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XENOPHON'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A PROJECT FOR THE WHOLE OF GREECE

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Abstract. *This paper discusses Xenophon's political philosophy and its Greek context. One of the major themes running through Xenophon's works is leadership, which he tackles implicitly or explicitly in virtually all of his writings (be it his philosophical, historical or literary writings). For Xenophon, the leader was important not only as an individual leading the armed forces, but as a leader of a city or a community as well. Bearing in mind the importance of leadership and the role of leaders for Xenophon, the author of this paper tries to show that Xenophon's political philosophy can be seen as part of his Panhellenic program. The aim of this program is to politically unite the Greeks by making them enter into an alliance in the name of a common Panhellenic crusade against Persia.*

Keywords: *Xenophon, Panhellenism, leadership, Cyrus the Younger, Anabasis, Hellenika.*

One may begin to speak of Xenophon's political philosophy with a paradoxical proposition: Xenophon has not proposed any systemic summary of his political attitudes, having not left one work in which he would have described his political philosophy and his approach to various (self) ruling forms. Nevertheless, scholars emphasize the unity of Xenophon's political philosophy, extrapolating a common political idea from his various works.[1]

To speak of Xenophon as a thinker is to speak of one and only idea, which had matured in Xenophon's mind during his career as a soldier. He became a mercenary of Cyrus the Younger, the prince of Persia, in about 401 BC. As a member of the entourage of Cyrus, he travelled to the inland of Persia and, later on, with much trouble, came back to Greece. The difficulties suffered during the campaign, the countless troubles and the constant threat of being scattered, all faced by the mercenary army, including its lack of discipline and disobedience as well as the tapping into the final reserves of strength and the reaching of the *oikoumenē*, proved to be revelatory to Xenophon, who came to an idea of the importance of leadership and the individual as a leader. The course of the battle of Cunaxa was a clear demonstration of how important Cyrus the Younger was for the Greek mercenaries in his role as their leader and commander. After that battle, in which, unbeknownst to the Greek mercenaries, Cyrus had died, they fought,

[1] Sarah Brown Ferrario is of the opinion that Xenophon's exploration of political matters cannot be narrowed down to one specific treatise and extends across the full corpus of his works (Ferrario 2017, 60). For more on Xenophon's political ideas, see Gray 2007 or Gish, Ambler 2009.

according to Xenophon, with Artaxerxes as if Cyrus was alive, striving to reach victory at all costs. The news about Cyrus's death were shocking to Xenophon, who saw Cyrus as the winner in the battle for the throne. After Cyrus's death, Xenophon spared no kind words to describe him:

> Of all the successors of Cyrus the Elder, no Persian was a more natural ruler and none more deserved to rule. This was the view of all who were held to have been close to Cyrus. In the first place, even while he was still a child, at school with his brother and the other boys, he was regarded as the best of his generation at everything.[2]

In the eulogy dedicated to Cyrus, Xenophon sees the connection between political leadership and moral values, thus showing how a combination of an individual's best personal qualities determines the competences of a ruler as well:

> Cyrus was thought [...] to be more respectful than any of his peers and more obedient to his elders even than his inferiors in rank.[3]
>
> It was also clear the he always tried to go one better than anyone who did him either good or harm. [...] This is why more people wanted to entrust their money, their cities, and even their lives to him than any other person of our times. At the same time, however, no one could say that he allowed criminals and wrongdoers to mock him. No, he punished them with unstinting severity, and one could often see, by the side of busy roads, people who had lost feet, hands, and eyes. The upshot was that it became possible for any innocent man, whether Greek or barbarian, to travel within Cyrus' domain wherever he liked without fear and carrying whatever he wanted.[4]
>
> He especially used to honour people for bravery in warfare. [...] This meant that brave men were also seen to prosper the most, while cowards were expected to be their slaves. This is why he always had plenty of men who were prepared to face danger in any situation where they thought that it might come to Cyrus' attention.[5]
>
> He regarded it as essential to make those who wanted to stand out for their justice wealthier than those who sought to profit from unjustice.[6]
>
> He never took land away from people who managed their estates with sufficient expertise and justice to improve the land and generate an income from it, but he always added to what they had. This meant that they gladly undertook hard work and went about the business of acquisition with confidence. They also had not the slightest inclination to conceal what they owned from Cyrus, because he made it plain that he did not mind people who made no secret of their wealth, while he made efforts to appropriate the property of those who tried to conceal it.[7]

Cyrus achieved a symbiotic connection between the ruler and his subordinates, ensuring that both sides had benefits and suffered no harm. Such behavior of the ruler encouraged an atmosphere of universal trust and implied that only the ruler would be able to meet their needs, since he followed the principles of honesty and justice.

