"Cyrus appeared both great and good":
Xenophon and the performativity of kingship

Xenophon tried to do many things with history across his diverse corpus.[1] His writings have been seen as following Thucydides in exploring political theory through narrative history (*Hellenica*), and, to a lesser extent, Plato in using dialogue, often centred around the figure of Socrates, to discuss ethical and political problems (*Memorabilia*, *Symposium*).[2] It is, however, Xenophon's development of the use of narrated but idealised exempla for didactic purposes that is most characteristic of his work. His *Cyropaedia*, a highly fictionalised depiction of episodes from the life of Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, demonstrates, at some length, "how to do things with pseudo-historical narrative."

Xenophon makes use of idealised narrated exempla as a vehicle for political and ethical explorations and in so doing employs narrative to explore the excellence of political actors through their performance. His account of Cyrus' deliberate self-transformation into a king and Cyrus' mannered performance of his role, in the final two books of the *Cyropaedia*, provides a wealth of material for addressing political-theoretical concerns he shares with Plato and Aristotle, including hierarchy and equality, distributive justice, the relationship between power and virtue, and the nature of the distinction between ruler and ruled.

In his examination of kingship through its performance, Xenophon emphasises the role of the virtue of the king. The qualities that make a king successful are both physical and mental virtues: strength, endurance, self-restraint, courage, justice and good judgement. One of Xenophon's questions is whether these qualities are innate in individual rulers or acquired by them through their education and experience. For modern readers, such questions are more often asked about gender than ruling, but for Xenophon the binary but fluid opposition between ruler and ruled is analogous to that between genders. Because some of the characteristics that Xenophon ascribes to the

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[1] Why Xenophon, and not Herodotus, whom Paul has "taken personally" (Cartledge 2009b)? An exploration of Xenophon through the prism of gender theory seems appropriate as a vehicle for paying tribute to Paul as a teacher and supervisor, from his introductory lectures on "Sex and Gender in the Classical World," to his patient commentary on my undergraduate and postgraduate research. Both Paul and Xenophon have written biographies of the Spartan king Agesilaus ("a highly suitable case for biographical treatment" (Cartledge 1997b: 31)), though Paul's is rather longer (Cartledge 1987).

[2] Melissa Lane explores the relationship between Thucydides and Plato in this volume.

virtuous performance of ruling and of gender, masculine and feminine, overlap, feminist theories of the performativity of gender may provide insights into Xenophon's analysis of both the performance of kingship and the perception of that performance by subjects. They may also help the analysis of the problematic slippages between styles of ruling and performance of gender that mark the transition of Cyrus' rule into a style that he announces as kingship but that commentators have treated as imperial despotism. Such a reading places ethics at the centre of Xenophon's project, offering an alternative to the current scholarship which has displaced it, and suggests a more nuanced analysis of the problems of imperial rule in both author and the character through whom he explores them.

Until a recent renaissance in study of Xenophon, modern scholars (unlike their ancient and early modern predecessors) were reluctant to treat his work as a serious contribution to theoretical and philosophical exploration of such topics.[3] Xenophon, falling between the opposed types of idealist philosopher and realist historian represented by Plato and Thucydides, was respected by neither discipline. Both philologists and analytical philosophers, such as Karl Joël and Gregory Vlastos, have treated him as a less-interesting source for Socrates, incapable of revealing the important aspects of his philosophy.[4] British scholars in particular had a long-established tendency to see Xenophon as an old-fashioned figure, perhaps emblematic of Classics' Victorian elite status and boys' school history.[5]

Signs of change can be traced back to the work of the American political scientist Leo Strauss, who read Xenophon as the ancient world's Machiavelli, i.e. as an early exponent of Realpolitik who cared more for utility than virtue, an approach that asserted the importance of Xenophon as a political thinker while displacing his ethical thought.[6] As Paul noted in 1997, a re-assessment was underway, with "glimmerings

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[3] See Tatum 1989: 4-33 on the *Cyropaedia* in ancient and early modern political thought.
[4] Joël 1893; Vlastos 1991; cf. Morrison 1987.
[5] "English" views on Xenophon are summarized humorously in Terence Irwin's review of Strauss on Xenophon. Irwin describes Xenophon as like "a familiar British figure – the retired general, staunch Tory and Anglican, firm defender of the Establishment" (Irwin 1974: 410). Irwin's caricature has been cited by Paul in his own contributions to the re-evaluation of Xenophon (Cartledge 1987: 61-2, 1993: 7).
[6] Gray 2011; Nadon 1996 survey the literature and positions taken. Straussian perspectives are perhaps best represented by Newell 1983, in extreme form by Reisert 2009, and developed at length in Nadon 2001; Tatum 1989; cf. Rasmussen 2009. Machiavelli frequently refers to Xenophon and Cyrus, but

of new readings in sight," and that prediction has been borne out by the subsequent profusion of Xenophon studies.[7]

