VI. KINGDOM AND EMPIRE

Xenophon's thought on monarchy and the monarchical control of empire offers a distinctive contribution to political theorizing. He considers how an individual can be seen and agreed to merit the position of sole ruler, and so exercise power over his subjects identifies three main grounds for monarchical authority: ancestry, connection to the gods, and personal excellence (*Cyr.* 7.2.24). The phenomenon of royalty extends beyond the king himself, to his family and through his court. Royal women have a distinctive status compared with other women, with the possibility of greater agency. Xenophon depicts several such women, all from outside mainland Greece, as knowledgeable political actors and commentators: Mandane (*Cyr.* 1.3), Mania (*Hell.* 3.1.10–15), and Pantheia (*Cyr.* 4.6, 5.1, 6.1, 6.4, 7.3).[1]

Xenophon draws on earlier accounts, such as Herodotus' exploration of the role of kings in the rise and fall of the cities and empires they rule, and he parallels those of his contemporaries, notably Isocrates.[2] Their accounts of virtuous monarchical rule offer a different model from Plato's more abstract account (*Statesman*, *Euthydemus, Alcibiades I*). Xenophon's starting point is the Socratic idea of a 'kingly art' (*basilikē technē*), the skill of political leadership. He also borrows from the rich history of Achaemenid kingship, which drew on long traditions of wisdom literature and deployed the visual display of power and connection to the divine (*Anabasis*, *Cyropaedia, cf. Oeconomicus*).[3] This results in a conflict within Xenophon's monarchical thought, as the range of actions and strategies which he praises sit uncomfortably with conventional Greek views of virtue.[4]

Xenophon describes his ideal ruler most concisely in his portrait of Cyrus the Younger, not a king but pretender to the Achaemenid throne, in a brief obituary set within his account of Cyrus' fatal battle at Cunaxa (*An.* 1.9.1–29) and conveying the ambivalence some have seen in his account of the older Cyrus (*Cyropaedia*). The younger Cyrus was the 'most kingly (*basilikōtatos*) and most worthy of rule' of

[1] Emily Baragwanath has shown how Xenophon exploits the difference in lifestyle of Athenian women and non-Greek royal women: see Baragwanath 2002, 2016.

[2] See Atack 2020a: 122–50.

[3] Degen 2019; Tuplin 2013. Socrates' evocation of Persian kingship (Pl. *Alc.* 121b–122c) shows how Persian kings were productive examples for Greek thinkers.

[4] Although the schema in Buzzetti 2014 is too rigid; see Tamiolaki 2016b.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

all the Persians after his older namesake (1.9.1). Even as a boy he had stood out from his peers for his heroic bravery in a hunting expedition – actions also suggesting a dangerous appetite for risk.[5]

Xenophon portrays Cyrus as concerned both with the maintenance of his reputation for honesty and with the need to outdo others when repaying favours or exacting punishment (1.9.10–11). His fierce punishments ensured public safety but left wrongdoers mutilated; at the same time, he was generous in rewarding the just, aiming to make 'the good more fortunate and the bad worthy of being their slaves' (1.9.15). His distribution of favours, from the food on his plate, to valuable gifts and land, was all aimed at securing his own pre-eminence, and made him 'loved by more people than any other Greek or barbarian' (1.9.29), the desired outcome of manipulative acts of generosity.[6] Despite his subservient status relative to his brother the king (Xenophon uses the word *doulou*, 'slave'), Persians became loyal to this junior figure rather than their Great King.[7]

The shepherd king and the metaphysics of monarchy

Since both Plato and Xenophon depict Socrates discussing *basilikē technē*, it seems likely that the concept was associated with the historical Socrates and his followers, as suggested by the discussion between Socrates and Aristippus (*Mem*. 2.1.17).[8] Other Socratics including Antisthenes wrote about kingship, and Antisthenes also used Cyrus as an exemplar (DL 6.16).[9] Perhaps paradoxically for thinkers focused on democratic Athens, the topic of kingship provided a structure for assessing both non-Greek regimes and political and military leadership more broadly.

Basilikē technē can imply a distinction between ruler and ruled, but the term is ambiguous. It denotes both a master skill, the 'king of skills' controlling all other skills, and the skill specific to ruling, the 'skill of kings'. For Dorion, the adjective 'kingly' should be seen primarily as

[5] Cf. *Cyr*. 1.4; Hom. *Od*. 19.428–66.
[6] Azoulay 2018a.
[7] On the terminology and its relation to Persian sources such as the Behistun inscription (DB 1), see Missiou 1993.
[8] See Chapter 4; Atack 2020a: 101–4.
[9] Antisthenes *SSR* V frs. 86, 97; Atack 2020a: 94–7; Prince 2015.

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an analogy, in the first of these senses, and the skill should not be specifically associated with kings, the second sense.[10]

Both the Spartan and Persian systems of education taught this skill (see Chapter 4), as a means through which the endpoint of that education – the achievement of individual and collective happiness (*eudaimonia*) – might be reached. Xenophon suggests that what Socrates offered his students was the ability to lead as if they were a king. Socrates makes this explicit in his discussion with Euthydemus, identifying that he seeks:

> the quality…which makes good politicians and good managers, men capable of exercising command and bringing benefit to people in general as well as themselves…This is the skill of kings, and we call it 'the royal art' (*basilikē technē*). (*Mem.* 4.2.11)

This discussion does not confirm whether Socrates' *basilikē technē* is, paradoxically, a skill which might be best exercised in a *polis* setting over willing subjects, who can give and withhold consent. Xenophon argues that Cyrus had a unique capacity to engender willing submission to his rule and the desire to please him, but he exercises this beyond the scale of the *polis* (*Cyr.* 1.1.5).[11] Whether there can be room for a king in a *polis* citizen framework puzzled other theorists of Xenophon's time. Aristotle's account of kingship (*Politics* 3.14–18) concludes that a monarch (such as Xenophon's Cyrus) cannot be accommodated in the *polis*, because of his incommensurable excellence compared with other citizens who can never be his equals.[12] Where Xenophon treats the rule of the different entities of *polis* and empire as a transition of scale, Aristotle asserts a qualitative distinction between the *polis* and other types of community.

