

## PIETY IN XENOPHON'S THEORY OF LEADERSHIP\*

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*Abstract.* The central theme in Xenophon's writings is to isolate and articulate the qualities of the ideal leader. His ideal leader secures consent to his leadership, treats his followers as friends, and works for their mutual success as a group with shared interests. An additional essential aspect, however, has escaped the attention of most modern scholars. This aspect is Xenophon's emphasis on the leader's piety and on his ability to maintain a proper relationship with the gods. He principally does this by securing their advice and goodwill through sacrifice, divination, and the avoidance of impious actions. In this article the stress on the leader's piety as the *sine qua non* of effective leadership is traced through Xenophon's corpus.

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*Keywords:* Xenophon, piety, leadership, divination, seer, sacrifice.

The December 15, 2013 issue of the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* contains a review the likes of which no scholar would ever wish to receive. It is of a book by Alain de Botton and John Armstrong called *Art As Therapy* (2013) and begins:

Who's afraid of Alain de Botton? At 43, he's already an elder in the church of self-help, the master of spinning sugary 'secular sermons' out of literature ('How Proust Can Change Your Life'), philosophy ('The Consolations of Philosophy'), architecture ('The Architecture of Happiness'). He has a remarkably guileless face and a friendly, populist vision of art. Why then do I keep checking my pockets? And why the

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grumbles that he condescends to his subjects and regards his readers .... as ‘ants’?<sup>1</sup>

This review immediately brought to mind Xenophon, whom one might call the Alain de Botton of his time. And it especially brought to mind his *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*, which are chock full of ‘sugary sermons’. But not all of those sermons are secular, and that may help to explain why so many modern readers, and especially Anglo-American philosophers, are afraid of Xenophon.

### 1. The Centrality of Piety

Xenophon spent his literary career pursuing a number of main ideas, or key themes, that thread their way through his large and varied corpus of writings. One of those themes was to isolate and articulate the qualities of the ideal leader. Xenophon’s ‘theory’ of leadership has, of course, been the subject of considerable scrutiny, most recently and most thoroughly by Vivienne Gray (2011). She and others have isolated the principal criteria for effective leadership in Xenophon’s corpus.<sup>2</sup> His ideal leader secures consent to his leadership, deals decisively with insubordination, treats his followers as friends, knows what is best for them, and works for their mutual success as a group with shared interests. He also exhibits self-control on all occasions, and shares the toils of those under his command. One essential aspect, however, is missing from this list, and, in our secular age, has naturally escaped the attention of many modern scholars.<sup>3</sup> That missing item is Xenophon’s emphasis on the leader’s piety and on his ability to maintain a proper relationship with the gods. He principally does this by

<sup>1</sup> Sehgal (2013).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Gray, some important studies are Breitenbach (1950) 47–104 and (1967), Wood (1964), Due (1989), Hutchinson (2000), Azoulay (2004), Tamiolaki (2012a). On Xenophon’s treatment of individuals generally, see Tuplin (2003) and Due (1989) 147–206.

<sup>3</sup> An important exception, however, is Dillery (1995) 179–242, a ground-breaking study of Xenophon’s *Hellenica*.

securing the advice and goodwill of these gods through sacrifice, divination, and the avoidance of impious actions.

The proper modes of human-divine interaction, which would have been self-evident to Xenophon's readers in general terms, are strategically elucidated throughout his corpus: sacrifice is principally animal sacrifice, divination is asking the gods for advice, and impious actions are doing things displeasing to the gods (like breaking oaths, defiling temples, or committing heinous crimes).<sup>4</sup> Xenophon sometimes refers to consultations of Delphi, and occasionally reports god-sent dreams and bird omens (*oiōnoi*, often translated as 'auspices'). But the primary means of getting advice from the gods is by a method that just about anyone can do at home or in the field, although usually and most authoritatively with the assistance of a professional seer (*mantis*). That is by killing a victim, usually a sheep, and then examining the shape, colour, and texture of its liver.<sup>5</sup>

The Greek word that Xenophon employs to refer to the results of this type of divinatory sacrifice is *ta hiera*, usually translated as 'signs' or 'omens'. This can be confusing since in a sacrificial context *ta hiera* may denote the sacrificial rite, the particular parts of the sacrificial victim that are examined for signs, or the signs themselves that emerge from examination (the difference between the last two meanings is often blurred).<sup>6</sup> The *hiera* are either favourable

<sup>4</sup> On religion in Xenophon, see Dürrbach (1893), who accuses Xenophon of manipulating religion in the *Anabasis* as part of his self-defence; Anderson (1974) 34–40; Dillery (1995) 179–94, 236–7; Bowden (2004); Parker (2004), who gives an especially sophisticated treatment of the *Anabasis*; Pownall (1998) and (2004); Flower (2012) 203–16; Bruit-Zaidman (2013). Zucker (1900), still an important study, focuses on the role of divination in the *Anabasis*.

<sup>5</sup> The bibliography on divination in Greek religion is vast. For Xenophon in particular, see Parker (2004) and Flower (2012). For the role of divination in Greek society, see Johnston (2008) and, especially for the role of the seer, Flower (2008). The techniques of liver divination (*hepatoscopy*) are well described by Collins (2008).

<sup>6</sup> See Jameson (1991) 200–1. I will not be discussing the battle-line sacrifice (called *sphagia*), in which the seer slit the victim's throat (a goat or ram) while observing its movements and the flow of blood.

or unfavourable, depending on the appearance of the victim's liver.

The standard procedure was to sacrifice a single victim, and then, if the omens were unfavourable, to sacrifice a second one. If the omens were still unfavourable, one could sacrifice yet a third victim on that day, but no more. On two occasions in the *Anabasis*, however, Xenophon sacrifices two victims in a row as part of the same consultation. This is not because one of them is merely held in reserve in case the answer is either unclear or unfavourable during the first sacrifice; for the wording indicates that Xenophon has sacrificed both victims (6.1.22–4; 7.6.43–4). Rather, we need to infer that Xenophon asked different questions of each victim as a type of checking: while sacrificing one victim he must have asked 'is it better to do x?', and while sacrificing the other, 'is it better to do y?' Only the sequence 'yes-no' or 'no-yes' would count as a reliable answer.<sup>7</sup>

Before proceeding any further it is necessary to raise a difficult question. To what degree are Xenophon's views on leadership and piety essentially those of his social class, his own original contribution to political thought and leadership theory, or predominantly based on his recollections (such as they were) of Socratic teaching? This is not an easy question to answer with certainty; but surely Xenophon's views emerged from a combination of all three elements. Socrates is in many ways the perfect leader, and Xenophon opens his *Memorabilia* with a demonstration that Socrates' religious attitudes, including his use of divination, were completely traditional, even if strongly held (1.1.6–9).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, as far as we can tell, Xenophon's account of Socratic religion contains novel ideas and emphases (such as the insistence that the gods are both omnipresent and

<sup>7</sup> See Parker (2004) 150–1 who cites the Azande poison oracle as a parallel. The use of the poison oracle by the Azande (a people of the southern Sudan), administered to chickens in a type of checking, is remarkably similar to what is implied in Xenophon's account.

