

## BOOK REVIEW

*Xenophon's Mirror of Princes: Reading the Reflections*. By VIVIENNE J. GRAY. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. vii + 406. £83.00/\$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-956381-4.

Gray's provocative, lucid and erudite study develops key ideas that she has advanced throughout her career: Xenophon is primarily concerned with modeling good leadership, in achieving this he employs innovative literary skill, and the way individual passages advance his program is best understood by reading them against similar scenes across the author's diverse corpus. Building on earlier studies of particular works, Gray offers a systematic presentation of Xenophon's leadership theory and provides a catalog of the main literary devices that enhance its dramatization (explicit evaluative comments, allusion, inherited and invented type scenes, and constructive irony). Good leadership in all settings—*oikos*, army, Socratic classroom, polis and kingdom—is revealed as the selfless cultivation of the material and ethical increase of one's followers in order to obtain their voluntary obedience and the rewards of praise and security this brings. As Gray brilliantly demonstrates, Xenophon even accommodates personal friendship within his paradigm as a situation in which two parties trade off the roles of leader and follower. Gray uses her detailed case for Xenophon's sophisticated but univocal message to challenge ironic (i.e. Straussian) readings of several works, which posit the author subtly embeds deflationary details that unmask the manipulative and oppressive character of his "model" leaders for discerning readers. For Gray such readings fixate on how figures like Cyrus the Great "use" their dependents (χρησθαι) while ignoring Xenophon's qualification that both leader and follower "use" each other properly (καλῶς / εὖ χρησθαι) by fostering an interdependent *eudaimonia*; a vision of human relationships that anticipates Aristotle.

The book's most significant contribution is to document comprehensively the universalizing thrust of Xenophon's leadership model, finding the cultivation of willing obedience emphasized in spheres as disparate as the estate mistress with her maid (*Oec.* 9.11-16) and the groom with his horse (*Equ.* 2.3). In all of these areas Gray is right to highlight Xenophon's insistence that the leader dis-

play a genuine concern for the successful nurture of his followers, which ironic approaches have too often minimized. Particularly effective is the book's final chapter, which surveys clear instances when Socrates in Xenophon employs irony in order to determine whether these offer any precedent for the subtle dissimulations that Straussians have attributed to the author as a product of Socratic influence. Instead, Socrates carefully signposts irony for his interlocutors, using it only to reinforce and enrich their appreciation for his surface message that the young *kaloikagathoi* of Athens practice an ethical form of leadership.

The risk of Gray's approach, which seeks *Xenophonta ek Xenophontos saphenizein*, is that it becomes reductive. Particularly in the fourth chapter's analysis of Xenophontic type scenes, each discrete narrative pattern is seen as carrying the same meaning in its every occurrence. But such repetition can also create meaning by subverting expectations. An instructive example from the *Hellenica* is Agesilaus' controversial intervention on his son's behalf in the acquittal of Sphodrias, the Spartan harmost guilty of succumbing to bribery and executing an ill-advised raid on Athens, but whose son is the lover of Agesilaus' heir (5.4.20-33). Gray rightly shows (212-32) how the episode conforms to a stock narrative in Xenophon where a generous leader secures greater advantage for his community in forgiving a guilty man, whose consequent gratitude drives him to perform exceptional public service, than by enforcing the strict letter of the law (cf. Cyrus and the rebellious king of Armenia). In accordance with the pattern Xenophon does include a prolepsis indicating that Sphodrias' son, grateful for his father's acquittal, becomes a bulwark of Sparta who dies heroically at Leuctra (5.4.33). He thus neutralizes the charge that Agesilaus put personal interests before those of the state. But Xenophon is equally clear that Sphodrias' acquittal drives Athens to abandon Sparta for Thebes (5.4.34). The lesson of the episode thus seems more complex than Gray allows inasmuch as the successful management of men within a polis by its leader (Agesilaus and Sphodrias) comes into conflict with the successful management of a hegemon over its allies (Sparta and Athens). Model leadership is still the central issue, but it is here one of complex dimensions. An avenue for future investigation might be the degree to which Xenophon maps his model of interpersonal leadership onto inter-polis dynamics, and the tensions that exist between these two levels. Helpful in this regard would be a greater consideration of the role juxtaposed narratives play in creating meaning, which has

been fruitfully explored for Xenophon but does not appear in Gray's catalog as a major literary device of the author.<sup>1</sup>

Such quibbles should only serve to demonstrate that Gray's study is a highly stimulating point of departure for further discussion. This is the most important book on Xenophon in many years, the product of a sustained and deep engagement with his texts. Its many close readings deserve serious consideration and provide an indispensable basis for future conversations about the author in all of the many areas his encyclopedic output occupies.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the "aesthetic of asyndeton," proposed by E. Lévy, "L'art de la déformation historique dans les *Helléniques* de Xénophon," in H. Verdin, G. Schepens and E. de Keyser, eds., *Purposes of History* (Louvain, 1990) 125–57.