Xenophon's account of kingship incorporates the analogy between kings and shepherds common to both Greek and Near Eastern traditions. Homer's Agamemnon remains an important exemplar for Socrates, one who deserved the epithet 'shepherd of the people' (*Mem.* 3.2.1). This analogy invokes an image with significant cultural weight, much used by Homer (*Iliad* 2.243, 254) and with a long history in the ancient cultures of the Near East.[13] Xenophon's Cyrus develops

[10] Dorion 2004, 2013: 147–69; see also Illarraga 2023.

[11] Azoulay 2018a: 16; the reciprocal quality of *charis* is challenged in the context of monarchical superiority.

[12] David Riesbeck offers a different interpretation: see Riesbeck 2016: 258–69; Atack 2020a: 187–8.

[13] Brock 2013: 43–52; Haubold 2015; Atack 2020c.

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the image through a consideration of the benefit that sheep and shepherd gain: profit for one, happiness (*eudaimonia*) for the other (*Cyr.* 8.2.14).[14]

In his *Statesman*, Plato appears to criticize the reactivation of this ancient image, through the extended myth of the Golden Age in which herds of humans are managed by semi-divine herders (Pl. *Plt.* 269c–275c).[15] His concern is the kind of difference implied between ruler and ruled; the shepherd-king image analogizes it to that between man and beast, or god and man.[16] Plato had previously suggested that a new form of difference might be found in the superior knowledge of the ideal rulers, the philosophers who should 'rule as kings' (*basileuein*) in an ideal city such as his posited Kallipolis (*Republic* 5.473d). Xenophon tends towards a weaker association between kings and the divine, crediting kings with special access to the gods and understanding of their intentions; this is in addition to holding formal religious roles such as priesthoods.

Xenophon's monarchical thought thus points to competing models of kings' authority, capturing a point of transition from what Alan Strathern labels the 'divinised king' to the 'righteous king'.[17] Strathern identifies a transformation of thought on kingship in what historians have termed the 'Axial Age'. The old idea that kings should rule because they had some measure of divinity, and were somehow aligned with the cosmos, or brought alignment with it, began to be replaced with a new sense that kings merited their rule through their personal qualities. Xenophon's and Plato's examination of the shepherd-king image suggests a recognition of that transition.

The *Cyropaedia*'s account of the Achaemenid kings explores their religious role (*Cyr.* 1.6.2–6, 8.3), suggesting a connection to the divine and ability to interpret it, rather than that kings are themselves divine.[18] In conversation with Cyrus, his father, Cambyses, responds to clear omens that Cyrus' expedition has the favour of the gods (1.6.1). He recalls how he has instructed Cyrus in the importance for a ruler of self-sufficiency in religious interpretation, 'so that you might not learn the advice of the gods from other people acting as interpreters, but you

[14] See Pl. *Rep.* 1.345c–e.
[15] See Atack 2020a: 154–58; on the *Statesman* myth, see Horn 2012.
[16] Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1.2.1253a2–7.
[17] Strathern 2019: 155–218; Atack 2020a: 1–4. On the Axial Age, see Jaspers 1953.
[18] Melville and Mitchell 2013b; Root 1979, 2013.

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would recognize it' (1.6.2). Cyrus' answers set out a pragmatic view of how leaders should manage their relationship with the gods. He notes that, in line with other relationships such as friendship, being properly prepared and having the skills to capitalize on circumstances is important for taking full advantage; in the case of the gods, this means paying due attention to them in both good times and bad (1.6.3), and being prepared to take advantage when the gods signal an opportunity (1.6.6). Cambyses' approach lies somewhere between grounding kingship in connection to the divine and in the possession of knowledge, illustrating the shifting grounds of political authority also explored by Plato (*Laws* 3.690a–c), in which authority based on knowledge is treated as the most developed form of authority, superseding patriarchal authority.

However, outside this dialogue, Xenophon hints at a strong sense of divine connection for Cyrus throughout the *Cyropaedia*. Before the vital battle against the Assyrians' allies, the Hyrcanians with their skilled cavalry, Cyrus prays for divine support, and one account (Xenophon signals authorial scepticism with *legetai*, 'it is said') describes Cyrus' forces being illuminated by divine light (*Cyr*. 4.2.15).[19] The mysterious light enables them to march through the night, and so surprise the Hyrcanians, resulting in the flight of the Assyrians from the field and a further victory for Cyrus.[20]

Other characters also assert the stronger view of the connection between Cyrus and the divine. When Cyrus captures Croesus, the defeated Lydian king suggests that the former possesses a fundamentally different form of monarchical authority:

> I thought that I was capable of fighting against you, but first of all you are descended from the gods, and then from a line of kings, and finally you have been practising virtue from your childhood. But I understand that the first of my ancestors to rule as a king did so as one who was simultaneously king and freedman. (*Cyr*. 7.2.24)

Croesus accepts that Cyrus holds all three forms of monarchical authority – divinity, genealogy, and virtue – and acknowledges his innate superiority.[21] When Cyrus asks Croesus about his testing of oracles (a reference to Herodotus' longer account, Hdt. 1.46–56), the Lydian explains his own failings: that this exercise showed that he

[19] Gray 2011a.
[20] Degen 2019, 2020.
[21] Cf. Hdt. 1.6–7, and Xenophon's account of Agesilaus' claim to rule (*Ages*. 1.2).

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misunderstood how to interact with the god Apollo. He still does not understand the answer which he received, Apollo's declaration that he will live in happiness through knowing himself (*Cyr.* 7.2.20).[22] Croesus' non-royal ancestry and failure to understand how to interact with the divine mark him as a failed king. But Xenophon's account of kingship encompasses different forms of successful kingship.