<sup>8</sup> For attempts to reconstruct the historical Socrates' religious views, see McPherran (1996) and (2011), Calvo-Martinez (2008), Powers (2009).

omniscient),<sup>9</sup> and some of these may well be Xenophon's own attempt to harmonise traditional Greek beliefs about the gods.<sup>10</sup> One should also leave space for the impact on Xenophon's theories of his own personal experience as a general in command of mercenaries and as a soldier serving under the command of others (principally Cyrus the Younger and Agesilaus).<sup>11</sup>

So given Xenophon's unusual life experiences and Socratic education, the religious dimension of the leadership theory articulated in his writings, although in some respects traditional and normative, is unlikely to map directly onto the beliefs and practices of his contemporaries. In other words, Xenophon appears to be offering something distinctively new. Yet even if one is not willing to ascribe as much originality to Xenophon's views as I would like, it has recently been demonstrated in impressive detail that he no longer can be perceived as the naive and unthinking purveyor of popular beliefs; rather, across his large corpus of writings Xenophon has constructed a theologically consistent and philosophically sophisticated account of the relationship between gods and mortals as mediated through divination.<sup>12</sup>

However that may be, the importance of piety as a primary characteristic of Xenophon's ideal leader is actually not very difficult to demonstrate. Piety, or *eusebeia*, as Jon Mikalson has recently pointed out, means 'proper respect' towards both gods and other people (whereas the adjective *eusebēs* means 'properly respectful').<sup>13</sup> Since 'piety' is the standard and convenient translation, I will continue to

<sup>9</sup> See Dillery (1995) 184–5, with *Mem.* 1.1.19 and 1.4.18, *Smp.* 4.48, *Cyr.* 8.7.22.

<sup>10</sup> Bruit-Zaidman (2013) stresses the influence of Socrates on Xenophon's religious views. Dorion (2000) LXX, however, suggests the possibility (which I find attractive) that Xenophon, in a process of transposition, has attributed to Socrates the virtues, values, ideas, and interests that were dear to himself.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Buxton in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Labadie (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Mikalson (2010) 9.

deploy it, while keeping in mind its culturally specific connotations, when used in a religious context, for Xenophon and his contemporary audience.

The concept of showing proper respect towards the gods (which encompasses serving them and honouring them as well as consulting them and obeying them) runs throughout Xenophon's corpus and always receives special emphasis. A good place to start is with the 'sugary sermons' of the *Memorabilia*. Right at the beginning we are told that Socrates advised his close friends, 'that if an action was unavoidable, to carry it out as they thought best, but where the result of an action was uncertain, he sent them to use divination to see if the action should be taken.'<sup>14</sup> He said that anyone who proposed to run a household or a city efficiently needed the help of divination' (1.1.6). Obviously, consultation of the gods is going to be especially important for anyone who manages not only their own affairs, but also those of others. According to Xenophon, the ideal leader is the one who can make his followers 'happy' or *eudaimones* (*Mem.* 3.2.4–5). This is not 'happiness' (*eudaimonia*) in the modern emotional sense of feeling good, but in the material sense of 'living well' or 'faring well'.<sup>15</sup> Making one's followers and subjects happy, as the history of humankind sadly demonstrates, is much easier to accomplish in theory than in practice. And that is why, in Xenophon's view, the role of divine guidance becomes indispensable.

It has been well pointed out that the three fundamental and enduring beliefs of Greek polis religion are that the gods exist, that the gods pay attention to the affairs of men, and that there is reciprocity between men and gods.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 'To use divination' is often misleadingly translated in this passage as 'to consult the oracle' (although that is a possible rendering, it is unlikely that Socrates is recommending repeated trips to oracular sanctuaries such as Delphi). Xenophon employs the future participle *manteusomenous* from the Greek verb *manteuesthai*, which also can mean either 'to practise divination' or 'to consult seers', as at Aristophanes, *Birds* 593 and 596.

<sup>15</sup> Mikalson (2010) 7–9.

<sup>16</sup> Yunis (1988) 38–58.

Xenophon's Socrates takes these beliefs to a new level. Near the beginning of the *Memorabilia* and once again near its end (1.4 and 4.3), Xenophon gives the first ever account of a theory that engendered a theological and philosophical debate that is still raging today. I am referring to the theory now called Intelligent Design. One of Xenophon's proofs that the gods have designed the universe for the benefit of humankind is the fact that they are willing to act as our advisors. He claims: 'In so far as we are unable to foresee what is advantageous for the future, the gods themselves work with us, indicating through divination to those who consult them what is going to happen and teaching them how to obtain the best results' (4.3.12; cf. 1.4.15–18). Intelligent Design is likely to be Xenophon's own novel contribution to philosophical and theological thought.<sup>17</sup> Its relevance to leadership theory is that it provides an objectively valid basis for the programme of religious and ethical behaviour that Xenophon advocates.<sup>18</sup>

It is essential to emphasise that for Xenophon piety is not a secondary, second-class, or peripheral characteristic of the successful leader. Thus *How to Be a Good Cavalry Commander* opens with this exhortation (1): 'Your first duty is to sacrifice and to ask that the gods grant you to think and do and say those things that might make your exercise of command most pleasing to them, as well as being most acceptable, most reputable, and most useful for yourself, your friends, and your city.' In today's world, despite the invocations of 'God' in political rhetoric, no military handbook would begin with an appeal to prayer and sacrifice. The centrality of piety in the list of a leader's virtues is made explicit at the end of Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, where he summarises the king's virtues in order that they may be easier for the reader to remember. Piety is placed first. He starts with specific examples of Agesilaus' piety and then notes (11.2): 'He never stopped repeating that he believed the gods took no less

<sup>17</sup> See especially McPherran (1996) 279–91 and Sedley (2007) 75–92, who, however, attribute the theory to the historical Socrates rather than to Xenophon himself. Note also Powers (2009).

<sup>18</sup> Note, in particular, *Mem.* 1.4.2 and 19; 4.3.2 and 16–18.

pleasure in pious deeds than in unblemished sacrificial offerings. Whenever he was successful, he did not look down upon his fellow men, but gave thanks to the gods. And he offered more sacrifices when confident than prayers when in doubt.’

