

# Interpretation

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## Interpretation

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# The *Education of Cyrus* as Xenophon's "Statesman"

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The problem which engenders Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*<sup>1</sup> is that of ruling human beings. Xenophon begins by noting that all regimes, and especially tyrannies, are subject to being overthrown. Men, unlike herd animals, are ruled only unwillingly, although they often desire to rule. This reflection upon the human situation as one tending to disorder does not lead Xenophon to propose improvements in the constitutions of regimes, but to suggest that humanity requires a master of the art of ruling, one who can rule human beings as other men rule animals. Xenophon presents Cyrus as possessing that power. Cyrus, beginning with a small Persian army, founded an empire extending to the limits of the known world (1.1.4; 8.6.21). Xenophon's opening statement gives the impression that he considers the problem of rule to be the central political problem and Cyrus to represent its solution. Xenophon identifies the problem of rule with the durability of regimes and Cyrus as the founder of the universal state. But it would be hasty indeed to conclude that Xenophon believes the problem of rule to be identical with the problem of durability, which is essentially the problem of obtaining universal peace. To use a formula, peace would seem to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for happiness. It is not possible at the outset to know whether Xenophon considers the solution of Cyrus to the problem of rule to be adequate, but it does appear from the opening statement that Xenophon is presenting Cyrus as the best political man. Xenophon, however, does not introduce Cyrus as just or virtuous or philosophic. He says rather that Cyrus "struck all men with fear and no one tried to withstand him" and that "he was able to awaken in all so lively a desire to please him, that they always wished to be guided by his will" (1.1.5). If Cyrus is the best ruler, there will still be the question whether the best ruler is like the best city in not being desired by decent people without reservation.

Xenophon says he will examine Cyrus' origin, nature, and education with a view to understanding how he was able to excel all others in ruling men. Xenophon intends to reveal the soul of the political man *par excellence*. Xenophon in fact covers the whole of Cyrus' life, including his death and its aftermath. The recording of the regime of Cyrus and its coming into being would seem to be required if Xenophon intends not only to reveal the soul of the best ruler but

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also his meaning to political life. However, we must be careful to follow where Xenophon leads, for Xenophon, by emphasizing the origin and especially the nature and education of Cyrus, seems to indicate that the best ruler cannot be fully understood on the basis of his statesmanship. The best political man must have an education which develops his natural capacity, and he must have opportunities (1.4.18; 1.5.4). He does not simply appear on the scene but has a history.<sup>2</sup> The history of his activity will consist not only of visible actions but also of the generating and therefore justifying thought behind them. That thought must be mixed with certain passions trained or not in youth and be derived largely from certain opinions acquired in youth. Cyrus is a successful practitioner of the art of ruling at a very early age (1.4.9; 1.4.12–15). The book's title, which at first appears to be a misnomer, serves as a rather heavy pointer to the fundamental importance of Cyrus' education to his success. The title is, however, not without ambiguity, for Cyrus both receives an education and imparts (and inflicts) an education. We cannot assume that these educations constitute the education Xenophon intends for his readers; that education must consist of the *Education of Cyrus* as a whole.

Cyrus' father is said to have been the Persian king Cambyses and his mother the daughter of the Median tyrant Astyages. Cyrus' origin is mixed. Xenophon reveals Cyrus' nature in a brief description of him as handsome, affectionate, devoted to learning, ambitious, and willing to endure great pain for praise. This description presents a problem and a question. First we see that Cyrus' natural character is a mixture of erotic and heroic elements. The problem lies in the tension between these elements, specifically between Cyrus' love of human beings and his ambition. It is doubtful that love of human beings will be able to coexist peacefully in the soul with ambition when the ambition is the desire to rule human beings. The question is whether Cyrus' political ambition is natural to him or is a product of his education. If Cyrus' political ambition is the result of combining love of human beings with ambition to rule, it would appear that his political ambition is rooted in his nature. Even so, his natural character can hardly be sufficient to explain his great success.

The education that Cyrus undergoes is divisible into three parts: Persian, Median, and kingly. The last, for which he is prepared by his youthful Persian and Median educations, refers to the instruction he receives from his father while en route to Media ahead of the Persian army. The treatment of the parts is different. Cyrus does not appear in the account of Persia; Xenophon limits himself to saying that Cyrus underwent the Persian education as a boy of less than twelve. Cyrus enters first in the pages devoted to his stay in Media, and it is from them that any judgment must be made of whether or how far Cyrus reflected in his early boyhood the regime of which his father was king. Dialogue is absent from the account of Persia, moderately present in the account of Media, and is the form of the kingly education. The ascendancy of speech might be explained by Cyrus' ascending years were it not that the adolescent Cyrus in Media recalls instruction he received as a boy from his Persian

teacher; Cyrus might have been shown in conversation with his teachers in the section devoted to Persia. Speech, it seems, is to be associated more with the erotic life of the Median tyranny than with the severe life of the Persian aristocracy. The dialogue between Cambyses and Cyrus takes place in Persia but on the way to Media. While the review of Persia is dry and legalistic, the account of Cyrus' visit to Media, which is roughly three times as long, is lively and entertaining. Hunting, for example, is discussed generally as a means by which Persian boys both were trained in courage and learned the art of war; but Cyrus is shown in Media chasing and killing not only wild animals but also men. The law and arrangements of state, prominent in the review of Persia, are appropriately absent from the account of Media.

The education provided by the Persian aristocracy is remarkable for having as its aim not reading or writing but the creation of good citizens. Good citizens, the Persians think, not only obey the law but do not desire anything bad. The highest intention of the Persian education is to lead young men towards manly virtue. It instructs the young in justice, in moderation and in courage. The claim of the Persian education to teach justice is qualified by the Persian identification of the just with the lawful. Persian boys learn justice by bringing and deciding cases against one another under the supervision of their teachers.<sup>3</sup> Xenophon points with characteristic subtlety to the problematic character of a civic education which identifies the just with the lawful while maintaining that law-abidingness is only the first prerequisite of good citizenship and not, as most states think, almost identical to it. Xenophon observes that the Persians punish ingratitude as they punish theft and assault, ingratitude being a form of injustice. The prevention of demonstrations of ingratitude or of similar vices (e.g., of illiberality) is aimed at the enforcement of a decorum that at least imitates genuine virtue.