Two forms of kingship

Through his accounts of Cyrus the Great and Agesilaus, along with other kings, Xenophon creates two distinctive models of kingship. Sparta provides one form, a model of kingship which is clearly congruent with Xenophon's ethics of the self. The Spartan king Agesilaus II, in whose forces Xenophoon served in both Asia Minor and mainland Greece, provides an important example for his thought on monarchy. His depiction of Spartan kingship acknowledges the kings' traditional claims to authority but also shows how Agesilaus maintains and extends his authority through performance and ritual, in a process identified in Max Weber's account of charismatic leadership as 'routinization'.[23] This contrasts with the style of kings such as Astyages, and Cyrus in his imperial phase, in which authority is asserted performatively through differentiated appearance, and the display of wealth and power through court rituals and managed public appearances. While the first of these forms exemplifies a 'virtue' theory of monarchy shared by Xenophon's contemporary Isocrates (*Nicocles*, *Evagoras*), the second form conforms with it less obviously.[24]

The first form of kingship is associated with Sparta and the imagined Persia of the *Cyropaedia*. Spartan kingship rests on descent, religious role, and the exemplary virtue exhibited by kings such as Agesilaus. But it is a minimalist form of kingship compared with the second type, that of the *Cyropaedia*'s Medes and Xenophon's historical Persians. Its austerity appears more obviously congruent with Xenophon's Socratic ethics, and their emphasis on restraint and self-control. Other commentators thought it minimalist too: Aristotle, who appears to draw on the *Cyropaedia* at various points in his account

[22] Ellis 2016.
[23] See Atack 2023b.
[24] Atack 2018a.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of kingship, describes Spartan kingship as merely a combination of hereditary priesthood and generalship (*Pol.* 3.14.1285b26–8).

Xenophon sets out the privileges and duties of this kind of king in his *Constitution of the Lacedaimonians.* On campaign, the king performs sacrifices to the gods and gathers omens so that he can understand the will of the gods and decide whether any action should be taken, especially for symbolic actions such as crossing the border (*LP* 13.2–5). These are done in front of the commanders and two of the city's ephors.[25] When the Spartans march to battle, the king leads from the front. At home, the Lycurgan *politeia* prescribed a leading role for the king in religious matters, involving more public sacrifices (15.2), and also instituted a system for the king to dine in a public dining hall, where he had a double share of food so that he could make gifts of it to other diners (15.4). But mutual oaths between the kings and the ephors, as representatives of the city, commit the city's two kings to maintaining the existing *politeia* and not seeking to expand their power (15.7–8). Only on his death do the Spartans acknowledge that their king has a special status, treating him as a hero rather than a man (15.9). In this way, Xenophon argues, Spartan kingship avoids the risk of a king exceeding the limits of his authority and becoming a tyrant.

Xenophon's portrait of Agesilaus expands this description with telling details of how his claim to authority is made, drawn from his genealogical connection to the hero Heracles and, through him, the gods:

> About his noble ancestry (*eugeneias*) what might anyone say better or finer, than that even now (*eti kai nun*) they know how many generations of named ancestors he is from Heracles, and that these ancestors are not private individuals, but kings born from kings? (*Ages*. 1.2)

Agesilaus had secured his accession to the kingship because Spartans suspected the rival candidate, Leotychidas, of being fathered by the Athenian exile Alcibiades, a point which Xenophon leaves unexplained even as he emphasizes Agesilaus' legitimacy.[26]

Agesilaus demonstrates his connection to the past through the simplicity of his antique-looking home, which could even be the home of the first king (*Ages*. 8.7), and which demonstrates his restraint.[27]

[25] Humble 2022: 178–80.

[26] *Hell*. 3.3.1–4; *Ages*. 1.5; Plut. *Vit*. *Alc*. 23. Cartledge 1987: 112–14 notes discrepancies between Xenophon's two accounts.

[27] Compare stories of Romulus' hut from Rome: Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.11, Rood et al. 2020: 186–7.

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Xenophon's Persian *politeia* does not mention the living arrangements for Cyrus' father, although it describes the king's military role (*Cyr.* 1.2.10). The Persian king's religious role becomes evident when Cyrus returns to Persia as supreme king over his father, Cambyses (8.5.22–6). The latter sets out the limits of Cyrus' role within Persia, which echo the limits of Spartan kingship.[28]

Spartan kingship offers a style of personal presentation which contrasts with that of non-royal leaders. Xenophon contrasts Agesilaus with the Spartan commander Lysander. The latter's extravagant personal presentation made him look more magnificent to the population of Asia Minor, attuned to the opulent display of Achaemenid power, so that they thought that 'Agesilaus appeared to be the private individual, and Lysander the king' (*Hell.* 3.4.7–8). However, Agesilaus responded by refusing all requests that Lysander brought to him, suggesting that his quietist mode of kingship did not indicate any abandonment of status hierarchies. Xenophon's insistence on the gulf between Lysander and the king marks his commitment to the idea that kingship is a form of leadership exercised on a different level. Xenophon later draws a related contrast, when Agesilaus meets the Persian king's local viceroy, the satrap Pharnabazus:

> after agreeing a truce and shaking hands [Apollophanes] brought Pharnabazus to the specified place, where Agesilaus was lying on the ground on some grass waiting for him, with thirty of his associates. But Pharnabazus came wearing a robe worth much gold; and while his servants were laying out stitched blankets for him, on which the Persians sit in comfort (*malakōs*), he was ashamed to enjoy the luxury, as he saw the plain style of Agesilaus, so he too lay down on the ground just as he was. (*Hell.* 4.1.30)

The contrast between the satrap, effectively a royal figure, and the Spartan king illuminates the contrast between the two forms of kingship in Xenophon's work, which is more broadly explored in the *Cyropaedia*. Here the distinction between the forms of kingship is coded into Greek-like and non-Greek forms.[29] While Cyrus' Persian father, Cambyses, represents a style of kingship resembling the Spartan form, his Median maternal grandfather, Astyages, exemplifies a maximalist form of monarchical performance, exhibiting all the features

[28] Atack 2023a; Tuplin 1994.

[29] On the Greek 'despotic template', see Dewald 2003; on Xenophon's presentation of Achaemenid courts, see Tuplin 2010.

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of a palace system in which the king occupies a special place of extreme privilege and displays high levels of consumption and display, emphasizing the gap between ruler and ruled. The young Cyrus criticizes this distinction when he returns to Persia, arguing that kings should be distinguished by their commitment to effort:

> they consider it necessary that the ruler should differ from the ruled in dining more sumptuously and having more money in his store and sleeping for longer and leading a life more lacking in toil (*aponōteron*) than that of the ruled. But I think that the ruler should not differ in his use of leisure time but in thinking ahead and loving hard work (*philoponein*). (*Cyr.* 1.6.8)

Xenophon presents Astyages' court as a site of an exoticized despotic rule in which the elite enjoy a luxurious life and are visibly distinguished from those they rule. Cyrus noticed his grandfather's royal costume and self-presentation, the eye make-up, rouge, and wig (*Cyr.* 1.3.2); although his initial response was negative, he would later adopt it himself as a marker of his new kingly status (*Cyr.* 7.5.37).[30] Here Xenophon transforms aspects of the despotic template into an account of effective governance; the second form of kingship can also be a form of virtue monarchy.

