

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF XENOPHON

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The life of Xenophon (*ca.* 430–355 BCE) invites fascination and admiration. Born a citizen of Athens, the world's first democracy and a great maritime empire, he observed the strengths and weaknesses of democratic and imperial politics. Xenophon benefited from the vibrant culture generated in that milieu, where the potent dramas of Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed beneath the towering architecture of the Acropolis, and the grandeur of Athens drew into his horizon intellectual luminaries from around the Greek world. The imposing legacy of Pericles and the intrigues of Alcibiades dominated Athenian politics in Xenophon's youth, while the devastating consequences of the Great War with Sparta plagued his coming-of-age.

Yet it was his encounter with the first and most influential of political philosophers which left the most profound mark on Xenophon. For he was a keen student of Socrates, one so devoted that much of his mature life was dedicated to his remembrance in writing of the Socratic life, and especially of the probing examinations associated with that life. The speeches, deeds and thought of Socrates explicitly occupy an entire volume of Xenophon's five-volume collected works, one of only three extant portraits of the philosopher (along with those of Aristophanes and Plato) by someone who knew and conversed with him in Athens. This fact alone would warrant serious attention and care when reading Xenophon, whose substantial *corpus* has survived intact for almost twenty-five centuries. (Many other students of Socrates, the so-called 'Socratics', wrote about him, but aside from Xenophon and Plato few works of theirs survive; unlike Socrates and Xenophon, several also founded their own schools of philosophy.)

This volume takes as its theme the political thought of Xenophon. Unlike many of his fellow-students of Socrates, Xenophon was also a man of action. As a young man, he left Athens (and Socrates) to join a military expedition of Greeks and non-Greeks which marched deep into the Persian Empire and, outside Babylon, won a memorable, if ultimately pyrrhic victory over the forces of the Great King. Stripped of reliable allies and with their leadership severely depleted by imprudence and treachery, the 'Ten Thousand' Greeks turned to Xenophon, who stepped forward to lead the vulnerable contingent as it fought its way back to the sea. He ascended quickly in the ranks and was the leader most responsible for their successful return home — although his own homecoming was denied. Athens, for reasons that remain obscure, exiled Xenophon. He continued to campaign (under a Spartan king) with distinction, acquiring for himself an estate near Olympia to which he soon retired with his wife. Here, to quote from the poem of a nineteenth-century admirer, 'The Philosophic Warrior sought repose'.

In his leisure, Xenophon hunted with his young sons and reflected upon his experiences in Athens and his remarkable career. Over the course of his long retirement, the practical life of a retired soldier and general gave way to a life of contemplation and writing. Socrates, while central to his thoughts, was not always their immediate focus. He wrote volumes about Greek military and political history, much of which he witnessed first-hand, including his thoughts on the domestic and foreign affairs of Athens and Sparta. In addition, he wrote short treatises on hunting, horsemanship, the use of cavalry in battle, and tyranny, as well as a monumental study of Cyrus the Great's founding of the Persian Empire. The originality of his works is no less stunning than their depth, notwithstanding that Thucydides preceded him and that the prolific Isocrates and Plato were his contemporaries.

The range of Xenophon's writing has no rival in the ancient world. Yet even in his writings on politics and political history the questions at the core of his Socratic works constantly surface. Socrates himself (ironically, in a dialogue of Plato) acknowledged that men with experience of both political affairs and the summit of philosophy were needed to illuminate aspects of human life which he himself chose not to discuss (*Timaeus* 19b–e). To judge from his writings, as one twentieth-century admirer of Xenophon has remarked, Xenophon was preeminently suited to accomplish in his leisure — and in the light of his Socratic education — a contemplative reliving and deepening of those challenges which are peculiar to the experience of politics at its peak. The intriguing paradox embodied in Xenophon is most evident in Diogenes Laertius' conclusion that 'he emulated Socrates precisely' throughout his entire life, despite the facts that he chose to write and that his own life encompassed deeds which on the surface would seem to distance him from his teacher in the most decisive respects. We are thus led to wonder: how did Xenophon's philosophical concerns influence his political thought and, in particular, his judgment regarding the proper ends and means of politics and the political life? This is one of the principal questions animating this Special Issue, and it is one which we hope will engage its readers.

Xenophon's life and works have stimulated diverse studies and approaches. He has been considered, for example, an essential source for understanding Socrates and his philosophy, for studying Athenian views of Sparta and Greek views of Persia, as well as for critiquing Athens' democracy and its empire. His writings are a major resource for reconstructing Greek history, in addition to providing insight into Persian culture, classical techniques for riding horses and hunting with dogs, the daily life of Greeks, the experiences of sailors and soldiers, and the organization of the ancient household. Studies of the reception history, or afterlife, of his texts have now emerged, often revealing more about those who read his works (and how they were interpreted) than about the author.