More recent scholars such as Vincent Azoulay have re-read Xenophon as a serious theorist and commentator on culture and politics (Azoulay 2004). Writers exploring Xenophon's depiction of ancient women's lives from a feminist perspective, such as Sarah Pomeroy and Allison Glazebrook, have also demonstrated that Xenophon's interests extend beyond the stereotypically masculine, with explorations of the household and descriptions of female characters being found throughout his corpus of work.[8]

Across his corpus, Xenophon portrays and assesses different styles of performance to explore, and sometimes to collapse, a range of binary divisions including male and female, kingship and tyranny, and ruler and ruled. In some of his works he explores gender and the role of women in their own right; in others, characteristics of the performance of gender become analogies for creating and exploring oppositions, with opposed styles of performance representing moral qualities attracting opposite evaluations.

In this way Xenophon himself, with his focus on appearance (*phainomai*) and display (*epideiknumi, apodeiknumi*), participates in what might be labelled an ancient "performative turn."[9] Characters' traits are presented through the observations of others, or through decisions about self-presentation; both Cyrus and Panthea, for example, are distinguished by appearing different from the others around them, Cyrus from his peers at school in Persia (1.3.1) and Panthea from her retinue (5.1.4). The importance of appearance is further exemplified in the description of Cyrus'

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treats the latter positively as a founder king, along with Moses, Theseus, and Romulus (Machiavelli 1988: 19-22).

[7] Cartledge 1997b: xvii. Particularly notable is the recent Francophone renaissance in study of Xenophon, represented by Azoulay 2004, 2006; Carlier 1978; Dorion 2013; L'Allier 2004.

[8] Glazebrook 2009; Pomeroy 1994.

[9] Paul 2011: 4 emphasizes a turn from narrativity to performativity in a range of disciplines. I have found Judith Butler's feminist ideas on the performativity of gender helpful for thinking of Cyrus' performance of kingship, and Guy Debord's situationist concept of spectacle helpful for assessing its audience reception (Butler 1990, 1993; Debord 1994). For this paper I concentrate on non-speech performance; Cyrus's speech acts within the *Cyropaedia* have a special status as literal "sovereign performatives," with the performative framework of royal spectacle in which these speech acts are made underscoring this special status (Butler 1997: 78-82; Foucault 1980: 92-6). Josh Ober has applied Skinner's development of speech-act theory to Greek political thought (Ober 1998).

assumption of kingship (7.5.37 onwards) and the royal procession with which he celebrates it (8.3.1-25). In particular, the contrast between the visibility of Agesilaus, and Cyrus in his early career, and the later seclusion and staged public appearances of Cyrus as king, emphasise the importance of appearance and performance in the evaluation of ancient monarchy.[10] Xenophon follows other Greek historians in this, including Herodotus on Deioces (Hdt. 1.96-101) and Thucydides on Pausanias, the Spartan regent who adopts Persian dress (Thuc. 1.130).

Demonstrating the analytical and argumentative import of these descriptions provides the means to link them to Aristotle's ethical thought, which also has an aesthetic component, and to reposition Xenophon as a contributor to an ancient virtue ethics in which aesthetic evaluation plays an important part.[11] It offers a richer Xenophon than the Straussian readings that treat the author as a harbinger of Realpolitik and his Cyrus as, in Joseph Reisert's words, a "moral black hole" (Reisert 2009: 302). Others have recognised that leadership and character are central concerns of the *Cyropaedia*, and in doing so have contested "dark" readings of Xenophon's work.[12]

Presenting and integrating two forms of monarchy

Xenophon identifies and then contrasts two forms of kingship through narrating their performance by the kings who represent them, in Sparta and in his imaginary Near East.[13] These two forms of kingship, a maximalist form associated with consumption, display, and hierarchy, and a minimalist form associated with simplicity and accessibility, can be related to Aristotle's later classification of the extreme forms of

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[10] The contrast between the public life, open to scrutiny, of the Athenian citizen and magistrate and the lack of visibility and scrutiny of the Persian king is a theme of Greek political analysis, evident from Aeschylus' *Persians* onwards. As Alastair Blanshard notes in this volume, the life of the Athenian juror was a public one, always open for formal or informal evaluation by his fellow citizens. The visible Cyrus was more often invoked as a model for those on display (Cic. *Q Fr.* 1.1.23, 42; Tatum 1989: 10).