Cyrus' actions and habits secure good behaviour from his subordinates by providing an example (*paradeigma*) for them to imitate (8.1.37):

> We agree that we have learned of Cyrus that he considered that rulers should not differ from their subjects in this way alone, through being better than them, but he also thought that they should also use enchantment (*katagoēteuein*). At any rate, he himself chose to wear Median dress, and he persuaded his colleagues (*koinōnas*) to dress themselves in it. For it seemed to him to cover up if anyone had any deficiencies in their body, and to make its wearers look most handsome and of greatest stature (*kallistous kai megistous*). (*Cyr.* 8.1.40)

The make-up and costume which the young Cyrus had disdained now appear useful to him as a way of signalling status and exerting authority which can be communicated through others, so that his personal charisma can be spread to a greater distance. Xenophon concludes that his stylized appearance on formal occasions constitutes one of the 'arts he devised so that his rule might appear difficult to despise (*mē eukataphronēton*)' (8.3.1). He goes on to describe Cyrus' preparations for a key religious procession, in which he puts on magnificent robes, and gives matching ones, minus the purple stripes denoting royalty,

[30] Tatum 1989: 97–111; Azoulay 2004; Atack 2018a.

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to his associates (8.3.13–14). The spectacle is such that even Cyrus' close associates respond by performing *proskynēsis*, a gesture of obeisance, contrary to their own customs.[31]

One way in which Cyrus exerts his power remotely is through transmitting his excellence to his subordinates, while at the same time exercising power through the manipulation of his appearance and public image. The king demonstrates his authority by providing a model of behaviour to copy, directly to his courtiers. Xenophon presents both Cyrus and Agesilaus as exemplars or *paradeigmata* for imitation. Being an exemplar makes demands on the ruler; these extend from principles of military leadership, as Cyrus and Cambyses discuss. The leader must be prepared to undergo hardship and to show more physical resilience than those he leads (1.6.24–6, cf. 1.6.8). As they note, the potential rewards for success and penalties for failure are also greater for leaders, because their exposed position makes dishonour all the greater.

Cyrus, after he has assumed full power, insists that both he and his immediate deputies must demonstrate the excellence which underpins their claim to that power. While the favour of the gods will help them, they must also help themselves:

> After this, the most powerful [support] we must provide for ourselves. This is being considered worthy of ruling through being better than those who are ruled. Therefore we must share hot and cold and food and drink and labour and rest even with our slaves. But while we share in these experiences with them we must try to show that we are better than them. (*Cyr.* 7.5.78)

However, what Cyrus insists must not be shared is the 'theoretical and practical knowledge of war' (*polemikēs epistēmēs kai meletēs*, 7.5.79), which is instrumental in the elite's pursuit of freedom and happiness. The performative display of resilience and endurance is not an invitation to their inferiors to copy and learn; the only ones for whom the austere leaders are exemplars (*paradeigmata*) are their sons.

That Xenophon believes that both forms of kingship can deliver excellence is shown in the similar qualities he assigns to Agesilaus and Cyrus.[32] In the *Agesilaus*, he devotes separate chapters to each aspect of virtue which Agesilaus exemplifies: piety (3.1), honesty

[31] Bowden 2013.
[32] Azoulay 2020.

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(4.1), self-restraint in pursuing his sexual desires (5.1), courage (6.1), love of country (7.1), and charm, his ability to deploy *charis* (8.1).

The construction of exemplary narratives is sometimes at odds with telling the historical truth. Because Xenophon includes Agesilaus' military campaigns in both his *Hellenica* and his flattering biographical portrait, *Agesilaus*, it is possible to see him moulding his material to produce a more compelling exemplar. Accounts of Cyrus from other sources – Herodotus and Ctesias – suggest similar operations in Xenophon's construction of the *Cyropaedia*.[33] While Herodotus depicted Cyrus dying in a conflict with the Massagetae after proposing marriage to their queen (Hdt. 1.205–14), Xenophon depicts him dying peacefully in old age (*Cyr.* 8.7.2–28). Both accounts feature warning dreams sent by the gods, but only in Xenophon's version is Cyrus able to advise his sons.

When Cyrus completes his conquest of surrounding lands with his victory at Babylon, he transforms himself from the leader of an army to the ruler of an empire, as he enters the city. Along with the decision to treat the conquered as subjected peoples, he makes a conscious decision to present himself in the style of the Medes rather than the Persians:

> He commanded the Babylonians to work their lands and to pay tribute and to serve (*therapeuein*) those to whom each of them had been allotted; he told the Persians who were his partners (*koinōnous*) and those of the allies who chose to stay with him to speak as masters (*despotas*) to those whom they had captured.
>
> After this, although Cyrus already desired to set himself up as he thought appropriate for a king, he thought he should do this with the agreement of his friends; that he should appear infrequently and in solemnity in a way which attracted the least jealousy.
>
> (*Cyr.* 7.5.36–7)

In choosing to limit his contact with others, Cyrus adopts the seclusion which for Greeks marks the oriental despot.[34] Cyrus expresses this model when he sets up his palace system and transforms the status of his associates, who take on new roles as courtiers and key subordinates, and so retain some access to him. The vast scale of the royal household established by Cyrus in Babylon echoes other descriptions of palace systems, such as Herodotus' account of the Median king Deioces' palace at Ecbatana (Hdt. 1.98–100). Xenophon describes the palace

[33] Lenfant 2004; Gray 2016. On the historical Cyrus, see Briant 2002; Mitchell 2023.
[34] On Xenophon and Persian culture, see Hirsch 1985.

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system in detail, but the account functions as a normative model. Notable are Cyrus' meticulous plans for the protection of his person, with carefully selected eunuchs as his personal bodyguard, and with an outer layer of protection from an elite force of troops, the Ten Thousand (*Cyr.* 7.5.58–68). Again, there is a rationale: eunuchs have no family loyalties so rely entirely on patronage, while his elite force are hand-picked from the poor Persians who would easily be bound in the same way.

