ways he leaves the world in worse condition than he found it. Because of their different views about the relationship between knowledge and the *polis*, the Cyropaedia and Republic repay being read in conjunction with one another and even form a kind of natural dialectical whole. Viewed in this light, perhaps we begin to get a sense for why no less than Milton could with some justification praise "the divine volumes of Plato and his equal Xenophon" (Prose Writings, 70). And perhaps —though only perhaps— we get a small inkling of one possible reason that Strauss, who published his first article on Xenophon in 1939, came back to the subject of Xenophon at the end of his remarkable life that had witnessed a century of horrors where knowledge and method proved all too effective in

transforming political life throughout the world, but woefully incapable of making it better.

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