The ruling Persian virtue is moderation, understood chiefly as control of the bodily passions and demands. The Persian education places the training of the passions second only to instruction in justice. The third element of the Persian education is the inculcation of courage through training in the arts of war and the administration of praise and honor. The emphasis upon moderation and courage indicates that the Persians require more than the public display of the gentlemanly virtues: they require the simple but manly virtues of the good soldier. To say that the Persians require certain virtues is to attribute their practice of virtue to necessity. Xenophon acknowledges or rather discloses at the end of the discussion of Persia that the Persian education cannot be understood without reference to the regime it was designed to help maintain (1.2.15). The Persian regime is by law an aristocracy; in practice it is a severe oligarchy in which there are many poor and few rich. By law no one is excluded from sending his sons to the public schools; in practice only those who can afford to maintain their children without work do send them. The few rich (the peers) have to guard against the many poor. They accomplish this by depriving the poor of all but the lightest arms and relying chiefly upon themselves as the

defense of Persia. The arrangement requires the Persian peers to live austere lives of vigilance, beginning with a youthful education intended to be morally and physically toughening. The Persian education succeeds in encouraging competition for honor among the young and in training them to endure hardship. With the help of strong laws, including the threat of ostracism, it succeeds in maintaining among the ruling class something more than the appearance of virtue but something less than true virtue.

Cyrus' Median experience interrupts his Persian education at age twelve and lasts four years, that is, during what is usually the decisive period of adolescence. Xenophon's Cyrus is intelligent; affectionate, and exceedingly charming. That he is not without independence of mind is evident from the favorable impression he has of his grandfather's appearance; the old tyrant comes complete with wig, purple tunic, eye shadow, rouge, and jewelry. Because Cyrus has experienced only Persian austerity until his arrival in Media, his immediate pleasure in the beauty of his grandfather's appearance must be owing to his nature. While Cyrus likes the ornate dress, he dislikes his grandfather's fancy foods and intemperate drinking. Cyrus says that he objects to his grandfather's drunken parties (cf. Plato, *Laws*, Bk. I) because during them both Astyages and his guests forget who is the ruler; the basis of Cyrus' objection is thought about politics and specifically about the necessity of moderation to well-ordered politics (1.3.10). Cyrus' comment that among the Medes his grandfather is the most handsome but among the Persians his father is the handsomest demonstrates a quick mind and a natural openness to human differences. Cyrus is naturally politic and cosmopolitan.

The existence of a tension in Cyrus between his ambition and his love of human beings (reflexive of his desire to be loved) is confirmed by Cyrus' youthful pursuits in Media. But these pursuits also demonstrate that Cyrus is already in possession of the understanding which would enable him to reconcile these passions.<sup>4</sup> This understanding is the essential foundation of his success. It is Cyrus' ambition which prompts him to accept his grandfather's invitation to stay in Media. He regards himself and is regarded as the best among Persian boys at throwing the spear and running on foot, and he wants to be the best among Median boys at riding horses. It seems important to add that Cyrus always competes honestly and never prevents anyone from doing his best. Cyrus wants to be, and to be acknowledged to be, the best among all men. He wants as well the admiration and love of all. His desire to be loved leads him to desire to have and to benefit friends. The young Cyrus schemes to secure his grandfather's consent to allow him to take his friends hunting on the open plain. In benefiting his friends he proves his superiority and places them in a dependent position: Cyrus' ambition to be the best is always in the service of ruling. Clearly, the desire to be the best will in very many situations be in a state of tension with the desire to be loved and admired. Satisfying both these desires will be especially difficult if those from whom love and admiration is

wanted hold themselves in competition for the highest honors. Xenophon states emphatically in the opening reflection of the *Education of Cyrus* that there is nothing for which men compete more (or with which they are less content for others to occupy) than positions of rule. Political superiority is not as easily demonstrated as, say, athletic superiority, for many eagerly imagine themselves rulers. Political superiority, even when convincingly demonstrated, will not be accepted willingly by those who find its acceptance contrary to their interests. The successful overcoming of the tension between the desire to be loved and the desire to occupy the first position among men in political life proves to be identical with a philanthropy calculated to gain advantage.

The account of Median effeminacy and luxury contrasts sharply with that of Persian discipline and austerity. There is no evidence that Cyrus participated in the vulgar activities of his grandfather. But how, other than in learning to ride horses (perhaps not a small matter), is Cyrus benefited by his coming of age in Media? There is evidence that his closeness to Astyages provided his mind with material on which to ponder the nature of absolute rule (1.6.8). Cyrus certainly found in Media the freedom to test his powers (the political teaching contained in this irony, which concerns those well-connected with the tyrant, was not lost on the young Cyrus.)<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Cyrus' absence from Persia during a critical period of his life is what is most significant about his Median experience. The young Cyrus is not upon his arrival in Media thoroughly attached to everything Persian. Cyrus' highly successful Median adventures cause him to be summoned home by his father in order to avoid criticism by the authorities, who might well have feared the Medianization of the crown prince; Xenophon makes the point that upon his return Cyrus is called upon to prove himself to be the best of the Persian youth (1.5.1). Cyrus' Persian and Median educations are in a state of tension, as are his natural characteristics. Xenophon evidently regards a certain divisiveness in the soul as necessary to great political activity, whereas from the *Memorabilia* we learn that he regards great philosophic activity, namely that of Socrates, as requiring the unity of the soul.