Kingship between virtue and vice

The encounters between Cyrus and Croesus and Agesilaus and Lysander assert a difference between kings and other leaders. Although Xenophon occasionally declares the similarity of leadership over different domains, from empire to household, his kings display differences, from their superior epistemic status to their ability to deploy that status to dominate and manipulate subjects through ruses and deception. These powers lead to what some have labelled 'dark' readings of the *Cyropaedia* as a manual for tyranny rather than virtuous rule.[35] Xenophon's description of Cyrus' imperial regime contains some of his most detailed political thinking, albeit targeted to a mode of rule and social organization antithetical to the democratic *polis*. Cyrus' control over his people, from the crowds who line Babylon's streets for processions to the distant subjects who cannot expect to see him, is maintained by institutions which focus power on him while enabling that power to be distributed and delegated.

As Vincent Azoulay showed, Cyrus weaponizes the concept of *charis*, the tradition of reciprocal generosity between friends and fellow citizens.[36] He donates huge rewards to his closest associates, giving them provinces to rule as well as great riches and rewards, but they cannot hope to reciprocate and so remain under obligation to him. They must be present at court to display their loyalty (*Cyr.* 8.1.16–21), and are punished for failure to attend. Rodrigo Illarraga has demonstrated a structure to Xenophon's account which balances the contributions of Cyrus' psychology and his education, answering the

[35] Gray 2011b.
[36] Azoulay 2018a.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

question posed in the opening chapter, so that Cyrus' pursuit of honour (*philotimia*) is aimed at virtuous ends.[37]

While written law still has a role in Cyrus' regime, the power of the ruler plays a greater part in ensuring conformity: 'Cyrus considered that a good ruler over men is a seeing law (*bleponta nomon*), because he is capable of setting them in order, and seeing and punishing the disorderly' (*Cyr.* 8.1.14). Cyrus can engage in remote perception of his subjects through his structures of command and control. These include motivating some subjects to act as 'the king's eyes' and 'the king's ears' in return for generous rewards (8.2.10–12). As Xenophon explains, this is not a role held by a specific individual, but a practice in which all may engage, and which ensures continuous conformity.[38] But this system is only part of a hierarchy through which power is transmitted downwards and across Cyrus' vast empire.

The special epistemic status of the king permits him to deploy strategies not available to others, in withholding and obscuring knowledge from both his enemies and his subjects. Xenophon's royal characters appear to accept that there are circumstances in which they should use tactics similar to Plato's 'noble lie' (Pl. *Rep.* 3.414b–417b), deceiving others to benefit them.[39] War is agreed to be such an occasion, but the *Cyropaedia* explores the role of deception in leadership, giving rise to further questions: whether Xenophon regards Cyrus as an ideal or not, and whether his regime should be admired. In 'republic to empire' readings, Cyrus' use of deception is treated as a negative quality. Joseph Reisert characterizes Cyrus as 'a sort of moral black hole around which the whole galaxy of his subordinates and subjects will come to revolve'.[40] These responses sometimes draw on Straussian arguments, in which Xenophon's apparent praise of Cyrus conceals a sharp critique.[41]

In a key discussion early in the *Cyropaedia*, Cambyses discuss the roles of truth and deception in leadership with his son as the latter leaves Persia to begin his campaign. After a long and wide-ranging discussion on the importance for leaders of being knowledgeable and able to command respect and obedience, of leading by example, and

[37] Illarraga 2021.
[38] Azoulay 2018a
[39] Hesk 2000: 151–62; Schofield 2007, 2023: 139–62.
[40] Reisert 2009: 302; see also Newell 1983; Nadon 2001.
[41] Tamiolaki 2020b.

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demonstrating a greater capacity for enduring the hardships required on campaign, Cyrus asks how to gain advantage over the enemy (*Cyr.* 1.6.19–26). Cambyses begins by setting out the moral complexity of leadership, such that a leader may sometimes use questionable tactics to achieve an acceptable goal:

> Be aware that the man who is going to do these things must be a plotter and secretive and a trickster and deceptive, a thief and a bandit, making gains from the enemy in every act. . .if you were that kind of man, my son, you would be a man with the greatest respect for justice and the law. (*Cyr.* 1.6.27)

Cambyses goes on to explain that many of the skills that the Persian boys learn have bad as well as good uses, such as the tricks used to trap prey on hunting expeditions (1.6.28). Young boys use trickery only against animals, and are taught 'to tell the truth, not to trick and not to take advantage' (1.6.33), a practice which the Persians enacted as law in response to the Greek fashion for teaching deception (1.6.31–2), and also perhaps a criticism of Spartan practices.[42] This creates the counter-intuitive point that the ideal leader, the paradigm of virtue, is able to use non-virtuous forms of persuasion, rhetorical strategies such as deception and theft which are forbidden to the subjects, to encourage them to obey. This disjunction opens up the possibility of readings in which Xenophon's text, like the actions it describes, offers the elite a lesson inaccessible to those whom they lead.[43] Others, such as Christopher Nadon, focus on the implications for the regime Cyrus institutes after his conquests are complete; this 'republic to empire' reading of the *Cyropaedia* follows Machiavelli's analysis of the role of deception in the exercise of power, and questions whether any 'straightforward' reading of the work is possible.[44]

While these readings emphasize moments of ambivalence and complexity in Xenophon's portrait of Cyrus, they underplay the importance of the many Greek antecedents for the use of trickery by leaders. Odysseus is a prime example of a trickster leader, exemplifying the quality of *mētis*, a cunning intelligence which is praiseworthy in a military or political leader.[45] It also downplays Xenophon's clear rejection

[42] Hesk 2000: 122–41. See also Chapter 4.

[43] See Newell 1983. On Xenophon, Machiavelli, and deception, see Rasmussen 2009 for a Straussian-tinged analysis.

[44] Nadon 1996, 2001: 1–13, criticizing the literary readings of Due 1989 and Gera 1993 among others.

[45] Detienne and Vernant 1974; Odysseus is the paradigmatic example of *mētis* in leadership.

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of another form of deception, the over-promising of benefits. A leader's credibility and authority will evaporate quickly if he raises expectations and fails to deliver (1.6.19), and no-one will be willing to follow him; this form of dishonesty is not acceptable, whether one is leading a pack of hounds or a band of soldiers. Likewise, people are willing to obey those who seem skilled and to be acting with goodwill and concern for their interests.