Cyrus's death at the battle of Cunaxa was a traumatizing experience, but there was more trouble to come after Tissaphernes, Artaxerxes's second-hand, treacherously killed the chief Greek commanders. Xenophon describes the impact that

[2] *An.* 1. 9. 1. Trans. Waterfield 2009.
[3] *An.* 1. 9. 4.
[4] *An.* 1. 9. 13.
[5] *An.* 1. 9. 14.
[6] *An.* 1. 9. 16.
[7] *An.* 1. 9. 13

this treacherous act had on the mercenary army, which felt lost at the time, attempting to rally around a common purpose:

> After the capture of the generals and deaths of the company commanders and the soldiers who had gone with them, the Greeks reflected on their desperate predicament. They were close to the king's headquarters; they were surrounded on all sides by countless hostile tribes and cities; there was no longer anyone who would sell them provisions; they were at least 10,000 stades from Greece; there was no guide to show them the way; there were uncrossable rivers blocking their route home; even the barbarians who had made the journey up country with Cyrus had betrayed them; and they had been left alone, without a single horseman in their army.[8]

The subsequent description of the *Anabasis* is essentially an account of the activity of a leader – of facing and overcoming difficulties, convincing his army to obey and finally letting the mercenary army to scatter. Therefore, in this respect, *Anabasis* is not only the story of Xenophon as a successful leader but one of him as a failed commander as well.[9] The ability of the army to escape the danger and survive, its incapability to stay together and its final dissolution reveal, to a certain extent, the shortcomings of the Greek political system – the absence of a common position, its dissent and lack of unity regarding important political questions. Xenophon speaks about all of this – either directly or indirectly – and tries to outline a new perspective on Panhellenism, showing a way out of the crisis that shakes the whole Greek world. That this way out is not only a positive one may become clear at the end of *Anabasis*. Xenophon shows a way to solve the problem of the Greeks who fail to unite and a method for reconciling the Greek city-states which harbor such different positions and approaches to various issues.

To get a better picture of the Greek world, one ought to look to *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, and especially to its sequel – *The History of Greece* (*Hellenika*). In his *opus magnum,* Thucydides depicted the *stasis* state of the Greek world – the "war of all against all." Before the beginning of the conflict, the Greek world, despite the fact that separate city-states had pursued different politics, was regarded as integral. With the start of the Peloponnesian War, the problems of the Greek world became increasingly serious and, most importantly, there were no ways to deal with them. During the conflict, two super *poleis* emerged – Athens and Sparta. Their rivalry and will to power caused a split in the Greek world. Greece became a shattered mirror, the every split fragment of which showed a different picture. Athens and Sparta desired to become more equal than others. In *The History of Greece*, one may discern how sensitive Xenophon is to every shown effort at unity, and how he advocates various Panhellenic initiatives. One may see that some political figures, some leaders and their actions are more favored than others, especially if

[8] *An.* 3. 1. 2–3. 1. 3

[9] The *Anabasis* can be regarded as an utopian text (Dillery 2003, 63–68) in the sense that it shows the impossibility of a common identity and unification. The Ten Thousand was a community that could not be rooted locally, and its temporal unification was due to the efforts shown by the generals and by Xenophon in particular. The Ten Thousand was a project that lasted only while it had a common purpose – a purpose to survive, to reach the *oikoumenē* (Cf. Ma 2004, 340).

those actions provided an opportunity for a common military readiness, common purposes and military campaigns. While reading *The History of Greece*, one may get the impression that Xenophon saw the Persian king as the culprit for all the sufferings of the Greeks. It was he who tried to divide the whole Greek world by supporting one or another Greek *polis*. However, the Greeks, by taking gold from the Persian king, were responsible as well. "Thus most of the Corinthians, including all the best elements in the state, began to desire peace and agitate for it. This did not escape the notice of the Argives, Athenians, Boeotians, together with those Corinthians who had taken money from the King and those who had become most clearly responsible for the war."[10]