A specific example of the king’s piety in action is repeated in both the *Agesilaus* and in the *Hellenica* (*Ages.* 1.27; *HG* 3.4.18). Xenophon has just described Agesilaus’ method of training his army at Ephesus in 395 and then adds: ‘And one would have been heartened by also seeing this, first Agesilaus, and then the other soldiers, proceeding from the gymnasia with garlands on their heads and dedicating their crowns to Artemis. For wherever men reverence the gods, practise the craft of war, and practise obedience to their commanders, how is it not likely that there all things are full of good hopes?’

Agesilaus must have done more than merely leave a wreath for the goddess; he even seems to have dedicated a column in her famous temple. For an inscription has been found on the fragment of a column base from the temple of Artemis at Ephesus that bears the name ‘Agesilaus’.<sup>19</sup> So we can easily imagine the king, who always had a keen sense of how to project an image of himself, doing just what Xenophon describes him as doing. Other passages in the *Agesilaus* (2.13; 3.2; 11.1–2) also testify to the image that the king wished to project of himself as a person of exceptional and consistent piety. And image-making aside, Agesilaus, like Xenophon himself, surely believed that he could win not only the goodwill of men, but also of the goddess herself, by this act of devotion.

<sup>19</sup> See Börker (1980). The inscription was later partially erased. Wesenberg (1981) suggests that it was intentionally mutilated after the conclusion of the King’s Peace in 387/6 as an expression of resentment after Sparta had abandoned the Greeks of Asia.



## **2. Seeking the Gods' Advice**

Xenophon's emphasis on Agesilaus' piety as a central virtue is in keeping with his overall theological view of the reciprocal relationship between gods and mortals. This reciprocal relationship is made especially manifest in the rites of divination, and in several of his works Xenophon states explicitly that the gods give signs specifically to 'those whom they favour'. In the *Cyropaedia* (1.6.2 and 46) Cyrus' father Cambyses says to the young prince that he had him instructed in the art of divination in order that he should not be dependent on seers and so that he should always be able to seek advice from the gods, since they know all things. The strongest statement of this position is when Cambyses asserts to his son at the very end of their long conversation (1.6.46):

Human wisdom does not know how to choose what is best any more than if someone were to draw lots and do as the lot fell. But the gods, my son, who always exist, know all things, both the things that have taken place, the things that are, and whatever shall come to pass as a result of each past and present event. And when men consult them, they indicate in advance to those whom they favour both what they ought to do and what they ought not to do. But if the gods do not wish to advise everyone, that is not surprising. For there is no necessity for them to care for those whom they do not wish to.

Yet who is it that 'the gods favour'? It is those who serve them (through prayer and sacrifice) in good fortune as well as in bad (*Cyr.* 1.6.3–4) and who do not pray for things that are 'unlawful' (*ta athemita*, *Cyr.* 1.6.6). Moreover, Xenophon's conception of the proper relationship between gods and mortals serves to model the kinds of interactions that ideally underpin mutually beneficial relationships in the human realm (the young Cyrus was instructed to treat his friends in the very same way he did the gods: 1.6.3–4 and 6). The programmatic nature of these passages about the necessity

of cultivating divine favour and guidance is clearly marked. It is not just that they are emphatically placed at both the beginning and end of Cambyses' advice to his son. Their importance is also underscored by the fact that virtually the same advice is given by Socrates in the *Oeconomicus* (5.19–20) and by Xenophon himself at the end of *How to Be a Good Cavalry Commander* (9.8–9):

If someone is surprised that I have frequently mentioned working with god, let him recognise that if he should often find himself in danger, this will be less surprising, and if he considers that in time of war enemies plot against one another but seldom know whether these plots are well-laid. It is impossible to find any other advisers in such matters except the gods. They know everything and they give signs in advance to whomever they wish through sacrifices, birds of omen, voices, and dreams. And it is likely that they are more ready to give advice to those who not only ask what they should do when they happen to be in need, but even in good fortune serve (*therapeuein*) the gods in whatever way they are able.

The message, therefore, for current and future leaders is crystal clear. If you want the gods to look out for you and to communicate their advice to you, then you need to attend to them, as did Cyrus the Great, both in good fortune and in bad. Moreover, one must not expect the gods to assist one in committing acts that are unjust or wicked. The efficacy of this message is reaffirmed at the end of the *Cyropaedia* in a nice example of thematic ring-composition: at the end of his life Cyrus gives thanks to the gods for his many successes, the guidance that they gave him through divine signs and omens, and their care (*epimeleia*) for him (8.7.3). His father's instructions on how to interact with the gods, delivered at the start of his military career, have been completely validated.

Now all of this is fine in theory (and, in the case of the *Cyropaedia*, in fiction); but how does it work out in practice?

In the modern world, those leaders who appeal to divine guidance most often and who display the most conspicuous piety are not necessarily the most effective and successful at making their constituents 'happy'. I am thinking, in particular, of two Presidents of the United States who would appear to be on opposite poles of the political spectrum (Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush), both of whom left office deeply unpopular. So should we conclude that piety is a characteristic of the successful leader only in self-help books (*Memorabilia*), eulogies (*Agesilaus*), and historical fiction (*Cyropaedia*)?

To answer that question we should turn to Xenophon's more concretely historical works, the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*. In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon has constructed his own role as the exemplary type of the wise, resourceful, pious, honest, and selfless leader, who constantly refers important decisions to divination.<sup>20</sup> Although Xenophon was not himself a seer (*mantis*), he claims that he sacrificed frequently and knew a good deal about how to interpret the results (5.6.29). We also see him deciding by himself on the meaning of dreams (3.1.11–12; 4.3.8) and signs (the sneeze at 3.2.9). Diogenes Laertius, who composed a short biography of Xenophon, describes him as pious, fond of sacrificing, and competent to interpret the omens from sacrifice (2.56). Even if this is merely an inference from Xenophon's own writings, it sums up very well the image that the author Xenophon has constructed of Xenophon the character. The opinion of a professional seer, however, was always more authoritative than Xenophon's own interpretation of god-sent signs. For that reason he frequently employed the services of the seers present on the expedition concerning both military operations and personal matters.