Cyrus does not rely on *mētis* at the start of his development as a leader. He first deploys it as he overtakes his uncle Cyaxares as effective leader of the Median forces (*Cyr.* 4.2). Cyrus has been keen to follow up their battlefield action with pursuit of their opponents, but Cyaxares declines to send out a raiding party, preferring to spend the evening hosting a feast for his commanders. Cyrus asks for permission to take volunteers on a raid, seizes the opportunity, and, as Xenophon takes great pains to show, seeks the support of the gods in doing so (4.2.12). While the gods send a divine light to illuminate his journey (4.2.15; see p. 109 above), and enable him to return victorious with further spoils, Cyaxares becomes resentful of his nephew's activity.

Xenophon uses this episode to show that Cyrus' skill and qualities play an important part in his success. Another element of Xenophon's conception of leadership, the ability of leaders to recognize moments of opportunity, originates from a military context: the word *kairos* is often used by historians to denote the good order of forces readied for battle.[46] But Cyrus' ability to recognize the opportune moment and act on it is recognized by the steady drift of allied troops to his command. The arrival of a large Persian force after the battle is over cements his rise in status.

Cyaxares' complaint to Cyrus and their subsequent discussion provide a second dialogue on the nature of monarchy (5.5). Cyaxares recognizes that he is diminished by Cyrus' success and the material evidence for it. Although he is 'born from a king and from ancient ancestry which reaches back as far as human memory, and considered a king himself', he sees that he is visibly less successful and has a lesser entourage than Cyrus (5.5.8).

Cyaxares' complaint is that Cyrus' energy and successful action have alienated his own support and dishonoured him (5.5.25–6). He illustrates the way Cyrus has won the support of the Medes using

[46] Trédé 1992; Atack 2018b connects this to the account of the *kairos* in Plato's *Statesman*.

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two examples: petting another man's hunting dogs (5.5.28) and seducing his wife (5.5.30).[47] Cyaxares feels emasculated by Cyrus' success, claiming that he has been excluded from sharing in honourable activity and instead receiving favours 'like a woman', while Cyrus performs the masculine role (5.5.33). This is one of many examples of Xenophon analogizing monarchical power to the patriarchal power of a man over his wife and household.

Monarchy and gender

Kings occupy the top place in any non-divine hierarchy. In doing so, they display a hyper-masculinity which emasculates those they dominate, as Xenophon makes explicit in his account of Cyrus' encounters with Cyaxares and Croesus. Royal performance transcends gender norms: Cyrus' adoption of facial make-up represents both royal seclusion – people cannot see his true face – and a way of signalling his power, rather than the negative assessment of women's use of make-up seen in the *Oeconomicus*.

Royal women also transcend gender norms through their proximity to power. Cyrus rewards the masculine-coded courage of the Armenian prince Tigranes' wife with a gift of 'feminine jewellery' (*gynaikeion kosmon*, *Cyr.* 8.4.24). Women can participate more directly in palace-based monarchical regimes than in the *polis*; the palace is effectively a large household, and they also accompany their husbands on campaign. This gives women like Tigranes' wife and Pantheia opportunities for action. Just as Ischomachus' wife exercises knowledge in managing their household and discusses and criticizes her husband's actions, royal women display knowledge in administering the palace, negotiating its hierarchies, and assessing the performance of their male kin.[48]

Cyrus' mother, Mandane, voices the clearest assessment of the risk of tyranny and the impact of tyranny on community (1.3.13–18). She has taken her son to visit her father, Astyages, the king of the Medes, where he has experienced its palace culture and the unlimited power wielded by his grandfather. She is concerned that this experience will undermine his commitment to Persian republican values. While Cyrus is

[47] Cf. Croesus at *Cyr.* 7.2.28–9.
[48] Baragwanath 2002.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

confident that he will retain his earlier lessons in justice from Persia, Mandane sets out the difference between the two forms of kingship clearly:

> 'But, my son,' she said, 'at your grandfather's court and in Persia the same things are not agreed to be just (*dikaia*). For he has made himself the master (*despotēn*) of everyone in Media, while in Persia having an equal share (*to ison echein*) is considered just. But your father is first to do what is ordered by the city, and he accepts those orders, and the measure is not his soul (*psuchē*) but the law (*nomos*).' (*Cyr.* 1.3.18)

Mandane's clearsighted political analysis reflects a broader trend in Greek historiography; Herodotus, too, depicts the women of royal households as perceptive analysts of politics and religion.[49] Because women moved from one household to another on marriage, Mandane's life has given her experience of two cultures and a comparative perspective. Xenophon uses her to explore the possibility of a hybridization of his two forms of kingship through uniting the differentiated cultures of Medes and Persians.

The Asian queen Pantheia, 'the most beautiful woman', plays a significant role in the *Cyropaedia*. Her story explores key ethical themes while being interwoven with that of Cyrus; it appears to some as a romantic sub-plot, but in exploring both self-control (*enkrateia*) and the limits of *charis* it provides an opportunity for Xenophon to explore key ethical themes.[50] Pantheia enters the story when she is captured as Cyrus' forces defeat the Assyrian forces with which her husband, Abradatas, king of Susa, is allied. Distributing the human spoils of war is complicated; Cyrus decides to keep her as a hostage rather than to enslave her (5.1.17, 6.4.7). Cyrus' friend Araspas reports her incredible beauty, which leads Cyrus to decline to meet her lest he be distracted from his mission (5.1.8).[51]

Cyrus places Pantheia in the care of Araspas, expecting that she will become useful in some way (5.1.17). However, although Araspas has sworn that he will maintain self-control and not mistreat her, he lacks Cyrus' self-control, becomes obsessed with his beautiful charge, and, when she rejects his approaches, threatens her. Pantheia does not submit to his harassment, but sends one of her eunuch retinue to

[49] E.g. Gorgo at Hdt. 5.51; cf. Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae, Hdt. 1.212–15.

[50] The episode has a rich bibliography: Due 1989: 79–83; Gera 1993: 221–45; Tatum 1989: 163–88; Stadter 1991: 480–4; Whitmarsh 2018: 60–2.

[51] See Chapter 2.

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demand action from Cyrus (6.1.31–3). Cyrus' resolution of the incident demonstrates how he gains considerable advantage from those around him. After he removes her from Araspas' control, the grateful Pantheia offers Cyrus the support of her husband (6.1.38–40). She commissions new armour for her husband, made from her jewellery, and sends him to fight for Cyrus in a vivid and touching scene which emphasizes Cyrus' status as a heroic figure and *kalos kagathos* (6.4.2–11).