[11] The role of aesthetics in Aristotle's ethics, and the aesthetic component of *to kalon*, have been much debated, and often underplayed in analytic readings of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; see Kraut 2013; Milliken 2006.

[12] Faulkner 2007: 127-76; Sandridge 2012; Tamiolaki 2012, with Cartledge 2009a: 100-01 and Gray 2011: 330-71.

[13] The historicity of the peoples of the *Cyropaedia* is much contested. Christopher Tuplin has argued that there is less "oriental" detail in the *Cyropaedia* than one might expect (Tuplin 1990). Focusing on themes of gender illuminates the orientalist tendencies in Xenophon's work.

monarchy, *pambasileia* and Spartan kingship (*Pol.* 3.14-15.1284b35-1285b37).[14] Aristotle's typology of kingship provides a framework within which Xenophon's account of Cyrus' transformation and the collapse of the distinction can be understood.

Cyrus' assumption of kingship transforms his rule from that of the limited form of Spartan-style kingship exemplified by his father's situation in Persia, itself a kind of republic with a mixed constitution, into one surpassing the barbarian kingship described by Aristotle as his second form, in which barbarian subjects, of a slavish character by nature, are untroubled by their kings' despotic rule (ὑπομένουσι τὴν δεσποτικὴν ἀρχὴν οὐδὲν δυσχεραίνοντες, *Pol.* 3.14.1285a16-22).[15] Cyrus' new kingship resembles Aristotle's final form of kingship, *pambasileia*, in its all-encompassing power:

> πέμπτον δ᾽ εἶδος βασιλείας, ὅταν ᾖ πάντων κύριος εἷς ὤν, ὥσπερ ἕκαστον ἔθνος καὶ πόλις ἑκάστη τῶν κοινῶν, τεταγμένη κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομικήν. ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ οἰκονομικὴ βασιλεία τις οἰκίας ἐστίν, οὕτως ἡ παμβασιλεία πόλεως καὶ ἔθνους ἑνὸς ἢ πλειόνων οἰκονομία. (Arist. *Pol.* 3.14.1285b29-34)

> …but there is still a fifth type of kingship. This is the absolute type, where a single person is sovereign on every issue, with the same sort of power that a tribe or a city exercises over its public concerns. Just as household government is kingship over a family, so conversely this type of kingship may be regarded as household government exercised over a city, or a tribe, or a collection of tribes (translation Barker/Stalley)

In both the *Cyropaedia* and in his accounts of Agesilaus, in the *Hellenica* and *Agesilaus*, Xenophon shows how his model kings perform their roles and how subjects perceive them to be doing so and alter their own behaviour as a result. Unlike

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[14] Aristotle distinguishes between the figure of the oriental despot and the *pambasileus*; see Atack 2015: 313-15; Carlier 1978.

[15] Xenophon's Persia is not quite Sparta, but clearly draws on it; republic-to-empire readings of the *Cyropaedia*, which analyse the work's political trajectory in terms of the contrast between the "republican" arrangements of Persia and the "imperial" arrangements of Cyrus' post-conquest empire, often emphasise this connection (Nadon 2001: 35-42); cf. Tuplin 1994. Xenophon may draw on orientalising aspects of fourth-century Greek discourse on Persia (see Shapiro 2009, and Hall 1989). The characterization of barbarian servility points to Aristotelian "natural" slaves.

Aristotle's analytical categorisation of forms of kingship, Xenophon's narrative format focuses on the performance of the role by the king and the perception and reception of that performance by (potential) subjects.[16] This is most clearly shown in the description of Cyrus' appearance at his royal procession:

> ἰδόντες δὲ πάντες προσεκύνησαν, εἴτε καὶ ἄρξαι τινὲς κεκελευσμένοι εἴτε καὶ ἐκπλαγέντες τῇ παρασκευῇ καὶ τῷ δόξαι μέγαν τε καὶ καλὸν φανῆναι τὸν Κῦρον. πρόσθεν δὲ Περσῶν οὐδεὶς Κῦρον προσεκύνει. (8.3.14)

> On seeing him, all prostrated themselves, either because some had been ordered to initiate it, or because they were stunned by the display and by Cyrus' seeming to appear tall and beautiful. Previously, no one of the Persians used to prostrate himself before Cyrus.