As depicted in the *Anabasis*, when Xenophon was deciding issues that affected his own future, and by association that of the entire army as well, he made these difficult and perplexing decisions by sacrificing a victim to the gods and then examining its entrails. These decisions

<sup>20</sup> See Flower (2012) 117–40, 203–16.

included whether to discuss with the soldiers the founding of a colony (5.6.16–17), whether to accept sole command of the army (6.1.19–24), whether to return home to Athens (6.2.15), whether to lead the army to the Thracian prince Seuthes (7.2.14–15), and whether to remain with Seuthes in Thrace or to move on with the Ten Thousand (7.6.43–4). Even though divination is a means whereby the gods give advice, not orders, the constant referral of these important decisions to divine arbitration tends to legitimatise and validate Xenophon's decisions.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, however, the appeal to divination tends to mitigate Xenophon's personal responsibility for the consequences of his choices. An especially egregious example appears at the very end of the *Anabasis* where Xenophon, trusting in favourable omens from sacrifice, leads a nearly catastrophic raid on the fortress of the Persian grandee Asidates (7.8.8–23). But, due to considerable luck, Asidates is eventually captured and the narrative concludes with the simple words: 'And this is how the earlier omens turned out.' Appealing to god-sent instructions can be useful both in narrative and in real life, and is a much more effective face-saving device than merely asserting that 'mistakes have been made'.

Thus Xenophon can and does use piety to gloss over his own bad decisions and questionable actions. And he can do the same for his heroes as well. Agesilaus is called 'a perfectly good man' (*Ages.* 1.1), and his piety is stressed in Xenophon's eulogy. But besides the fact that he actually oversaw the collapse of the Spartan hegemony, his personal life was not spotless. Greek leaders did not need to worry about being caught sending salacious emails to admirers of either sex; nonetheless, there were socially prescribed limits on behaviour. In Agesilaus' case, his involvement with a handsome Persian boy seems to have caused him some embarrassment. In Xenophon's *Agesilaus* (5.4–7) we are told that Agesilaus was passionately in love with Megabates, the son of Spithradates; yet he displayed remarkable self-control

<sup>21</sup> Park (1963) is a classic study of the social function of divination.

and refused to be kissed by him.<sup>22</sup> The length (a whole page in the Oxford Classical Text) and tone of Xenophon's treatment suggests that this relationship was a cause célèbre. The *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* merely states rather matter-of-factly that 'Agesilaus was said to be extremely infatuated with him' (21.4).

Now, one major feature of Xenophon's theory of leadership is that the leader should be the master of his desires and passions, including that for sex (*Memorabilia* 2.1). I suspect that Xenophon lingers on this incident because he is trying very hard to prove that Agesilaus had not had a physical relationship with Megabates, despite rumours to the contrary. He makes a point of emphasising that Agesilaus could not possibly have acted improperly because when abroad he always slept in temples, where it is impossible to do such things, or in public places. Readers of Herodotus (9.116–21) will remember, of course, that the Persian Artaxctes, a very bad man indeed, did have sex with women in the shrine of Protesilaus and suffered crucifixion as his punishment. Thus Xenophon's proof of the king's self-control is based on a rather circular argument: Agesilaus did not have sex with Megabates because he slept in temples and pious people, like Agesilaus, would never do anything impious in a temple.

### 3. Divine Intervention in Human Affairs

Apart from providing advice and guidance, the Greeks also believed that the gods could take a more active hand in human affairs, especially by punishing the wicked and assisting the pious. In other words, winning the goodwill of the gods meant much more than simply securing favourable

<sup>22</sup> On this passage see Hindley (1994) and Pontier (2012). Hindley (2004) 126 and n. 8, argues that Agesilaus' 'caution arose from political, not moral grounds'; but this assessment is decisively refuted by Pontier (2012) 618 n. 25, who observes (pointing to *Ages.* 5.4 and 11.10) that the episode is meant to demonstrate the *enkrateia* (self-mastery) of Agesilaus. I would add that moral and political considerations are not easily separated.

omens from them before undertaking a battle or some other venture. Both in the *Agésilas* and in the *Anabasis*, Xenophon speaks of making the gods one's allies through proper conduct (such as not breaking one's oaths, plundering temples, or using force on suppliants). This is essential because 'the gods are capable of quickly making the great small and of easily preserving the small, even if they are in difficulties, whenever they wish to do so' (*An.* 3.2.10).

Xenophon repeatedly asserts in his own speeches in Book 3 of the *Anabasis* that the gods will be hostile to the Persians as oath-breakers but be allies of the Greeks since they kept their oaths (3.1.21–2; 3.2.10). In some incidents we can glimpse divine agency at work, such as in the dream that roused Xenophon to action after the arrest of the generals by Tissaphernes (3.1.11–13) and in the spontaneous house-fire that saved the Greeks when they were trying to escape from the Drilae, a tribe dwelling near to the Black Sea (5.2.24). One of the most explicit acknowledgements of divine intervention in the *Anabasis* occurs when Xenophon rallies his men to save the Arcadians (who have detached themselves from the rest of the army) when these are surrounded by Thracians and on the verge of annihilation. Xenophon tells his troops that 'Perhaps it is the god who is bringing this about, in his wish to humble those who boasted of their superior wisdom, and to give us the position of greater honour, since we begin with the gods' (6.3.18). The meaning seems to be that the Arcadians found themselves in this dangerous predicament precisely because they had acted without first consulting the gods.

The idea that omitting to consult the gods can by itself contribute to failure appears also in the *Hellenica*. In 367 representatives from the warring Greek cities (Thebes, Theban allies, and Sparta) convene in Delphi for a peace conference, but fail to reach an agreement (7.1.27): 'When they arrived they did not at all consult the god as to how peace might come about, but they took counsel amongst themselves.' People who begin with the gods, who make the gods their starting point by consulting them through the rites of divination, are those who trust in divine guidance

rather than in their own mere human wisdom. This is true even in private life: Ischomachus, who owns and manages a sizeable estate, is successful in all of his pursuits because he always 'begins by serving (*therapeuōn*) the gods' (*Oec.* 11.8).

Xenophon is depicting himself in these passages from the *Anabasis* as a leader who has been specially selected, and continually aided, by the gods. Moreover, he is mindful that one needs actively to solicit the support of the gods. The example of good leadership that he exhibits in the *Anabasis* is matched by his presentation not only of Agesilaus (whose various personal faults—principally anger and partiality—are not concealed in the *Hellenica*),<sup>23</sup> but especially of Cyrus the Great. This Cyrus is very much Xenophon's own creation (even if he drew on various sources, Greek and Persian<sup>24</sup>), and this means that he illustrates the virtues that Xenophon considered most important in a leader while lacking any conspicuous faults.<sup>25</sup> Like Xenophon himself, Cyrus too always begins an enterprise by consulting the gods.

In a very remarkable and unprecedented passage in Greek literature, Cyrus performs an elaborate set of rituals before invading Assyria (*Cyr.* 3.3.21–2), which go far beyond the border-crossing sacrifices performed by Spartan kings (which were made to Zeus and Athena)<sup>26</sup> or Agesilaus' attentions to Artemis at Ephesus:

Cyrus first sacrificed to Zeus the King and then to the other gods, asking them that they, being propitious and

<sup>23</sup> For the characterisation of Agesilaus, see Ferrario (2012) 344–53 and (2014) 240–54; Flower (2015). On his anger, also note Tamiolaki (2012b) 22–3.