The reputation Cyrus earns in his first battle while still a youth in Media causes him to be selected to lead the Persian troops being sent to aid Media in its defense against Assyria. Cyrus sacrifices to the gods and chooses two hundred men from among the peers to form the upper echelon of the Persian army. The first opportunity to judge the combined effect of Cyrus' Persian and Median educations is his speech to the selected peers. Cyrus begins by saying that the men owe their selection to their having been observed by him to be obedient to the authorities. As for himself, Cyrus wishes to make known why he has accepted the command. He says:

"I have come to realize that our forefathers were no whit worse than we. At any rate, they also spent their time in practicing what are considered the works of virtue. However, what they gained by being what they were, either for the commonwealth of Persia or for themselves, I can by no means discover. And yet I

think that no virtue is practiced by men except with the aim that the good, by being such, may have something more than the bad; and I believe that those who abstain from present pleasures do this not that they may never enjoy themselves, but by this self-restraint they prepare themselves to have many times greater enjoyment in time to come. . . . those who practice military science undergo this labor . . . because they think that by gaining proficiency in the arts of war they will secure for themselves great wealth and happiness and honor both for themselves and for their country.

“But when men go through all this toil and then allow themselves to become old and feeble before they reap any fruit of their labors, . . . not even [they] would rightly be considered guiltless of folly.

“Now you, I take it, could make use of the night just as others do of the day; and you consider toil the guide to a happy life; hunger you use regularly as a sauce, and you endure drinking plain water more readily than lions do, while you have stored up in your souls that best of all possessions and the one most suitable to war: I mean, you enjoy praise more than anything else.” (I.5.8–12)

Cyrus’ speech is aimed at undermining the view that virtue is for its own sake and at supplying a qualified hedonism as the ground for the practice of virtue. The argument runs in part as follows: Virtue is practiced for gaining the good; the good is pleasure; the pleasure of the soldier is great wealth, happiness and honor. The hedonism of Cyrus is qualified by the nobility of his chief pleasure, honor.<sup>6</sup> Virtue is good because of the good things that may be acquired by its practice.<sup>7</sup> From the point of view of pleasure virtue is a means, but it appears as a necessary negative in forms both passive and active: as either abstention from pleasure or as hard work.<sup>8</sup> In both cases virtue is bodily. Cyrus does not speak of gratitude or of other virtues of the soul—these virtues, in their true form, would not seem useful in acquisition; their practice would seem unpleasant from the point of view of material pleasure. Cyrus’ reference to “what are considered the works of virtue” may imply that he considers the Persian catalogue (or the conventional catalogue) of the virtues incomplete or mistaken.

The corruption of the principle of aristocracy does not meet with any objection from the peers. Their easy conversion to the view of virtue as the means to the greatest pleasures (and to the view of the good life as being identical with the pleasant life) indicates either a serious flaw in the Persian education or the impossibility of a completely successful citizen education to virtue which understands virtue as being its own reward. The latter case would arise if virtue were not teachable, or teachable to only a very few. Here it is useful to recall that Xenophon’s philosophic mentor was Socrates, whose most famous teaching was that human beings lack knowledge of the most important things and should therefore conduct themselves with moderation. The understanding that virtue would not be fully teachable if it were not fully knowable carries the obvious implication that the Persian education to simple virtue was hindered by the ultimate unknowability of true virtue. In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon says that Socrates never claimed to teach virtue, but made his companions hope to

become like him by imitating him (1.2.8). Xenophon also says in the *Memorabilia* that the good and noble things are acquired by practice and that the society of good men is training in virtue.<sup>9</sup> If virtue, or something akin to it, may be acquired through habituation, then the Persian education cannot have been simply unsuccessful. This thought encourages a reconsideration of the regime. In particular, the opinion of Persia advanced above, that the regime is legally an aristocracy but is in fact an oligarchy, is not adequate, principally for the reason that the Persians aim at making the best men (of wealth) preeminent (cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1293b2). The impurity of aristocracies in practice is owing to a certain fact, namely, that the virtuous are always too few to fill the many offices of government (cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1283b6). The description of Persia as a simple oligarchy would offer the doubtful explanation that what appeared to be the easy corruption of the peers is not a corruption at all, oligarchy being the regime dedicated to wealth. The description of Persia as an impure aristocracy (an aristocracy of notables) would explain the corruption of the peers by maintaining that the Persians always viewed virtue as mostly instrumental—not to wealth but to preservation. Accordingly, the corruption of the peers consists in the replacement of noble self-preservation with vulgar self-satisfaction as the end of virtue.

Cyrus must have felt this corruption necessary to his project. We cannot know from his speech to the peers whether he contemplated empire seriously from the beginning. He does appear at the outset to have a larger ambition than is required by his commission and to wish to establish great ambition in the hearts of the peers. But the ambition he wishes them to feel is for wealth; his own ambition, which must be political, he keeps prudently to himself. As the Persian practice of virtue is instrumental, it is not difficult to persuade the peers that there is something better than preservation that is the end of virtue. Cyrus concludes his speech by assuring the peers of the justice of the Persian mission. One may wonder whether the act of stating the just nature of the Persian cause is the first act made necessary by Cyrus' corruption of Persian virtue. The problematic character of that virtue is intimated by Cyrus when he calls the peers not lovers of virtue but lovers of praise. Cyrus, however, would not change his army for any other, even for one many times larger. This is because for Cyrus the virtue of the soldier consists in his love of praise, for "lovers of praise must gladly undergo every sort of hardship and every sort of danger" (1.5.12). It will become a question whether courage may be sustained in the face of the corruption of virtue. Cyrus is able without difficulty to combine the many virtues of the peers together with the natural human desire for pleasure. To use and maintain this highly problematic combination would appear on its face to require a very great political wisdom. Concerning this we must turn to the instruction Cyrus receives from his father Cambyses on the way to Media.