What solution did Xenophon see in these circumstances? He shared the vision of a strong Greece, i.e., a Greece where Athens and Sparta were on the same side, acting together. Athens and Sparta had played a significant role in the history of Greece in the past:

> They reminded the Athenians that throughout history in every great crisis Athens and Sparta had stood together for the right; Sparta had helped to drive the tyrants from Athens, and Athens had willingly sent help to Sparta when she was in difficulty with Messenians. And they referred to those happy days when the two were acting in concert, reminding their audience of how together they had driven back the Persians and of how, when Athens was chosen by the Greeks to be the leader of the naval forces and the guardian of the common funds, Sparta had supported the decision; and of how Athens on her side had given her support to the unanimous choice of all the Greeks that Sparta should act as leader by land.[11]

This nostalgia of the past unity may be regarded as Xenophon's vision of Panhellenism, according to which Athens and Sparta should act together and unite the whole of Greece. Sparta's role in this process was of great importance too, and to let this possibility slip would have been a terrible loss:

> And now heaven has offered you the opportunity of helping Sparta in her hour of need and, by so doing, of acquiring for all time to come the Spartans inescapably as your friends. Certainly it seems to me that there would be more than a few witnesses of the good treatment that Sparta would be receiving from you; yes, and the gods will know of this too, the gods who see all things now and for ever; both your allies and enemies know what is happening, and so does the whole world, Greeks and foreigners alike. […] And there is another point, too, to remember. If at any time in the future Greece should be again threatened by a foreign power, is there anyone you would trust more than the Spartans? Are there any others you would be more glad to have as your comrades-in-arms than these men whose countrymen, standing at Thermopylae, chose to a man to die fighting rather than to live and let the barbarian into Greece?[12]

The History of Greece ends with no clear conclusions. One may only guess what Xenophon felt after the battle of Mantinea. However, his scarce words are self-revelatory. The outcome of the battle of Mantinea was uncertain; no one could tell the winner apart from the loser. The course of the battle itself was depressing

[10] *Hell.* 4. 4. 1. Trans. Warner 1978.

[11] *Hell.* 6. 5. 34.

[12] *Hell.* 6. 5. 40.

to Xenophon, who saw no point in this mutual killing:

> The result of this battle was just the opposite of what everyone expected it would be. Nearly the whole of Greece had been engaged on the one side or the other, and everyone imagined that, if the battle was fought, the winner would become the dominant power and the losers would be their subjects. But God so ordered things that both parties put up trophies, as for victory, and neither side tried to prevent the other from doing so; both sides gave back the dead under a truce, as though they had won, and both sides received their dead under a truce, as though they had lost. Both sides claimed the victory, but it cannot be said that with regard to the accession of new territory, or cities, or power either side was any better off after the battle than before it. In fact, there was even more uncertainty and confusion in Greece after the battle than there had been previously.[13]

Given the importance that Xenophon attached to leadership – be it personal or *polis*-related – one may try to discuss Xenophon's project for Greece. This project is based on the idea of leadership, good rule and Panhellenism. Xenophon approaches the subject of a good ruler in two of his works – *Hiero* and *The Education of Cyrus*.

If Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* shows the preconditions for becoming a good ruler and points to the importance of natural and educational properties, *Hiero* is a sort of a handbook for the leader, a guide on how to become a better and happier ruler at the same time.[14] This, in Xenophon's opinion, is only possible if the ruler takes care of the happiness of his own city; the author thus sees a fateful connection between the *eudaimonia* of a city and that of a person:

> In the first place, then, which do you think brings you more credit, a residence gorgeously furnished at extraordinary expense, or the whole city equipped with defensive walls, temples, collonades, squares and harbours? Are you more likely to strike fear into the enemy if you personally are decked out with astounding arms and armour, or if the whole city is properly armed? Do you think more income would be generated if you were to keep only your own estates farmed or if you were to ensure that all the estates owned by your subjects were farmed? As for the occupation which is generally regarded as the noblest and grandest there is – that is, the breeding of horses for chariot-racing – which approach do you think will bring you the most credit, if you personally were to breed more teams than anyone else in Greece and enter them at the great festivals, or if your community were to produce more breeders and provide more contestants than any other state in Greece?[15]

Xenophon shows an ideal situation, an atmosphere of prosperity and safety, which is the result of the activity of a ruler who is dedicated, shares one's fortune and satisfies every need of the city:

> The first and immediate result will be the attainment of your goal: you will be liked by your subjects. Secondly, your victory will not be proclaimed just by a single crier: the whole world will resound with praise of your excellence. State after state, not just ordinary citizens, will look up to you with warmth and admiration, and throughout the world you will receive public tribunes, rather than private acclaim.
>
> Moreover, on the issue of safety, you'll be able to travel wherever you like to see the

[13] *Hell.* 7. 5. 25.