<sup>24</sup> For Persian elements in the *Cyropaedia* (which seem to be minimal), see Tuplin (1990), (1997) and (2013).

<sup>25</sup> Dorion (2009) 105 points out that Cyrus the Great, Agesilaus, and Socrates share the same 'characteristics, virtues, and doctrines'. Tamiolaki (2012a), however, maintains that the virtue of other leaders is often ambiguous while that of Socrates alone is uncontested and unambiguous.

<sup>26</sup> *Lac.* 13.2–3.

well disposed, be leaders for the army, good defenders, and allies and advisors for good things. And he also called upon the heroes who lived in Media and were its guardians. When he had obtained favourable omens from his sacrifices and his army was assembled at the borders of Assyria, then amid favourable auspices he invaded the enemy's country. And as soon as he had crossed the border, there again he propitiated the Earth with libations and the gods with sacrifices, and appeased the heroes who dwell in Assyria. After this, he again sacrificed to Zeus, the god of his fathers, and if other gods were made known, he neglected none of them.

Elsewhere Xenophon points to the efficacy of winning the goodwill of the gods before the enemy do. For instance, in the *Constitution of the Spartans*, he says that when a Spartan king is on campaign he always begins his sacrifice before dawn, 'wishing to seize in advance the good will of the god' (13.3). But this passage from the *Cyropaedia* is his fullest illustration of how a model leader might go about doing it. There is some Persian colouring here, and that might explain why the prayers and sacrifices are so luxuriantly extensive. Yet given that no one ever ruled a greater empire of willing subjects, as Xenophon emphasises at the beginning of the *Cyropaedia* (1.1.3), there must also be a lesson here that Xenophon is imparting to his readers. It is not possible, it seems, to pay too much respect to the gods: as Socrates tells Euthydemus in the *Memorabilia*, it is by honouring the gods to the fullest extent of one's power that one can expect the greatest benefactions in return (4.3.17).

Quite apart from winning and maintaining the good will of the gods, the successful leader also employs religion to boost the morale of his troops. This may seem like cynical manipulation only if we divorce belief in the existence of the gods, and their interest in human affairs, from the leader's need to employ effective rhetoric. Here the speeches that Xenophon puts in the mouths of his leaders are strikingly different from those composed by Thucydides. As



mentioned above, in his speeches in Book 3 of the *Anabasis*, Xenophon rallies the dispirited troops by repeatedly asserting that the Greeks will have the gods on their side because of their piety in abiding by their oaths in contrast with the Persians' impiety in breaking theirs. By comparison, Nicias' speech to his troops in their pathetic flight from Syracuse in 413 is of a much different tenor than Xenophon's. Whereas Xenophon is full of optimism that the gods will help them despite their seemingly hopeless predicament, Nicias can merely say that the gods have punished them enough for what they did wrong and that they have become 'fitter objects for their pity than their jealousy' (Th. 7.77.4).

It is not only Xenophon himself who knows how to deploy divine assistance as an effective rhetorical device. The elder Cyrus actually highlights the morale-boosting effects of winning divine approval in his very first speech as a military leader (*Cyr.* 1.5.14): 'This too, moreover, I think makes you more confident—the fact that I have not neglected the gods as we depart on this expedition. For you have been with me enough to know that not only in great things but also in small, I always try to begin with the gods.' The nature of the gods' approval is made explicit in the first sentence of Cyrus' speech to the Persian peers before engaging the Assyrians (3.3.34): 'Men, the gods, as both the seers say and as it also seems to me, are announcing that there will be a battle, are granting victory, and are promising safety, as revealed in the omens from sacrifice.' By contrast, the king of the Assyrians makes no mention at all of the gods in his own pre-battle harangue (3.3.43), and that hardly seems coincidental.

Later on in the story, before the major battle with Croesus, Cyrus addresses his generals, beginning and ending his speech with predictions of divine support: 'Friends and allies, the gods are revealing the very same omens from sacrifice as when they gave us our previous victory' (6.4.12). Then at the speech's close, he says to them, 'If you think that we still need anything more, tell me. For with the assistance of the gods, we shall lack nothing'

(6.4.19). This may seem like a *façon de parler*, but appeals to divine assistance before battle had a powerful valence, as is demonstrated both in fictional narratives such as the *Cyropaedia*, in instructional tracts such as *How to Be a Good Cavalry Commander*, and in more distinctly historical accounts, such as the *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*.

#### 4. The Fate of Impious Leaders

Piety then is a powerful weapon as well as being an essential virtue. It allows leaders to get expert advice from the gods, who know everything, as well as to defer blame, at least by implication, onto the gods when things go wrong. It is also a means for rallying the troops under one's command and boosting their confidence. Yet the implications of how we should assess leaders who seemingly lack piety are sometimes left implicit, apart from the obvious case of those who perjure themselves or ignore unfavourable omens.<sup>27</sup>

Cyrus the Younger, as portrayed in the *Anabasis*, is an interesting case study. I have elsewhere argued that although he is almost always taken by modern scholars to be a latter day version of Cyrus the Great, he lacks certain of his namesake's virtues, such as self-control, humanity (*philanthropia*) and, most noteworthy of all, piety.<sup>28</sup> He is caught unprepared on the day of the battle of Cunaxa in 401 and throws away his victory, as well as his life, when he 'loses control of himself' and rashly charges his brother with only a few followers (1.8.26). There are even some cues in the following laudatory obituary that might raise a red flag for members of the original Greek readership.<sup>29</sup> For instance, Xenophon says of Cyrus, 'Nor would anyone be able to say this, that he permitted criminals and the unjust to laugh at him, but he punished them most unsparingly of

<sup>27</sup> Note Pownall (1998) and (2004). Dillery (1995) and Bowden (2004) offer opposing interpretations of the importance of divine punishment in Xenophon's account of historical causation.

<sup>28</sup> See Flower (2012) 188–94.

<sup>29</sup> Higgins (1977) 83 is astute on this point.

all. Along the well-travelled roads it was often possible to see people who had been deprived of their feet, hands, and eyes' (1.9.11–13). That kind of mutilation (whether of a corpse or of a living person) was considered barbaric by Greeks:<sup>30</sup> it is noteworthy that Cyrus the Great never does anything like this in the *Cyropaedia*. Did Xenophon intend his readers to notice the difference between the two men and to reach the conclusion that the younger Cyrus was a greatly inferior version of his namesake?<sup>31</sup> In what follows I give a fuller explication of this controversial reading of the text.