Cyrus' actions achieve the desired effect; his performance successfully creates the appearance of authority sufficient to induce *proskynesis* in his audience, by generating the *doxa* that he appears to be "great and good/fine," that important ethical and aesthetic pairing.[17] Those transformed by the spell of the spectacle are Cyrus' friends themselves (no longer a homogenous group of Persians), compelled by the sight of Cyrus to perform *proskynesis* to their former equal.[18]

The problem for readers of the *Cyropaedia* is that Xenophon has elsewhere criticised maximalist performances of kingship, and praised austere and minimalist performance that emphasise personal austerity and asceticism in dress and consumption as an ideal. This minimalist form of kingship, exemplified by the Spartan king Agesilaus, has been praised just as the make-up and costume of Cyrus' grandfather Astyages' has been offered for implicit criticism, despite Cyrus' own attraction to it (1.3.2). Minimalist kingship is exemplified in material form by Agesilaus' ancient but

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[16] Rosie Harman's account of perception in the *Cyropaedia* downplays the importance of political theory to the work (Harman 2008). However, perception enables the transmission of the authority of kings, and so the emphasis on perception in Xenophon's text is inherently political.

[17] I am grateful to Franco Basso and Melissa Lane for drawing my attention to the significance of the double infinitive (τῷ δόξαι… φανῆναι) in this passage.

[18] Xenophon does pragmatically suggest that some might have been told to prostrate themselves (8.3.14), but that has worse consequences, denying political agency to Cyrus' associates. Hugh Bowden argues that among the elite *proskynesis* did not necessarily involve full prostration (Bowden 2013), but Greek commentators including Herodotus saw it as a significant act (1.134, 7.136). See also Briant 2002: 222-4.

modest dwelling, which is distinguished not by splendour and luxury, as is the case with Persian kings' luxurious possessions, but by its simplicity.[19]

The performance of Spartan kingship also generates problems of misperception, illustrated by the experiences of Agesilaus in Asia. The cultural and ethical system in which such minimalist performance of kingship is recognised and valued turns out to be limited, as the king discovers while travelling in Asia (itself an unusual activity for a Spartan). The locals at Ephesus assume that the way to approach Agesilaus is via the non-royal Lysander, who as a result of their attention appears to be a king, with an over-sized crowd of followers surrounding him and seeking his attention, while Agesilaus appears (ἐφαίνετο) to be a private citizen:[20]

> καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἀεὶ παμπλήθης ὄχλος θεραπεύων αὐτὸν ἠκολούθει, ὥστε ὁ μὲν Ἀγησίλαος ἰδιώτης ἐφαίνετο, ὁ δὲ Λύσανδρος βασιλεύς (*Hell.* 3.4.7)

> …and as a result there was always a great crowd of courtiers around Lysander wherever he went, so that it looked as though Agesilaus was an ordinary individual and Lysander was the king.

The antiquity of Agesilaus' front door and knowledge of his descent from Heracles have not travelled from Sparta with him; despite his presence and availability, the people assume that they should follow the usual procedure and approach the king through his subordinate. However, the solution to this is that Agesilaus' friends, the group of 30 Spartan officers accompanying him, helpfully interpret Agesilaus' grievance at the honours paid to Lysander, and set Lysander straight (*Hell.* 3.4.8), which suggests that the appearance of minimal pomp and maximum accessibility is just as much a performance as the maximalist court rituals and minimum accessibility of the Persian kings and satraps. As with other kings (including Cyrus), friends play an important role in diffusing the king's ideas and attitudes.

Xenophon narrates the distinction between the styles of Agesilaus and the satrap Pharnabazus in a scene that provides a "brilliant" illustration (Cartledge 2002: 62) of their contrasting performances. Pharnabazus recognises the different styles as he

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[19] Harman 2012 analyses the role of perception in the *Agesilaus*.
[20] Vivienne Gray treats this story as a lesson taught by Agesilaus to Lysander (Gray 1989: 46-9). *Hellenica* translations adapted from Warner.

approaches the Spartan king; his servants bring him luxurious blankets to sit on, but he is embarrassed into joining Agesilaus, who is reclining on the ground:

> ἠσχύνθη ἐντρυφῆσαι, ὁρῶν τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου τὴν φαυλότητα· κατεκλίθη οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ὥσπερ εἶχε χαμαί. (*Hell.* 4.1.30)

> When he saw Agesilaus' modest get-up, he was ashamed to enjoy his luxury; so even he laid himself down on the ground, just like [Agesilaus] was doing.

Here, Spartan minimalism is both praise- and choice-worthy, and is perceived as such by the Persian satrap.[21] Pharnabazus, in imitating Agesilaus' austere performance, makes the opposite transition to that undergone by Cyrus.