This section is an example of Xenophon's Socratic rhetoric. It contains the political teaching necessary to successful rule. It begins and ends with discus-

sion of the gods. It begins with Cambyses observing that as the signs of the gods may be manipulated by soothsayers Cyrus ought always to rely upon his own reading of the divine revelation, and it ends with Cambyses teaching Cyrus of the limit of human wisdom and the necessity of divine wisdom. The opening observation is followed by Cyrus agreeing with his father that the gods help those who help themselves, while the last ends with the assertion that the gods are under no compulsion to help anyone. Man would appear to be on his own in a world where successful political activity belongs to energetic and gifted calculators favored by good fortune.

Having indicated to Cyrus that it is possible to manipulate believing men through interpretation of the divine signs and having underscored the importance of self-reliance, Cambyses recalls a discussion they once had in which they agreed that while it is a great task to prove oneself truly good and noble, it is equally great and equally worthy of a man to provide for himself and his household. And worthy of the greatest admiration is to understand how to govern other people so that they have all that they need and become all that they ought. This is to say that to rule wisely and well is more worthy than to be truly good and noble. It might be suggested that in Cyrus' case the elevation of politics and the political good over the soul and the private good is mitigated by absolute kingship being the regime in which the private good of the ruler is most nearly identical with the political or common good. But Cyrus does not begin as an absolute king; his very beginning is owed not to his being the monarchical heir of an impoverished aristocracy but to youthful success upon the field of battle. It seems that success in politics demands that one sacrifice or compromise something of one's private virtue; this fact is obviously of less importance if virtue is understood to be wholly instrumental. When Cyrus says he is prepared to trust the Medes to supply his army with provisions, Cambyses teaches the important lesson of relying upon one's own arms for obtaining provisions and securing revenue. Simple trust is dangerous; things should be arranged in such a way as to make it unnecessary. The possessor of an army may often gain what he wants through intimidation: an army makes one's words persuasive (1.6.9–10).

Following the discussion of provisions, a perhaps concerned Cambyses asks whether Cyrus recalls the other points which they had agreed must not be neglected. Cyrus recalls the education he received as a boy from an incompetent military instructor and Cambyses' review of the failings of that education. Cyrus had not been taught how to obtain provisions, how to ensure health, how to construct the artifacts of war, how to create enthusiasm, or how to ensure obedience, but had learned only tactics. This list of topics is nearly that now reviewed by Cambyses, with the following exceptions: in place of the discussion of tactics are discussions of love and taking advantage, while the arts of war are subsumed under taking advantage.<sup>10</sup> One cannot help wonder whether the tactics used in love and in taking advantage are comprehensive. It is note-

worthy that Cambyses sent his son to receive instruction in those fields not taught by his incompetent military instructor. Cambyses had refused at that time to teach generalship. Does he now teach it? Or does the replacement of tactics with love and taking advantage signal the replacement of the teaching of generalship with the teaching of rulership? If tactics may be subsumed under love and taking advantage, generalship would appear to be subsumable under rulership (1.6.12–14). However this may be, the review of Cyrus' education now undertaken by Cambyses reveals that education as falling short of the education needed by the ruler. The two topics following discussion of provisions—health and enthusiasm—indicate, first, that Cyrus conceived of the ruler's task too narrowly and, second, that he approached it too straightforwardly. He conceived of health as something to be regained by doctors when lost, rather than as something to be carefully maintained (the ruler's foresight must extend to maintenance as well as to acquisition). He thought enthusiasm was best created by inspiring men with hopes but did not consider the danger of creating false expectations. Cambyses suggests that Cyrus say nothing of which he is not certain but make "certain others" his mouthpiece (1.6.19; cf. 2.2.17; 7.5.55; 8.4.11).

Cyrus believes that the chief incentives to obedience are praise and honor for the obedient and punishment and dishonor for the disobedient. This, says Cambyses, is the road to compulsory obedience, but there is a shorter and better road to willing obedience. "For people are only too glad to obey the man who they believe takes wiser thought for their interests than they themselves do" (1.6.21). Cambyses cites the case of the sick willingly obeying their doctors. But the sick obey their doctors not only because they think their doctors possess the knowledge needed to become healthy but also because they trust their doctors to apply that knowledge in their interest. The doctor must not only in fact be wise in medicine, he must seem to the patient to be wise. The doctor's most valuable possession is his good reputation. Cyrus, displaying his keen political understanding, immediately interprets his father to mean "that nothing is more effectual toward keeping one's men obedient than to seem to be wiser than they." Human beings typically choose the course they think most advantageous to themselves; it is then a large part of the ruler's activity to convince those he would rule that following him is the most advantageous choice available to them. It is obviously a question whether or how far the same course may be advantageous, or be made to appear advantageous, to different people. Cyrus asks how to acquire a reputation for wisdom. Cambyses denies that there is any shorter road to a reputation for wisdom than really to be wise in the things in which one wishes to seem wise. The risk in feigning wisdom is that one will be proven an impostor. Cyrus asks not how one may become wise but how one may become wise in foreseeing that which will prove to be useful. Cambyses replies that Cyrus ought to learn all that is possible to acquire by learning, but to those things which are not possible either to learn or to foresee, Cyrus may

apply the soothsayer's art and thus prove himself wiser than others (1.6.23). The employment of the soothsayer's art—the feigning of divine knowledge—is the art made necessary by the inability of human beings to foresee the future. Human beings can at best plan and prepare.