It has been argued that Xenophon's theory of leadership, as exemplified by Cyrus the Great, can be reduced to three fundamental character traits: the love of humanity (*philanthropia*), the love of learning (*philomatheia*), and the love of being honoured (*philotimia*).<sup>32</sup> It is significant, therefore, that only one of these traits is attributed to Cyrus the Younger, either in his lengthy obituary or anywhere else in the *Anabasis*. This is his 'love of learning'; and even that is conspicuously limited to his training in archery and javelin throwing (1.9.5). Piety should be added to this list as a fourth fundamental trait of Xenophon's successful leader.

As we have seen, Xenophon often stresses that every successful leader needs to possess the virtue of being pious. The elder Cyrus, like Xenophon himself, is depicted as someone who puts the reverence due to the gods above all other considerations and who seeks their counsel through constant sacrifice (*Cyr.* 1.5.14). Although the younger Cyrus had his Greek seer perform the customary sacrifices before battle (1.7.18; 1.8.15), there is no indication of his personal piety. Indeed, as has been well pointed out, Xenophon never mentions that Cyrus had been able to benefit from

<sup>30</sup> When the Spartan general Pausanias is urged to mutilate Mardonius' corpse following the battle of Plataea, he responds, 'These things are more fitting for barbarians to do than for Greeks, and we begrudge this even to them' (Hdt. 9.79.1). For Greek attitudes, see Hall (1989) 158–9.

<sup>31</sup> So Flower (2012) 188–94 and Higgins (1977) 82–6.

<sup>32</sup> Sandridge (2012).

the least sign sent by the gods.<sup>33</sup> In other words, he is the only one among Xenophon's 'paradigmatic' leaders (Cyrus the Great, Socrates, Agesilaus, and Xenophon himself) who is unable to profit from divine favour and assistance. Given the repeated emphasis that Xenophon gives to a leader's ability both to receive divine signs (the gods send them to those whom they favour) and to interpret them correctly,<sup>34</sup> it is not to the younger Cyrus' credit that he grossly misinterprets his seer Silanus' divinatory sacrifice in the lead up to the battle of Cunaxa (1.7.18–20). Silanus had predicted that the King would not fight within ten days. Cyrus incorrectly inferred from this that the King would not fight at all. As a consequence, he marched 'rather carelessly' on the day before the battle and was caught with his army out of formation on the day of the battle itself.

Leaving aside his mistake and his negligence (which are bad enough in themselves), it is also implied that the failure of his expedition was due to his impiety in attempting fratricide. Cyrus plots against his elder brother, King Artaxerxes, because he feels dishonoured by him (1.1.4). Any reader who was familiar with Xenophon's other works would see this motive as being deeply problematic. In *Memorabilia* 2.3 Socrates argues at length that nothing in life is more useful or more beneficial to a person than a brother; and he encourages a younger brother to take the initiative in seeking reconciliation with his elder sibling by doing him a good turn. The *Cyropaedia* ends with the elder Cyrus, on his deathbed, enjoining his own two sons, in the strongest possible terms and at considerable length, to honour and love each other (8.7.8–24).

In my 'ironic' interpretation we are meant to infer that the gods did not give their support to Cyrus when he most needed it because he was not worthy of their care. I believe that contemporary readers of the *Anabasis* would have noticed that the younger Cyrus was lacking the virtues of the elder Cyrus; for it seems likely that the *Anabasis* and

<sup>33</sup> Boëldieu-Trevet (2006) 43–4.

<sup>34</sup> See below.

*Cyropaedia* were written very close to each other in time (the 360s). To be sure, there are more straightforward cases in which neglect of the gods, impious actions, and even the mere intent to act impiously, contribute to a leader's undoing. However, in what follows, I am for the most part going to pass over all of those many references to the impiety of Persian leaders in breaking their oaths, and concentrate on Greek leaders.

First of all, one of the most reckless things that a leader can do, even though it does not involve an unjust act per se, is to ignore omens sent by the gods. This is made absolutely clear in the programmatic advice that Cambyses delivers to Cyrus the Great (*Cyr.* 1.6.44): 'Learn this too from me, my son, which is the most important thing—never run any risk either to yourself or to your army contrary to the sacrificial omens (*hiera*) and the auspices (*oiōnous*).'<sup>7</sup> This lesson is so important not just because the gods know in advance what is going to take place, but also because they actually punish those who do not follow their advice. Thus Hermogenes asserts in Xenophon's *Symposium* that he has never regretted obeying signs and omens sent by the gods, but that there were occasions when he was punished for disobeying them (4.48). Here too one can cite Socrates' advice to Euthydemus that there is no better way to please the gods than by obeying them as fully as possible (*Mem.* 4.3.17).

In his more historical works, Xenophon provides several apparently unambiguous examples of where disregarding a seer's advice leads to disaster. In the *Hellenica* (3.1.17–19) we are told that in 399 the Spartan commander Dercylidas was forced to delay his assault on the city of Cebren for four days due to unfavourable sacrifices (*hiera*), even though he was in a great hurry. Nevertheless, one of his subordinate officers, thinking that the delay was stupid, rushed into action and found his company defeated and himself wounded. Later in the *Hellenica* the Spartan Anaxibius contemptuously ignores unfavourable sacrifices (*hiera*), and then falls into an ambush in which he and many of his men

are killed (4.8.35–9).<sup>35</sup> In the *Anabasis* (6.4.23–4), the general Neon leads out 2,000 men on his own initiative despite sacrifices that were unfavourable for leaving camp. Five hundred of them were then cut down by a cavalry force that, unbeknown to the Greeks, had been sent by the Persian satrap Pharnabazus.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, in the *Anabasis* we are given a conspicuous example of the Greek generals collectively obeying divine guidance even contrary to the army's self-interest (5.5.1–4). They desired to attack the fortresses of the Tibarenians, which were relatively weak, in order to 'get some profit for the army', even though the Tibarenians were offering them gifts of hospitality. Nonetheless, 'After many victims had been sacrificed, all of the seers finally declared the opinion that the gods in no way permitted war.' The generals then accepted gifts of hospitality and the army proceeded through the territory of the Tibarenians without plundering it. This passage may serve various narrative functions (such as demonstrating that the Ten Thousand were not mere brigands);<sup>37</sup> but one of its purposes is surely to provide a paradigmatic example of pious obedience to the gods.

Let us now turn from errors of omission (failing to take signs and omens seriously) to those of commission (committing impious acts). It goes without saying that the most impious rulers in the whole of Xenophon's corpus are the Thirty at Athens, and especially their *de facto* leader Critias, since their crimes involved the wholesale execution and banishment of their fellow citizens for the sake of private gain. As Theramenes proclaimed as he vainly clung to the altar of the public hearth for safety, the Thirty were both most unjust towards men and most impious towards the gods (*HG* 2.3.52–3). Their subsequent overthrow is due to a combination of divine intervention and human

<sup>35</sup> Gray (2007) 342–4 offers a close reading of the sequence.

