

REVIEW

A STRAUSSIAN XENOPHON

Eric Buzzetti, *Xenophon The Socratic Prince: The Argument of the Anabasis of Cyrus. Recovering Political Philosophy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xvii + 337. Hardback, \$115.00/£74.00. ISBN 978-1-137-33330-8.

In this new monograph on the political-philosophical underpinnings of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Eric Buzzetti (henceforth B.) offers a thought-provoking journey through the text by arguing that Xenophon thoroughly critiques the political life, in order to present his readers with an introduction to the philosophical life. B. proposes that there is in fact 'an authentic plan of the *Anabasis*' (4), that is, an underlying argument or *logos* that is made of three main parts (see below), which the reader must follow sequentially. In following this plan, the reader—young and politically ambitious, according to B.—is led to appreciate Xenophon's thoroughly Socratic credentials, and in particular, the way in which Xenophon the character practises many of Socrates' teachings on virtue and leadership in the later books of the *Anabasis*.

The work is made up of seven chapters (each of which follows in a linear fashion the seven books of the *Anabasis*), and is divided into three key parts: the first explores Xenophon's presentation of Cyrus the Younger—the Godlike King—in Book One of the *Anabasis*; the second section focuses on the presentation of the Spartan general Clearchus—the Pious King—in Book Two; the third and most substantial section, covering Books Three to Seven, examines the presentation of Xenophon the character—the Socratic King.¹ The book also comes equipped with three appendices, which explore (i) Xenophon's motives behind deploying the pseudonym Themistogenes of Syracuse in the *Hellemica* (3.1.2); (ii) the antiquity of the book and chapter divisions of the *Anabasis*; and (iii) the true number of the Ten Thousand.

In a lengthy introduction to the volume, B. elaborates on his methodology, which is strongly influenced by Leo Strauss' work on Xenophon. According to B., Xenophon writes in an esoteric manner, conveying the truth obliquely, due to his reputation as a Socratic. Such a connection would have been politically fraught at the end of the fifth century, as exemplified by the Athenians' famous trial and subsequent execution of Socrates in 399 BC. B. then further expands

¹ It is important, of course, to distinguish between Xenophon the narrator and Xenophon the character, albeit the distinction between the two is often elusive; see further J. Grethlein, 'Xenophon's *Anabasis* from Character to Narrator', *JHS* 132 (2012): 23–40.

on his highly idiosyncratic approach to the *Anabasis* manuscript tradition, which appears to favour the manuscript that best attests to Xenophon's apparent tendency to rename people, places, rivers, etc. Finally, B. provides a helpful literature review of important recent publications on the *Anabasis*, and reinforces his view that previous scholarship has failed to pay full attention to political philosophy and Socratism in the thought of Xenophon.

In the first part, B. explores the presentation of Cyrus the Younger. Although Cyrus represents an attractive form of rule in Xenophon's largely sympathetic account, B. suggests that Xenophon lends an implicit critique of Cyrus' morality and his particular model of rule as a Godlike King. For B., the limitations of this model are only further confirmed in a subsequent (re-)reading of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a work that closes with a damning assessment of the Persian monarchy and its demise following the death of its founder, Cyrus the Great.

The second part shifts the focus towards the Spartan general Clearchus. As was the case with Cyrus the Younger, B. seeks to demonstrate whether or not Clearchus' form of rule can be understood to succeed in conjoining the noble with the good. Discerning another flawed model of leadership, B. argues that Clearchus' ultimate failure was in his rash hopefulness in gaining the friendship of the Persian satrap Tissaphernes. The discussion well illustrates the recklessness of Clearchus in this regard, who falsely believed that he and the Ten Thousand were destined to a safe outcome on account of their having 'acted with unimpeachable justice and piety' (100); Clearchus' lack of self-knowledge and his muddled approach towards ensuring the best interests of the men emphasises the limits of his uncritical appeals to virtue. In the end, B. contends that this hopefulness towards Tissaphernes is in dialogue with Clearchus' hopefulness towards the gods; while his piety was not the root cause of his failure, his piety cannot be separated from the foolish confidence that he placed in the false friendship of Tissaphernes. It is in this sense that Xenophon's second kind of ruler (i.e. the Pious King) fails no less than the first in reconciling morality with advantage.