Cyrus finally meets and sees Pantheia as she mourns over the mutilated corpse of Abradatas, retrieved from the battlefield (7.3.8–12). While he offers continuing protection for her, she blames both herself and Cyrus for her husband's death. Pantheia is one of very few characters whom Xenophon depicts criticizing Cyrus, and perhaps the most justified. After Cyrus leaves, she takes her own life (7.3.14).

In lower levels of Persian imperial administration, Xenophon shows how an exceptional woman can operate as a leader. After the death of her husband Zenis, Mania asks the satrap Pharnabazus to be allowed to take over his role as governor of Aeolis (*Hell.* 3.1.10–12).[52] She performs well, keeping the area loyal, supporting Pharnabazus' raids on the neighbouring peoples, and offering the satrap appropriate hospitality. However, as the years pass, her son-in-law finds it intolerable to be governed by a woman; because she did not guard against her own family, he is able to assassinate her and her son (3.1.14). The story of Mania echoes Herodotus' tales of women as leaders, but it also illustrates the precarity of their power.

Tyranny and autocracy

Not all single-person rule is good; theoretical idealism gives way to the knowledge of lived reality. The encounter between two non-Greek sole rulers, Cyrus and Croesus, shows that there are different forms of monarchical power (*Cyr.* 7.2), with the case for the difference being made by the defeated Croesus. And in the short dialogue *Hiero*, Xenophon examines the rule of an extra-constitutional Greek sole ruler exerting power as his only means of authority. In both these conversations, Xenophon engages broadly with the literary topos of the encounter between the wise man and the tyrant; both also critique earlier examples of the genre, especially Herodotus' accounts of the

[52] Azoulay 2007; Baragwanath 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meetings of Solon and Croesus (Hdt. 1.29–33) and of Cyrus with Croesus (Hdt. 1.86–91).[53]

Tyranny is a deprecated form of rule, the 'bad' form of monarchy in the sixfold typology of constitutions (*Mem.* 4.6.12). In tyrannies, an individual holds political power without any authority beyond their own coercive power, and dominates the community without the consent of the ruled. Tyranny lacks the cosmic and divine authority of kingship, a point noted by Croesus, the *turannos* of Lydia, as he compares his own rule of the Lydians with that of Cyrus (*Cyr.* 7.2.21–4).[54] While Croesus has amassed great wealth, he lacks understanding of the divine, and has misinterpreted a key message from Delphi; even the idea of testing oracles is somewhat impious (see pp. 109–10 above). Croesus finally achieves understanding in the recognition that, after his defeat has emasculated him, he will have a happy life enjoying his wealth with no continuing responsibility (7.2.27–8), living a life that parallels the one that his wife enjoyed during his successful years.

Croesus' assessment of his changed situation offers a novel answer to the question of tyranny and happiness, placing it within Xenophon's overarching conceptual framework, within which all forms of organization can be analogized to the household. There was a popular view that an individual with unrestricted power and the capacity to satisfy all their desires must, from a hedonist perspective, be the happiest of all men, and his condition must be a desirable one.[55]

Xenophon also critically examines this topos in the *Hiero*, which features two historical fifth-century people apparently in the role of ruler and adviser: Hieron, the tyrant of Syracuse, and the poet Simonides, who was famous for writing praise poems to order, often for tyrannical leaders.[56] While Xenophon draws on the historical situation of both his characters, they also both inhabit and subvert the stock types of tyrant and wise adviser. As with the *Cyropaedia*, the *Hiero* has attracted divergent interpretations. Vivienne Gray follows other scholars who have accepted that Xenophon is straightforwardly suggesting, through Simonides in the role of adviser, a way in which a tyrant can transform

[53] Gray 1986.

[54] The term *turannos* may originate in a Lydian context, where it denotes a legitimate hereditary ruler, albeit one whose dynastic line came to power by force (V. Parker 1998).

[55] Pl. *Grg.* 470d–471d, where Polus claims this status for the Macedonian king Archelaus; see also McGlew 1993: 32–3.

[56] Strauss argues that Simonides, as a Socratic figure, conceals his wisdom in the dialogue (L. Strauss 2013: 38–40); cf. Zuolo 2017; Dorion and Bandini 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

himself into a king, and simultaneously legitimize his power and bring happiness to those he rules.[57] She argues that the suggestions Simonides makes could transform Hieron from tyrant to something resembling Aristotle's *pambasileus*.[58] Others have been less sure, finding complex irony in the work, both in Hieron's developing presentation of his plight (*Hiero* 2–8) and in Simonides' response and advice (9–11).[59] Claudia Mársico has pointed to connections with the discussion of tyranny in Platonic texts, although, unusually, in this case the *Alcibiades* and *Hipparchus* may be pseudepigraphic additions to the corpus and so post-date Xenophon's thought on the topic; there are also parallels in the account of tyranny in *Republic* 9.[60]

Still other commentators have pointed to Plato's critical use of Simonides as a character to represent past forms of knowledge which are now obsolescent: his definition of justice is rejected at the outset of the *Republic* (1.331d–334e), and a significant section of the *Protagoras* (338e–347a) is devoted to a detailed critique of the maxims embedded in one of his poems.[61] This critique fits within a broader fourth-century challenge to the literary and cultural authority of the poets (Isoc. *Evagoras* 8–11), which makes it harder to read Xenophon's portrayal of Simonides as uncomplicatedly positive.[62]

Simonides asks Hieron of Syracuse to instruct him in how the life of a tyrant differs from that of an ordinary citizen (*Hiero* 1.1–2). Hieron is a tyrant in the normal Greek usage of the term, an extra-constitutional ruler of a *polis* whose rule depends on the exercise of power. Simonides expects an answer which presents the 'happy tyrant' model, but Hieron gives him the opposite, arguing that the apparent oppressor is in fact the oppressed. The tyrant, who has no apparent constraint on his resources or actions, and so is popularly supposed to be able to maximize his pleasure and be happy, is paradoxically more constrained than the private individuals he dominates, and less happy, because of his fear of those he dominates attacking him. The private citizen therefore has more freedom than the ruler, and more capacity to satisfy sensory desires: for example, private individuals can travel to attend festivals

[57] Gray 2007: 34.