<sup>36</sup> On these and similar incidents, see Flower (2008) 143–4, 170–2.

<sup>37</sup> So Flower (2008) 170–1. For other explanations, see Parker (2004) 146.

resistance, as the democratic leader Thrasybulus makes explicit in his speech before the battle in which Critias is killed and the Thirty are routed (2.4.14–15). Thrasybulus can point to two tangible interventions: the gods previously caused a snow storm in fair weather, thus disrupting the Thirty's plan to besiege the democratic exiles in the fortress of Phyle (2.4.2–3), and now the gods have placed his forces in an extraordinarily favourable location for the battle that is about to take place.

At several points in the *Hellenica* the narrative touches upon the despoiling of sacred funds. Xenophon reports speculation that in 370 the dynast Jason of Pherae was planning to take control of the Pythian games at Delphi, and adds that 'his intention concerning the sacred treasures is unclear even today. It is said that when the people of Delphi inquired what they ought to do if Jason should seize the treasures belonging to the god [i.e., Apollo], the god answered that he would take care of it' (6.4.30). The very next sentence reports Jason's assassination, a man whose grand designs and outstanding personal qualities as a leader of men, Xenophon had just narrated at considerable length.<sup>38</sup> What is particularly interesting here is that Jason is punished by Apollo for the impiety that he was merely thinking of committing rather than for something that he had actually done. A few years later (in 368–6) Euphron of Sicyon seized the sacred treasures of his city in order to pay mercenaries (7.1.46; 7.3.8).<sup>39</sup> Like Jason, he was the victim of assassination. The implication is that the gods punish all those who break oaths and rob temples, and that leaders who do such things cannot be successful themselves or benefit their followers.<sup>40</sup>

On the level of collective piety, Xenophon's most explicit statement about divine punishment comes in a much-discussed passage of the *Hellenica* (5.4.1). He there gives a theological explanation for the failure of the Spartan

<sup>38</sup> See Tuplin (1993) 117–21; Dillery (1995) 174; Flower (2015) 125–7.

<sup>39</sup> See Tuplin (1993) 121–4 and Lewis (2004).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Pownall in this volume.

hegemony in the early fourth century,<sup>41</sup> claiming that the Spartans were punished by the gods for their hubristic act of seizing the acropolis of Thebes in 382. For this illegal seizure was in contravention of the terms of the King's Peace of 386, which guaranteed the autonomy of the cities of mainland Greece:

One might be able to mention many other examples, both Greek and barbarian, where the gods do not overlook those who are impious or who do unholy things. But now I shall speak of the example that lies before us. Even though the Spartans swore that they would permit the cities to be autonomous, they occupied the acropolis in Thebes and were punished by the very men who had been wronged, although they had not previously been conquered by anyone.

What Xenophon does not say explicitly, but which the previous narrative had revealed, is that king Agesilaus, who appears as a model of the pious leader in Xenophon's encomium, was implicated in this impiety. He had decisively intervened on behalf of Phoebidas, the Spartan commander who had seized the Theban acropolis, when Phoebidas was charged with acting without orders. Although the ephors and most Spartans were angry with Phoebidas, Agesilaus argued that the main consideration should be whether Phoebidas' actions were 'good' or 'bad' for Sparta (5.2.32).

To make matters worse, the contrast with Agesilaus' earlier behaviour is remarkable and could hardly have escaped Xenophon's notice when he narrated these events. Upon arriving in Asia in 396 on his campaign to liberate the Greeks of Asia, he made a truce with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes.<sup>42</sup> Tissaphernes, for his part, immediately violated the truce and used it as a breathing space in which

<sup>41</sup> So Dillery (1995) 179–94, 221–37; contra Bowden (2004).

<sup>42</sup> *Ages.* 1.9–13; *HG* 3.4.5–6 and 11. Overlapping accounts in these two works are nearly identical.



to request additional troops from the King of Persia. Agesilaus, on the other hand, abided by it, proclaiming that Tissaphernes had acquired the gods as enemies by committing perjury, while making them allies to the Greeks. In the subsequent narrative this prediction indeed comes to pass: Agesilaus defeats Tissaphernes in a battle near Sardis, and the King then has him beheaded.<sup>43</sup> When back in Greece, however, Agesilaus seems to have sacrificed his convictions for what he perceived as Sparta's self-interest, and the result was the near total collapse of Spartan hegemony at the battle of Leuctra in 371.<sup>44</sup> It was obvious to Xenophon, as it should have been to Agesilaus, that as soon as leaders begin to violate sworn agreements and to define justice in terms of what is most expedient for themselves and their communities, disaster is bound to follow. In the type of belief system in which Xenophon participated, the gods are indeed mindful of impious acts.

### 5. The Leader and the Seer

One surprising result of this discussion is the light that it sheds on Xenophon's conception of who was the best and most effective mediator between divine and human knowledge. For him it was not so much the priest (*hierous*) or the professional seer (*mantis*) as it was the kind of leader who knew how to make the gods' advice profitable both for himself and his followers.<sup>45</sup> Any leader who lacks proper respect for the gods, quite apart from incurring divine punishment, is also one who is hardly likely to respect his followers. For this reason, piety was not a secondary or derivative aspect of effective leadership, but was actually a litmus test for success in Xenophon's theory of leadership. Nonetheless, it has been understandably easy for modern

<sup>43</sup> *Ages.* 1.29–35; *HG* 3.4.20–25.

<sup>44</sup> For the history of this period, see Cartledge (1987), Hamilton (1991), Jehne (1994).

<sup>45</sup> For the traditional role of seers in warfare, see Pritchett (1979) 47–90; Parker (2000); Flower (2008) 153–87.

scholars to overlook or underemphasise the importance of piety to Xenophon, because we tend to be suspicious of politicians and others who make a display of their religiosity.

Xenophon, however, clearly believed that divination is a teachable craft that any intelligent person can learn. Xenophon himself knew how to read the entrails of a sacrificial victim, as he claims in the *Anabasis* (5.6.29). And in the *Cyropaedia* he has Cyrus' father say to the young prince that he had him instructed in the art of divination in order that he should not be dependent on seers, who might wish to deceive him, and in order that he should not be at a loss how to read the divine signs if he ever found himself without a seer (1.6.2). Nonetheless, Xenophon is not saying that professional seers are unnecessary. Rather, he is asserting that a commander needs to be able, if the circumstances should require it, to act without one. Even Cyrus the Great, after all, never seems to have dismissed his seers, as one of the passages quoted above reveals (*Cyr.* 3.3.34: 'as both the seers say and as it also seems to me').