[14] For a fuller account of the themes recurrent in *Hiero,* see Strauss 2000, 22–102.

[15] *Hier.* 11. 2–5. Trans. Waterfield 2006.

> sights, or to stay where you are and do so. A constant procession of people will pass before your eyes, all with something clever or beautiful or good to show you, all desiring to serve you. Everyone around will wish you well, and everyone away from you will long to see you.[16]

There were few examples of a good leader and ruler in Xenophon's times. First, there was Socrates, who may be called a leader of wisdom; then, Cyrus the Younger, and finally – Agesilaus. For Xenophon, Agesilaus was not only a leader, but a leader who cared much about everything related to Greece. Panhellenism was a connecting tie between Xenophon and Agesilaus. One may get an impression that in *Hiero*, while describing the properties of a good ruler, these properties are mirrored in the acts of Agesilaus:

> His attitude towards his political opponents was that of a father towards his sons. He would tell them off their mistakes, but congratulate them on their creditable achievements and support them in times of trouble. He refused to regard any of his fellow citizens as an enemy and found something to approve of in all of them; he counted the preservation of each and every one of them as a profit and the death of even a worthless one as a loss. He obviously thought that his fatherland's prosperity depended on his fellow citizens continuing to live in peaceful observance of the laws and that it would remain strong as long as the Greeks behaved sensibly.[17]

But the most important thing is that Xenophon was of the opinion that Greeks fighting Greeks is a terrible scourge afflicting the land of Greece:

> Then again, if it is true that a good Greek is a supporter of Greece, I challenge anyone to name another military commander who would refuse to take a city if he thought that would involve destroying it, and who considered victory in a war against Greeks a catastrophe. Once, when he received a report that in the battle at Corinth only eight Spartans had been killed, compared with almost 10,000 of the enemy, it was plain to see that the news distressed him. In fact he said: 'Alas, poor Greece! Enough men have just died to have defeated in battle, were they alive, the whole Persian army'. And when the Corinthian exiles informed him of the city's imminent surrender and pointed to the siege-engines with which they confidently expected to take the walls, he refused to attack, and argued that the proper course of action in the case of Greek cities was to discipline the rather than enslave them. 'If we annihilate those of our own people who make mistakes', he added, 'the chances are that we will fail to have the means to overcome the Persians'.[18]

One may never know whether these words were actually uttered by Agesilaus or whether Xenophon came up with them, but the fact remains that Xenophon possibly saw in Agesilaus a person who could make his project of a strong and mighty Greece come true.

[16] *Hier.* 11. 8–11.

[17] *Agesil.* 7. 3. Trans. Waterfield 2006.

[18] *Agesil.* 7. 4–6.

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KSENOFONTO POLITINĖ FILOSOFIJA: PROJEKTAS VISAI GRAIKIJAI

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje aptariama Ksenofonto politinė filosofija ir jos graikiškasis kontekstas. Viena iš pagrindinių temų, kurią Ksenofontas implicitiškai ar eksplicitiškai nagrinėja savo veikaluose, yra lyderystė. Lyderystės klausimas iškyla beveik visuose Ksenofonto kūriniuose, tiek filosofiniuose, tiek istoriniuose, tiek literatūriniuose.

Lyderis Ksenofontui buvo svarbus ne tik kaip kariuomenės, bet ir kaip miesto ar bendruomenės lyderis. Turint omenyje, kokią didžiulę reikšmę Ksenofontui turi lyderystės klausimas, straipsniu bandoma parodyti, kad savo politinę filosofiją Ksenofontas kuria kaip bendragraikišką, panhelenistinę programą. Šios programos tikslas – suvienyti graikus politiškai, suburiant juos bendram panheleniniam žygiui prieš persus.

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