The third step of the book turns to Xenophon the character, 'the Socratic King'. In this part B. proposes that Xenophon offers a philosophical assessment of the virtues of piety (Book 3), courage (Book 4), justice (Book 5), gratitude (Book 6), and the love of the soldier (Book 7). Xenophon's Socratic education serves as a cornerstone of the remainder of the work, then, as the character Xenophon repeatedly appeals to philosophy in order to try and bring together the noble and the good (cf. 113). Thus, throughout this part of the analysis, B. proposes that Socrates is behind many elusive passages and (seemingly) digressive *logoi*. For instance, in Xenophon's dream that shows his father's house being struck by lightning, B. argues that the father being referred to is none other than Socrates himself, and that the dream in fact conveys that Xenophon must abandon his Socrates-like unwillingness to rule (119–22).

One of the book's core strengths is the author's concerted attempt to situate the *Anabasis* against Xenophon's wider suite of works, which touch on a range of issues and themes that pertain to political theory, philosophy, historiography, household management, etc. For instance, it is near the end of the volume that we learn how all of Xenophon's chief non-Socratic works, along with the *Anabasis*, end in disappointment of some kind. B. convincingly asserts that this is because the political life 'is ultimately a disappointment according to Xenophon' (294). This sensitivity towards Xenophon's wider authorial and biographical contexts thus enables B. to generate meaningful connections between the corpus of Xenophonic works, and to consider the potential conditions under which Xenophon was able to conceive of, produce, and publish the account of his march upcountry.

Amongst the more contentious aspects of B.'s reading, however, is his Straussian view that Xenophon writes in such a way that the surface of the text obscures the true meaning of his *logos*. Although the *Anabasis* appears to be a dramatic, highly readable account about the Cyreans' pyrrhic victory at Cunaxa, and their subsequent march back to Asia Minor, B. contends that it is in fact a tract—written in the style of a war memoir—on the seriousness of the philosophical life, as embodied by Socrates (295–300). According to this reading, Xenophon rejects the political life, which fails to conjoin the noble with the good. Yet it is difficult to imagine that Xenophon's apparent message on the philosophical life would have been so controversial that he would need to obscure it since, as seems most likely, the work was published in c. 360 BC.² By this date Xenophon had already been exiled by the Athenians, and could hardly have been so concerned about potential state prosecutions led by the Athenians against him (*contra* 57).

Another key objection to B.'s argument is his insistence that Xenophon operated in a 'solidly pious world that resembled in some respects the Islamic world of today' (8). Not only does this comparison appear to me an unhelpful, indeed anachronistic one, collapsing the hugely different historical-cultural circumstances of today from Xenophon's own day; it also mischaracterises Xenophon's own religious identity. Throughout this volume, B. repeatedly suggests that Xenophon is characterised as critical of others' piety, and that the narrator placed Xenophon the character at a critical distance from the god Apollo (290 n. 87; cf. 116). Any reading of the *Anabasis* will show that this is not a satisfactory interpretation. On the contrary, Xenophon the character is highly attuned to all manner of divine phenomena over the course of the soldiers' march; oracles, dreams, omens, and sacrifices are all closely woven into

² At 5.3.7–13, Xenophon refers to Xenophon the character's future life at an estate in the land of Skillous. He does so, however, using the imperfect tense, thus implying that he had already been forced to leave this idyllic estate; cf. M. Flower, *Xenophon's Anabasis or The Expedition of Cyrus* (Oxford and New York, 2012) 29–30.

the development of the narrative—a narrative in which Xenophon, as both author and character, forms an indelible relationship with the gods.³

In spite of these caveats, and here I might add B.'s unfortunate tendency to assume that Xenophon names or renames characters with speaking names, so as to convey important esoteric messages, *Xenophon The Socratic Prince* is an engaging addition to the recent spate of works on Xenophon's *Anabasis* and/or his approach to leadership. The book rightly encourages readers to look beyond the surface of the text and to draw patterns that extend beyond their immediate narrative contexts. That being said, B.'s chief argument on the principal *logos* of the *Anabasis* as being a rejection of the political life is one that will not entirely persuade many readers (after all, it is difficult to think of any philosophical figure more political than Socrates),⁴ though it will hopefully inspire new readings of the *Anabasis* that further draw upon not only Xenophon's other historiographical works, such as the *Hellenica*, but also his other Socratic writings (e.g. the *Memorabilia*, the *Symposium*) in order to understand better the way in which Xenophon should be read.

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³ See further J. Haywood, 'Divine Narratives in Xenophon's *Anabasis*', *Histos* 10 (2016): 85–110.

⁴ See L.-A. Dorion, 'Socrate et la politique: les raisons de son abstention selon Platon et Xénophon', in id., ed., *L'autre Socrate* (Paris, 2013) 171–93.