Why then did Xenophon put so much emphasis on the ability of the commander to interpret the omens from sacrifice without having to rely on a professional seer? Might this have been related to his own experiences when acting as one of the generals of the Greek mercenaries in the *Anabasis*? His interactions with the seer Silanus, who slandered him to the army, were fraught (5.6.15–34). Additionally, might he have been influenced by his knowledge of one of the most tragic incidents in Greek history?

Every Athenian of Xenophon's generation would have known something about the disastrous attempt of Athens to conquer Sicily in 415–13. Xenophon in particular must have been familiar with the detailed account of these events in Books 6–7 of Thucydides' history; for the first part of the *Hellenica* is a continuation of Thucydides' unfinished account of the Peloponnesian War. In 415 the Athenians and their allies set sail for Sicily with a huge armada, eventually comprising 207 warships (triremes) and some 50–

60,000 men, only a very few of whom returned home alive. When the siege of Syracuse was going badly, the Athenian generals Nicias and Demosthenes finally decided to return home. Their plan was to do so as secretly as possible and at a given signal, obviously in order to escape the notice of the Syracusans. But just as the Athenians were on the point of embarking on their ships, there was a total eclipse of the moon. The date was August 27, 413. The historian Thucydides, in his terse account, primarily lays the blame for the Athenian reaction on Nicias (7.50.4):

When everything was ready and they were on the point of sailing away, the moon, which happened to be full, was eclipsed. Most of the Athenians, taking it to heart, urged the generals to wait, and Nicias (who indeed was somewhat too much given to divination and the like) said that he would not even still discuss how the move should be made until they had waited thrice nine days, as the seers were prescribing. For this reason the delay came about for the Athenians who had been about to depart.

Needless to say, the Athenian decision to delay their departure proved fatal. This famous passage, perhaps more than any other in Greek literature, reveals the influence that seers could have, for good or ill, on the outcome of events.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, although a general might turn to a seer for advice, it was up to him to decide when and how often the seer would sacrifice. And no matter what the results of those sacrifices were, the ultimate decision of when and where to attack resided with the general. In the words of Plato (*Laches* 199a): 'the law enjoins that the general rules the seer and not the seer the general.' For that reason it was necessary for Greek leaders, both in theory as well as in practice, to be able to read the signs from sacrifice and to determine the meaning of unsolicited omens, even if the professional seer

<sup>46</sup> A full treatment of this episode is in Flower (2009a) and (2008) 114–19; Stephenson and Fatoohi (2001) describe what the eclipse would have looked like.

was a highly paid and indispensable religious specialist. The Athenian polymath Philochorus (c. 340–260), who was himself a seer, believed that Nicias’ seers had misinterpreted the meaning of the eclipse, and we may well imagine that Xenophon would have agreed.<sup>47</sup>

## 6. Them and Us

Xenophon might seem to be urging a much more comprehensive, consistent, and (one might even say) intimate relationship between gods and mortals than was the norm in Classical Greece. But I suspect that he was merely at one end of a spectrum that could be found in all Greek communities during the Classical period. He was certainly not reflecting a particularly Spartan religious mentality, even if the majority of leaders who perform divinatory sacrifices in the *Hellenica* happen to be Spartans.<sup>48</sup> It is simply the case that the focus of his *Hellenica* is largely on the rise and fall of the Spartan hegemony, and for that reason Spartan commanders appear more often than those from other cities.<sup>49</sup> Very few Greeks would have openly ridiculed the efficacy of prayer and sacrifice, and those who did so were not likely to be chosen as leaders in Athens, Sparta, or any other Greek polis. Alcibiades mocked religious ritual in private and paid a heavy price. Other Athenian generals, including Tolmides, Cimon, Nicias, and

<sup>47</sup> *FGrHist* 328 F 135, quoted by Plutarch, *Nicias* 23.5–6: ‘And indeed the sign, as Philochorus says, was not obnoxious to fugitives, but indeed very favourable: for deeds done in fear are in need of concealment, whereas light is an enemy to such deeds.’

<sup>48</sup> For Spartan religion, see Flower (2009b) and Richer (2012). Every form of divination practised by Spartans is found in other Greek cities: the only exception is a border-crossing sacrifice called *diabatēria*, although elsewhere it simply may have been called by a different name; see Naiden (2013) 106, 342, 345. For the *diabatēria*, see Richer (2012) 209–12.

<sup>49</sup> As Tuplin (1993) 41 points out, only about 25% of the *Hellenica* from 2.3.11–7.5.27 concerns events which did not directly involve Spartan citizens.

even Pericles, are known to have formed virtual partnerships with seers whom they especially trusted. A close working relationship with a particular seer can also be documented for Greek commanders from many other cities, such as Dion from Syracuse, Timoleon from Corinth, the Theban Pelopidas, and the Macedonians Philip and Alexander.<sup>50</sup> It was standard practice throughout the Greek world for generals to consult the gods before leaving camp and before beginning battle, and it would have been highly anomalous not to do so.

Ever since Marx called religion the opium of the people, it is not uncommon to be suspicious of political leaders who use religion to justify or validate their decisions or policies. One need only think of a very recent US president. According to some British and American news agencies, George W. Bush allegedly told Palestinian leaders in June 2003 that he was told or inspired by God to invade Iraq in order to bring peace to the Middle East.<sup>51</sup> Even if this report is false, it is interesting that anyone could have thought it credible. Xenophon's leaders are never vouchsafed instructions that are so far reaching: in the case of sacrificial divination, the markings on a liver normally indicate only 'yes' or 'no' to specific questions. Furthermore, for most Greeks the answer is 'advice' rather than a 'directive', in the sense that the gods were not guaranteeing success should their recommendations be followed.<sup>52</sup> And that may be the reason why divine guidance generally worked better for the Greeks than it does for us. Sometimes, as in the case of Nicias and the lunar eclipse of 413, or of Cyrus and Silanus' prediction, divine messages

<sup>50</sup> The evidence for these relationships and further discussion can be found in Flower (2008) 176–83.

<sup>51</sup> For example, *The Independent* (7 October 2005); *The Guardian* (7 October 2005); *The Washington Post* (9 and 14 October 2005). See further Wood (2012) 147–8.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, Xenophon claims that before the battle of Cunaxa he was told by Cyrus himself that 'both the camp-ground sacrifice (*hierá*) and the battle-line sacrifice (*sphagia*) were favourable' (*An.* 1.8.15). See further Jameson (1991) 205 and Flower (2008) 165–9.

could be disastrously misinterpreted. But for the most part leaders could use the arts of divination to boost morale, avoid indecision, and validate plans of action. Perhaps this could be the topic of Alain de Botton's next best-selling self-help book for all of us 'ants': *Divination and the Art of Leadership*.

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