Reviewing the terrain thus far covered by Cambyses we notice that, excluding the opening references to the gods, there has been a constant ascent: provisions such as food and clothing are necessary to mere life, while health is necessary to the good life, or at any rate to creating the political conditions of the good life; from concern for the healthy body the discussion ascends to concern for the enthusiastic soul, and from the enthusiastic soul to the self-understanding soul, that knows it serves itself best by willingly obeying him who knows best. Cyrus now attempts to ascend from willing obedience to love. The “love of one's subjects” is to him “one of the most important questions.” Cyrus suggests “the same course that you would take if you wished to gain the affection of your friends,” namely, “you must show yourself to be their benefactor” (1.6.24). Cambyses cautions that it is difficult to always be in a position to benefit those whom you will; one may instead show sympathy and an eagerness to help (cf. 8.2.1). Cyrus does not yet see, as Cambyses does, that there will be limits to philanthropy and that not all subjects can be friends. Cambyses adds that the sight of the general enduring physical hardships better than his soldiers (made possible by his being the center of attention) contributes to his being loved by his men; one may be excused for thinking that this love has a lot in common with fear (consider 2.4.3 together with 2.4.28–29). In the impossibility of completing the ascent from willing obedience to love, the discussion would seem to have reached its peak. This peak proves to be a plateau. Cambyses has thus far prepared Cyrus to receive the core of the statesman's wisdom: of what sort he himself must be. Cambyses' moderation of Cyrus' inclination to elevate the importance of love to successful politics is critical to Cyrus' successful indoctrination.

Cyrus suggests that when the army achieves its best fighting form it is wise to engage the enemy at the first opportunity. Cambyses, however, says that one ought never to engage the enemy unless one expects to gain some advantage from it (thus the condition not only of one's own troops but also those of the enemy must be considered). Cyrus asks what is the best way to gain advantage over the enemy.

“By Zeus,” said [Cambyses], “this is no easy or simple question that you ask now, my son; but let me tell you, the man who proposes to do that must be designing and cunning, wily and deceitful, a thief and a robber, overreaching the enemy at every point.”

“O Heracles, father,” said Cyrus with a laugh, “what a man you say I must become!”

“Such, my son,” he said, “that you would be at the same time the most righteous and lawabiding man in the world.”(1.6.27)

When Cambyses says Cyrus' question is not simple, he means that there is no single answer that may be consistently applied. The art of the statesman consists in rightly judging of and acting upon the demands of an individual situation. The complete application of this art requires a complete freedom of mind. Cambyses gently (and without difficulty) leads Cyrus away from gentlemanship, from its moral restraint and straightforwardness. Cambyses refers again to Cyrus' early Persian education, reminding Cyrus of the devices he used in hunting small game.<sup>11</sup> If Cyrus will apply these to men, he will not fall short of any enemy. (Obviously it is a question who the enemy are for the man whose desire to rule is limitless, and whether the devices to be used upon the enemy are not in principle identical with those used upon subjects and friends.) The kingly education is not the perfection of the Persian gentleman's education but rather its undoing (1.6.31). The ruler needs a reputation for piety and law-abidingness, however, for the same reason he needs a reputation for wisdom. In the beginning the ruler rules with the consent of the ruled, and the ruled are more willing to obey the god-fearing; but, when no longer needing consent, the ruler, being the consummate calculator, continues to prefer to rule by consent rather than by force.

Cambyses perfects Cyrus' understanding of calculation, an art for which Cyrus has a natural taste, first, by liberating him from the moral conventions and, second, by stimulating him to creativity. The ruler is one who thinks literally night and day and who is an inventor of new schemes. But having encouraged Cyrus to calculation, Cambyses warns of man's fallibility—the knowledge necessary to foolproof calculation is unavailable to man. Because “mere human wisdom<sup>12</sup> does not know how to choose what is best,” man must wait upon the gods. From the practical wisdom of the ruler Cambyses ascends briefly to the theoretical wisdom of the philosopher.<sup>13</sup> Cyrus, for his part, asks no questions about wisdom; Cambyses, after crossing with Cyrus into Media and praying to the Median gods, departs for home.

We have seen that Cyrus' first act is the revaluation of Persian virtue: whereas virtue had been understood to be both good in itself and useful to preservation, it is now promulgated to be merely useful, and not merely to preservation but also to acquisition. This act would be of little significance had Cyrus been without the means to acquire. Indeed, it is Cyrus' very modest means—an army consisting of one thousand peers trained to fight hand to hand and thirty thousand commoners experienced only with bows and spears—which necessitates his second act, the reorganization of the army. This is accomplished in two steps. The first step consists in asking the commoners to fight hand to hand alongside the peers in exchange for an equal share of future successes. The peers accept the new arrangement out of concern for their safety, the commoners out of desire for gain. The second step consists in staging discussions that affirm the principle of reward according to merit. Cyrus prepares the army for this by instituting a system of promotion uncontrolled by

social position. Cyrus' aim is the creation, or rather unfettering, of a natural aristocracy in the army, but it will be an aristocracy in which the best are those most obedient and most capable as military officers. The emergence of a natural aristocracy must subvert the conventional aristocracy: Cyrus' reorganization of the Persian army effects an unauthorized and therefore illegal democratization of about one fourth of the whole citizen body (commoners as well as peers).

Cyrus' corruption of Persian virtue and social democratization of the army represents a return to nature. At the center of the account of the reorganization of the army, Xenophon includes a scene from Cyrus' dinner table in which he raises the question whether the commoners are any worse off than the peers because they have not received the Persian education. Cyrus wishes to make the commoners acceptable to the peers as equal partners in war. He does not in fact believe in the equality of the commoners: he describes them as strong in body but having souls needing training in courage. Even courage and strength together will not gain the highest honors, however: only one commoner, "a gentleman at heart," ever reaches a position of superiority (2.1.11; 8.3.5; see also 5.2.17). The peers tell stories ridiculing the commoners, and Cyrus laughingly says that the commoners can be made friends "with even a little piece of meat" (2.2.10). A peer known for extreme austerity rebukes the storytellers for inciting laughter; this friend of the old order sees that the new preference for pleasure over virtue undermines the peers' claim of superiority over the commoners. The laughing peers express their complaint against the new order (i.e., the lowering of their status) in a manner not offensive to Cyrus; the austere peer, although finally induced to smile, is not heard of again. Now occurs the first of two staged discussions of reward according to merit, a measure Cyrus wishes to be accepted "for the sake of the peers" (for even they would be made better—more obedient, more competitive, more desirous to please—by it) and one which shame prevents them from rejecting. One of the peers laughingly tells of a commoner who also is against share and share alike—against, that is, receiving an equal share of hard work. Cyrus knows perfectly well that in relying upon man's natural preference for the pleasant to motivate his soldiers he risks infecting them with viciousness, "for the vicious are often able to demonstrate that vice does gain some advantage." The vicious must be weeded out at any cost and replaced with the best "from all sources" (2.2.26).