The contributors to this volume share a common concern for the broader questions aroused by reading Xenophon's works. But the articles featured here are distinguished above all by the careful attention each author brings to the study of a particular text, or set of texts, in his *corpus*. All approach the enduring questions raised by Xenophon's accounts of political, moral and economic phenomena with an eye for his rhetorical style and the inter-textual dialogue at work within and among his writings. Their disagreements in interpretation suggest that the full depths of Xenophon's political thought have yet to be fathomed and that such an enterprise remains a vital one. For by sustained reflection on the fundamental problems of politics disclosed directly and indirectly in his works, we may come to learn not only *about* Xenophon and his times but *from* him in our time.

The articles in this volume contribute to a growing body of scholarly work which reads and interprets Xenophon with the seriousness his longevity and reputation across the ages quietly demand. Ben Lorch opens the volume by inquiring into Xenophon's complex account, in his *Memorabilia*, of Socrates' attempt to teach moderation concerning the divine, the Socratic prolegomena to any examination of the human things, and especially justice. David Johnson and Carol McNamara explore the Socratic education on display in the *Memorabilia* with respect to the hedonistic temptation of the private or apolitical life, on one hand, and the various inducements and obstacles that ennoble or degrade the political life in Socrates' view, on the other. Laurence Nee shows that the *Oeconomicus* exposes the defects of the claim by the gentleman and by the city that self-sacrifice is the defining principle of the good life. Gabriel Danzig and Joseph Reiser demonstrate the rival political lessons which readers of the *Cyropaedia* acquire from close examination of the extraordinary life of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire and the other great constellation in Xenophon's *cosmos* whose gravitational pull (apparently on Xenophon and his thoughts about what is, or is not, possible in politics) opposes, or seems to counter-balance, the impressive suasion of Socrates. B.J. Dobski and Dustin Gish demonstrate how Xenophon in the *Hellenika* infuses and elevates his account of contemporary Athenian and Spartan affairs with his philosophic reflections on the necessity and justice that naturally circumscribe the best regime possible for human beings as they are, not as we wish them to be. John Lewis, in his commentary on the *Poroi*, reminds us that Xenophon the Athenian never ceased thinking about the political and economic affairs of his native city, especially in difficult times, and how it might be improved and prosper by turning from imperial ambition and indulgent excess towards moderation and self-sufficiency. Xenophon's explicitly political works are thus an example of genuine patriotism worthy of one who knows that such exhortations need not (and perhaps could not) achieve their aim by citing as an authority the very philosophy that helped to discover and shape them. For politics, in the thought of Xenophon, has a certain dignity of

its own, the allure of which is grasped with the utmost clarity only when contemplated against the backdrop provided by a Socratic education, or the example of a Cyrus, not to mention the charming but profound rhetoric of a prudent gentleman like Xenophon.

The authors of the reviews which conclude this volume (Eric Buzzetti, John Dillery, Vivienne Gray, Aristide Tessitore and C.J. Tuplin) assess recent books on (or related to) Xenophon, taking up in their remarks many themes discussed at length in the articles. Their own publications, like the articles here, are models of the sort of thoughtful reading we hope this volume will encourage. For new readers and students of Xenophon, the articles usefully serve as an entrée into the bibliographic foundations (in English) for future studies. The footnotes therein collectively point readers to good books, articles and chapters on Xenophon as well as to excellent (recent) translations crucial to the renaissance of Xenophon studies for those unable to approach Xenophon and his texts through the original Greek. These articles also acknowledge seminal works of interpretation by pioneers such as Leo Strauss, William Higgins, Christopher Bruell and C.J. Tuplin, whose readings of Xenophon have educated generations of students as much through their spoken words as through those in print.

We were gratified by the number and quality of the manuscripts sent in response to our call for contributions and regret that this prohibited us from publishing all worthy submissions. Our decision to focus on studies devoted to Xenophon and his political thought limited the selection further, as did our desire to include articles which would do justice to the wide range of his works and would do so from competing perspectives. We want to express our gratitude to the contributors for their generosity in entertaining our suggestions, and to Sandra Good and Liz Robb for their assistance in further polishing all of the contributions.

We also would like to thank those who participated for several years on conference panels dedicated to Xenophon, often under the auspices of the *Society for Greek Political Thought*. Bill Higgins, in particular, deserves a special word of appreciation for his participation and support. Many of the contributions in this volume are the harvest of fruits which first began to ripen during those presentations and ensuing discussions. Finally, our original and abiding debt is to Kyriakos Demetriou and Thornton Lockwood, who proposed the idea for this Special Issue, invited us to serve as the Guest Editors, and advised us in its preparation. We continue to be grateful for the opportunity.

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