[58] Arist. *Pol.* 3.16–17; Gray 2007: 30.

[59] E.g. Too 2021: 119–30, who suggests that the didactic authority of poetry is also under question.

[60] Mársico 2023.

[61] McCoy 1999.

[62] Dorion and Bandini 2021: cxlix–clxxvii.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0533245124000087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and events, while the tyrant is afraid to leave his secure base at home for insecure venues (1.12).[63]

Hieron gives multiple examples to support his claim that he cannot experience happiness, in response to Simonides' questions. The tyrant has no meaningful relationships in which to take pleasure: he must always assume that any praise is flattery, and that any lover who accepts his advances does so out of fear rather than willingly. Because all his wishes are easily fulfilled, he cannot take pleasure in anticipating the future fulfilment of his desires. The normal human connections between family and friends (*philia*) are impossible under the conditions of tyranny; family and friends are often those who assassinate tyrants (3.6–8). Lovers offer only flattery, not any sense of a genuine interpersonal connection.

In the second half of the dialogue (8–11), Simonides changes his tactics and offers suggestions for how Hieron might become more fulfilled and alleviate his fear of his subjects by transforming the way in which he rules. On a positive reading of the dialogue, this advice would enable the tyrant to transform himself into a king, by legitimizing his rule. If Hieron were to gain the trust of those he oppresses, by demonstrating goodwill towards them and pursuing goals which benefited the community, he could win their assent to his rule and so relieve himself of fear. Simonides' suggestions have a strongly Xenophontic ring to them, as much as a Socratic one.[64] He suggests organizing the citizens into tribes and instituting competitions between them, for military training and business expertise (9.6), agricultural productivity (9.7), and entrepreneurship (9.9–10). The prizes which Hieron provides will encourage citizens to invest in the hope of securing victory, as those funding Athenian tragedies did (9.4–6). Whether such competition represents aristocratic agonism or market forces, Simonides' suggestions are appropriate both to his context, as a writer of victory odes, and to Xenophon's practice. Cyrus, for example, instituted competitions among his troops to encourage them to train (*Cyr.* 1.6.18, 2.1.22–3; see Chapter 5).

Simonides suggests that Hieron keep his mercenaries but use them to protect the whole community, rather than protecting him from that community (*Hiero* 10.1–8). Hieron should further invest in the city, competing with other rulers in the adornment of his community.

[63] The historical Hieron's teams competed and won at major festivals.
[64] Dorion and Bandini 2021: lxiii–lxviii.

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This will cause the citizens to love him; he will be overwhelmed with their erotic desire (11.11). As Victoria Wohl notes, Xenophon's language here evokes a democratic topos of erotic love between citizen and city.[65] Historical tyrants, notably Athens' Peisistratids, had acted as benefactors to the city, and had driven many cultural developments which took full form under the democracy.[66]

Xenophon's accounts of Hieron and Croesus both emphasize personal relationships and explore how power transforms and corrupts them. His closing chapter in the *Cyropaedia* suggests that the Achaemenid dynasty is similarly corrupted by its power, with king and court failing to follow the precepts given by Cyrus to maintain the skills and habits developed in the austere Persian tradition (*Cyr.* 8.8.4–7).

Hegemony in the Greek world as monarchical power

Although the Greek world of Xenophon's time was made up of multiple independent cities with varied political regimes, larger and more powerful cities, such as Athens and Syracuse, exerted power over smaller ones, especially those of strategic importance for trade and resources. Such rule could be characterized as a form of monarchical rule. Thucydides' history had noted the difficulties of maintaining such rule, in Pericles' 'policy' speech (Thuc. 2.59–64), and in the 'Melian Dialogue' had made implicit criticism of the Athenian ideology which had supported imperialism (5.84–116). Xenophon had seen both Athens lose its 'empire' of Greek cities around the Aegean, originally its allies in the Delian League against a notional Persian threat, during the Peloponnesian War, and also its attempt to reassert its hegemonic status after the failure of Spartan leadership. His military experience coincided with the period in which Sparta had become the hegemonic power of the Greek world. The later parts of the *Hellenica* explore the collective failings of leadership exhibited by Sparta.[67] The strife for leadership among the Greek forces of the *Anabasis* also reflects these inter-*polis* disputes. Xenophon is severely critical of Spartan leadership in both works.

[65] Wohl 2002: 241–4.
[66] Zatta 2009.
[67] Tuplin 1993.

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Near contemporaries of Xenophon, such as Isocrates, argued for a new Panhellenic alliance and expedition against Persia, ideally led by Athens, as a response to the changing international situation in the first half of the fourth century.[68] Xenophon is explicit in articulating similar Panhellenic goals; he envisages the Cyreans returning to Asia Minor after they have reached Greece, in order to exploit its wealth (*An.* 3.2.24–6).[69] As John Dillery argues, both Cyrus' own assessment of the Greeks and also their later success in finding their way home display Persia as weak compared with Greek capabilities.[70] The fertility and wealth of the lands ruled by the Great King offered a tempting alternative to the real and increasing poverty of Athens. Agesilaus' campaign is cast in Panhellenic terms, introduced by Xenophon as such (*Hell.* 3.1.1–2); in the *Agesilaus*, he praises the king's plans for revenge on Persia (*Ages.* 1.8).[71] But the Cyreans did not return to Greece, and Agesilaus' campaign in Asia ended without a significant outcome; the king returned to Sparta when summoned by the ephors (*Ages.* 1.36–8). Xenophon shows the constitutionally limited king recognizing the limits of the Panhellenic dream. Chapter 5 of the *Poroi* suggests an ambivalent attitude to military adventures in any recovered Athenian hegemony.[72]

Conclusion

Xenophon's thoughts on monarchy are some of his most interesting and, as the concluding chapter shows, most influential in later antiquity and up to early modern times. His accounts of figures such as Cyrus and Agesilaus enable him to explore different modes of kingship and to incorporate the performative elements he felt central to Achaemenid kingship into his model of good leadership. But these accounts also enable him to explore ethical topics, and how and even whether a good life can be lived in conditions of extreme abundance or absolute power. The *Cyropaedia* and the *Hiero* both provide important expansions of his ethical thought.

[68] See Low 2018.
[69] Warner and Cawkwell 1972: 23–4.
[70] Dillery 1995: 60.
[71] Dillery 1995: 99–101.
[72] Farrell 2016.

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