The corruption of Persian virtue once begun is perhaps hastened by the attachment to the army of increasing numbers of nations. There clearly ensues a general decline of discipline and morale (5.4.15; 6.2.13; 7.1.30; 7.2.6). Cyrus feels it necessary to exhort his men to courage before the great battle—something he refused to do before the first battle on the ground that no speech could make men instantly good.<sup>14</sup> Cyrus maintains obedience after the great battle by immediately dividing among his men the Lydian spoils, which he obtains

peacefully (plundering would have rewarded the disobedient and destroyed the city—this is one of many examples of justice deriving indirectly from Cyrus' calculations [7.2.5 together with 7.2.11]).

We are now in a position to understand Xenophon's philosophic intention behind his explicit intention to show how Cyrus solved the problem of rule. Underlying Cyrus' corruption of Persian aristocratic principles is an understanding of the natural human condition not dissimilar to that presented by such modern writers as Machiavelli and Hobbes, that is, one of violent struggle necessitated by man being grasping and competitive in a world of limited wealth. Given the character of the human condition, how does one build a stable politics? More fundamentally, what is the basis of political life? Three answers suggest themselves: kinship, friendship, coercion. Kinship is ruled out by the fact that kinship without friendship is insufficient to mitigate the natural condition (1.6.32). Friendship seems on its face a dubious answer, but it is the answer explicitly and publicly given by Cyrus at the peaceful end of his long life (8.7.13). Cyrus cautions that friendship does not arise naturally, meaning that the basis of friendship is not love, and asserts that faithfulness in men must be created and maintained by acts of kindness; he denies it can be compelled. Perhaps Cyrus considers this last claim to be a noble lie. The first alliance gained by Cyrus' efforts, that of Armenia, is secured most emphatically by force. The Armenians become allies by a self-interested calculation in which the weightiest factor is fear of violent death. Cyrus' initial kindness to the Armenians consists in sparing their lives, in returning their women, and in taking only a small part of their money, in exchange for their participation in the campaign. The political life of the subjugated slaves, whether they are Persian commoners in Persia or defeated Babylonians, rests upon coercion, but this fact is, for two reasons, alleviated and even concealed under the rule of the best ruler (8.1.43–44). First, the best ruler practices coercion by degrees: of the three enemy forts taken by Cyrus, one is taken by force, one by intimidation, and one by persuasion (5.4.51). Second, the best ruler desires as far as possible to make all enemies into friends, for the reason that his desire for the honor of mankind is unlimited except by his desire to rule mankind, which is limitless.

The ruler is he who can by management turn naturally faithless human beings into faithful friends. The art of managing friends demands that different men be treated according to their differences. Men follow Cyrus chiefly because he knows how to harm enemies and enrich friends; some of the best men follow because they are attracted by his natural excellence, by his superior manliness and good looks, or because they wish to requite some service he has done them (4.1.23; 4.2.9). Xenophon emphasizes in various ways how impressive Cyrus is in appearance. He looks and behaves like a leader among men themselves noted for physical endurance and courage. However, Cyrus' love for other men bears a resemblance to the love other men have for their dogs. He certainly looks upon individual men as tools, who are better or worse only

insofar as they are useful (5.3.46). For Cyrus, men are useful not only in their virtues but in their vices, loves, and hates; indeed, they become useful through appeals to their strongest passions, whether noble or ignoble.<sup>15</sup> The largest obstacle to transforming men into friends is the limit of good things to give away. Cyrus maximizes the political good will of his philanthropy by keeping his wealth in circulation (8.2.20). While Cyrus shares wealth, he does not share the highest political honors. There will always be those who envy the ruler and who consider themselves equal to him. These armed and capable men are a constant source of sedition, and must be made jealous of one another through contests and the circulation of positions of honor.

Once Cyrus establishes himself in Babylon, he considers how to maintain and enlarge his empire. Concluding that it is necessary to persuade the peers and other men of influence to remain together practicing virtue and waiting upon the king at court, Cyrus gives a speech urging the establishment of Persian practice. Cyrus, as an established peacetime ruler, needs the Persian virtues as the Persian regime needs them. Cyrus assures his "friends and allies" that they have not acquired their wealth unjustly and warns that without the continued exercise of self-control, moderation, and care they will lose it.<sup>16</sup> The measures taken by the peers to rule hostile commoners must now be taken by the peers and allies to rule far more hostile peoples (7.5.77). But Cyrus does not justify the institution of Persian virtue only on the ground of necessity, for he says that they must claim the right to rule over their subjects only on the ground that they are their betters (7.5.79). For Cyrus, the best men are those most capable of successful political action, the fundamental form of which is war. Masters of political action possess certain virtues common to gentlemen but, as Cyrus learns from Cambyses, they do not possess them in the same way or for the same reason. Cyrus does not go so far as to say that the rule of the peers and allies over the conquered nations is just because the rule of the best is just, or that their rule will remain just only as long as they themselves remain better than the ruled (7.5.83–84). As it is unjust for those who are superior in one respect to have superior shares of everything, the absolute and permanent subjugation of civilized peoples will always be unjust. Moreover, Cyrus subjugates peoples whose only offense is their independent existence (8.6.19–20). What of the justice of Cyrus' gentle but absolute rule over the peers and allies? Following Cyrus' speech, chief officer Chrysantas tells the peers and allies that they distinguish themselves from slaves only by their obedience to Cyrus being willing obedience; their obedience can be willing because, as they have common enemies, Cyrus' rule is to their common advantage (8.1.4). The justice of Cyrus' absolute rule and his just title of king are found in the extent to which his interest is identical with the interest of the governed. This identification reaches its limit under Cyrus, with the result that for the willingly subjugated, there is only one ruler and only one interest.

The imitation of the Persian practices will not establish the Persian virtues. The peers had been imitators of virtue, but they had understood virtue to be both good in itself and useful; they and the allies will now imitate the imitation of virtue, but it will be a thoroughly vulgarized practice without faith in its independent goodness. For this reason, the return to Persian virtue through Persian practice is impossible. Xenophon provides an annotated list of the virtues Cyrus wished represented in himself and the nobles, which is conspicuous for allotting justice to second place and speaking of it as a deterrent to improper gain. Piety occupies the first position (god-fearing men being less likely to commit crimes against the king); justice the second; showing respect the third; obedience (not, of course, practiced by Cyrus) the fourth; and last is moderation (8.1.23–30). It seems that the heavy emphasis upon obedience reduces the need for moderation among the subjects. Obedience is secured through a vast network of spies known as the “king’s eyes,” created by Cyrus’ “rewarding liberally those who reported to him whatever it was to his interest to hear.” Xenophon says plainly that “people are everywhere afraid to say anything to the discredit of the king” (8.2.10–11). Competition under Cyrus is not for honor among gentlemen but for Cyrus’ favor.

Cyrus’ regime is then of an altogether different character than that of the Persian regime. There is no indication that he ever intended to reproduce that regime on a large scale, or that he desired to produce a regime superior to Persia in the cultivation of individual excellence. Cyrus’ adoption of the Median costume and lavish giving are not done with a view to improving upon Persia by alleviating its harshest aspects, but are part of Cyrus’ political calculations (to make himself and the nobles formidable in appearance and to make sedition on the part of the nobles less likely). Not even if the good life is defined as the obtaining and enjoyment of wealth can Cyrus be said to create a regime aiming at the good life, for in truth no one but Cyrus owns anything (8.1.17; 8.2.15–19). The achievement of the best political man is a regime in which as king he is called father (8.1.44).

For Cyrus, virtue and friendship are merely useful for the obtaining of rulership of the largest possible empire. But what is rulership of empire for? A possible answer is universal peace. But the state of peace must itself be for something, for, say, the cultivation of domestic life; or for leisured conversation, or thought, about the world, and ultimately about the most important things of the world. It almost goes without saying that the adult Cyrus is never shown participating in family life. As a young man in Media, Cyrus does not show any interest in an Armenian philosopher; as general, he fails opportunities to show interest in the nature of wisdom and the soul (1.6.46; 6.1.41–42; 7.2.28–29); at his death, Cyrus professes an interest in the question of the immortality of the soul, but apparently has not seriously studied it. Whereas a state of peace is necessary to contemplation, a state of contest is necessary to

political activity; we have already noted that Xenophon seems to think this applies equally to the soul. The state of being at peace, or at rest, seems fundamentally unattractive to the political man.<sup>17</sup>

Cyrus considers, or at any rate thinks others consider, empire to be a good in itself (4.5.16). He does not say, however, that rulership of empire is the good or is the aim of the best life. He says rather that he counts most happy the one who can “acquire the most and use the most to noble ends” (8.2.23). Empire then is like the original Persian conception of virtue in being a good in itself and for the sake of noble ends. Cyrus believes that he dies leaving his friends and country happy to such an extent that he should be justly accounted an immortality of fame. Cyrus is able to live for an immortality of fame and yet be never more than mildly interested in the immortality of the soul because he doubts the immortality that supports virtue. The best political man lives entirely for the highest political end—unceasing and unequalled honor. The man most loving of honor is a political man for the reason that, while one can live honorably alone, one cannot bestow honor upon oneself. Cyrus himself “honored those who unhesitatingly obeyed more than those who thought they exhibited the greatest and most elaborate virtues,” meaning that Cyrus loved those who loved him, more than he loved the good (8.1.29).

The *Education of Cyrus* contains two prominent examples of politically active men superior to Cyrus in their attachment to virtue. One is Cambyses, who while possessing the knowledge necessary to empire, is ever the first of the Persians to obey the authorities (1.3.18). Cambyses is restrained by the understanding that aristocracy is a better political solution than is absolute beneficent monarchy because the regime in which gentlemen are dedicated to virtue is better than the regime in which nobles are dedicated to prosperity. We do not know how far Cambyses might have pursued either the enemy or Persian ambitions had he been in Cyrus’ place, but we may consider references to Cyrus’ being recalled by his father after the first great battle (6.1.4–5) and to the cool reception Cyrus receives upon his return to Persia as the Great King, at which Cambyses warns him against subverting the Persian constitution with a view to self-aggrandizement (8.5.21–24). The other man is the commoner Pheralus, who while possessing the skill of the ruler, possesses the soul of a gentleman and therefore cares more for virtue than for gain. The case of Pheralus shows that, while Cyrus himself is incapable of leading men to virtue, it is not impossible under Cyrus’ rule both to succeed and to practice virtue, if one is willing to take unusual measures (8.3.7; 8.3.47–50). The conclusion that the best political man is not the best man even on the political plane would seem justified if it is true that Xenophon does not regard virtue as merely useful. Fortunately, Xenophon is the author of a book devoted to Socrates, whom he calls at its end “the best and happiest man.” Xenophon does not call Cyrus happy, but rather calls him, at the beginning of the *Education of Cyrus*, “deserving of all admiration.” Xenophon invites comparison of Socrates to any other man, but invites

comparison of Cyrus only to any other ruler (*Memorabilia*, 4.8.11; *Education of Cyrus*, 1.1.6).

That Xenophon could think Cyrus the best political man and think Socrates the simply best man reflects the disjunction of politics and philosophy brought about on the one hand by the political man's disinterest in fundamental questions and the philosopher's disinterest in active political participation, and on the other hand by the inferior scope of politics: the best political man lives untouched by philosophy, while the philosopher lives in association with political life. But perhaps no man ever participated as fully as Xenophon in both politics and philosophy. One cannot fail to be impressed that the same man wrote both the *Anabasis*<sup>18</sup> and the *Memorabilia*. The most extensive claim one might make for Xenophon is that in exceeding Socrates in manliness and Cyrus in serious reflection, Xenophon is more than either the complete man. Xenophon, but not Xenophon's Cyrus, knows that there is a higher aim than the political aim. He does not for this reason despise politics or the life devoted to it. One would have to turn to the *Memorabilia* to know whether Xenophon thinks the philosophic aim requires the political aim to be the virtuous regime in which free men live in the exercise of noble actions.

The *Education of Cyrus* by itself teaches the need of the simple but manly virtues not only to self-preservation but also to healthy political life. In teaching, in the context of the grandest political activity, the precariousness and therefore remoteness of justice and goodness in political life, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the possibilities and therefore the limits of the life of the best political man, the *Education of Cyrus* teaches a true political moderation.

#### NOTES

1. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library, 1914.)

2. It would be interesting to know whether in Xenophon's view the coming into being of a statesman on the level of Cyrus does not require more complicated and more specific conditions than does the coming into being of the philosopher, who, appearing in Armenia, might appear almost anywhere (3.1.38).

3. During his youthful training in Persian justice Cyrus is once punished by his teacher for awarding to a big boy the big tunic of a little boy rather than the small one which belonged legally to him (1.3.16–17). The story emphasizes Cyrus' natural freedom of mind, a quality which turns out to be essential to him.

4. Given Cyrus' nature, to what extent does he need an education to successful political activity? The answer is partly indicated in the comparison of Cyrus' performance in his very first battle while still a youth in Media with his performance as general in the great battle with the Assyrians. In the former he takes the lead like a "well-bred but inexperienced hound" (1.4.21). In the latter he surveys the whole scene from a tower and dons the same armor as his staff (7.1.39; 7.1.2).

5. The freedom Cyrus has by virtue of his relationship with Astyages is not unrestricted; its successful use requires considerable skill. Cyrus is a contriver of pleasure for others (1.4.15) but finds philanthropy difficult to practice under tyranny (1.4.26).

6. On Xenophon having “had at his disposal a hedonistic justification of virtue,” see Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, revised and enlarged (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 96–99.

7. In his speech Cyrus links virtue to gain. Later he will need to link it to maintenance (7.5.82–85).

8. Cyrus uses in his speech the word for self-restraint, *enkrateia*, but not the word for moderation, *sophrosune*. Moderation is the ruling virtue, including self-restraint and deriving from prudence. Is there something immoderate or imprudent about the Persian expedition? See note 16 below.

9. Does training in virtue share a relationship with true virtue similar to that shared by philosophy and wisdom? The thought is that the gain from training in virtue is imperfect virtue as the gain from philosophy is imperfect wisdom.

10. The list recalled by Cyrus from his boyhood conversation with Cambyses is as follows: provisions, health, arts of war, enthusiasm, obedience, tactics. Their present discussion reviews: provisions, health, enthusiasm, obedience, love, taking advantage (1.6.12–14).

11. The *Education of Cyrus* contains numerous comparisons of men to animals; subjects and potential subjects are compared to herd animals (1.1.2), friends to domestic animals (8.2.4), enemies to wild animals (1.6.39).

12. Whereas Cambyses had formerly used the word *phronesis*, indicating practical wisdom, he now uses *sophia*, indicating theoretical wisdom (cf. 1.6.22 with 1.6.46).

13. This advice has a significant effect upon Cyrus, who describes himself at the time of his peaceful death as always having lived as he wished but as always having feared that he “might see or hear or experience something unpleasant” (8.7.7).

14. Cf. 3.3.50–55 with 6.2.13–22 and 7.1.10–22. In the great battle the infantry follow the Persian cavalry, whereas in the first battle the Persian infantry precede the Median cavalry; the switch from hand-to-hand fighting on foot to hand-to-hand fighting on horseback seems to indicate a decline in Persian courage (7.1.26). In the great battle (but not in the first battle) Cyrus makes extensive use of devices, such as scythe-bearing chariots, towers, and, to frighten horses, camels (7.1.34, 7.1.47–48).

15. Compare Araspas with Abradatas (6.1.36 and 6.4.9). Other examples are the justified but consuming hatreds of Gobryas and Gadatas for the Assyrian king. Note that Cyrus goes to help Gadatas against the Assyrian king that he may “gain an advantage to ourselves” (5.3.31–32).

16. In Cyrus’ original pronouncement upon virtue, he had concluded by assuring the peers that their mission is not unjust; he now twice assures them and their allies that they have not been unjust (*adikos*). In the original pronouncement Cyrus used only the word for self-restraint (*enkrateia*); he now uses both this word and the word for moderation (*sophrosune*). Perhaps this change reflects the difference between the demands placed upon the nobles in time of war and in time of peace, when they participate in governing (cf. 1.5.8 with 7.5.74 and 1.5.13 with 7.5.73; 7.5.77).

17. A state of peace is necessary not only to contemplation but to hedonism: in willing the satrapy of Media to his younger son, Cyrus says that Tanaoxares shall have every human pleasure without the interruptions to happiness brought by royal power, which power leaves “one able to find no rest.” Tanaoxares would seem to be thus encouraged to live as the self-indulgent Cyaxares lived (8.7.12; see 4.1.13–18).

18. The *Anabasis* is Xenophon’s account of Cyrus the Younger’s failed campaign against the Great King and of Xenophon’s leading the Greeks safely back to Greece. Xenophon reports in the *Anabasis* (5.6.15) that he was accused of desiring to found a city.