Personal austerity and self-restraint are central to fourth-century Greek theories of virtue kingship, in which the virtue of the king is transmitted to his subjects through their imitation of his example. This phenomenon is described in detail by Isocrates in his *Nicocles*, and by Xenophon in the *Agesilaus*, where chapter 10 summarises the model with a telling *paradeigma*, concluding that:[22]

> καλὸν ἄν μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἡ Ἀγησιλάου ἀρετὴ παράδειγμα γενέσθαι τοῖς ἀνδραγαθίαν ἀσκεῖν βουλομένοις… καὶ γὰρ δὴ οὐχ οὕτως ἐπὶ τῷ ἄλλων βασιλεύειν ὡς ἐπὶ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν ἐμεγαλύνετο, οὐδ᾽ ἐπὶ τῷ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ τῷ πρὸς πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ἡγεῖσθαι τοῖς πολίταις.

> …by analogy, Agesilaus' virtue seems to me to set an excellent example for anyone who intends to acquire manly virtue… For what was a source of pride for Agesilaus was the fact that he ruled himself rather than the fact that he ruled others; it was not guiding his subjects towards the enemy that made him feel proud, but guiding them towards virtue in all its forms.

However, successful *mimesis* of the king as *paradeigma* requires close contact between ruler and ruled, rather than the distance of a secluded despot, such as the Persian king who is rarely seen (τῷ σπανίως ὁρᾶσθαι, *Ages.* 9.1). Xenophon

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[21] Gray 1989: 54 describes this episode as "the illustration of ethical achievement."

[22] Isocrates *Nicocles* 29-47, especially 36. See Birgalias 2014 for the importance of virtue in Isocrates' monarchical thought. A further parallel between Xenophon's Cyrus and Isocrates' Nicocles is sexual self-restraint and respect for marriage (*Nicocles* 39-42); cf. Foucault 1985: 81-2 on the virile character of moderation in these exemplary figures.

continually emphasises and praises the accessibility of Agesilaus to his subjects (Ἀγησίλαος δὲ τῷ ἀεὶ ἐμφανὴς εἶναι ἠγάλλετο, *Ages.* 9.1). For Cyrus, generating the conditions for continuing *mimesis* becomes a problem once he establishes himself as a king; it is uncertain that he will enable his courtiers or their sons to learn from his example, as he intends by bringing the Persian education system to his court in Babylon (7.5.86). The final section of the work notes the eventual failure of the Persians, while Plato's Athenian Stranger argues that the palace culture of the Persians makes the inheritance of leadership skills impossible (Pl. *Leg.* 3.695c6-696b4).

But Xenophon's account of Cyrus' kingship explores a new political problem of scale; Cyrus attempts to combine *polis*-based Greek virtue kingship with the rule of a wide empire, forging a mixed form of monarchy. Cyrus' conquest of Babylon delivered him an empire to rule rather than an army to lead. Hitherto his performance of leadership was in the Spartan style, but he deliberately transitions to the other mode, which he had previously rejected. This new form of kingship has distinctively Xenophontic practical touches (8.6.1-18), and Cyrus' suggestions map out the way in which virtue kingship might be delivered. As Cyrus' human virtue alone is insufficient to sustain the good life for all, his subordinate satraps must imitate his virtue:

> οὐ γὰρ ἂν δυναίμην ἐγὼ εἷς ὢν ἀνθρωπίνῃ ἀρετῇ τὰ πάντων ὑμῶν ἀγαθὰ διασῴζειν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἐμὲ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ὄντα σὺν ἀγαθοῖς τοῖς παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ ὑμῖν ἐπίκουρον εἶναι, ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁμοίως αὐτοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ὄντας σὺν ἀγαθοῖς τοῖς μεθ᾽ ὑμῶν ἐμοὶ συμμάχους εἶναι. (8.6.12).

> Since I am but one person, I would not be able to preserve with human virtue the good things for all of you. Rather, I must, being good and having good men with me, be a protector for you; and you, similarly, being yourselves good and having good [men] with you, must be allies to me.

Aristotle, too, is wary of *pambasileia* (and kingship more broadly): the prospective *pambasileus* would need to exceed others by an exceptional amount (or perhaps offer access to a qualitatively different and superior virtue) to present subjection as a rational choice for citizens, who can generate good decision-making capabilities

themselves through the wisdom of the multitude (*Pol.* 3.11.1281a39-b15).[23] Xenophon suggests that Cyrus, as a "single individual" (εἷς ὤν), and with access to mere "human virtue" (ἀνθρωπίνη ἀρετῇ), cannot outweigh the need for others to generate virtue themselves. This limit suggests that Xenophon also sees Aristotelian *pambasileia* as an unworkable phenomenon, unless the rulers' excellence can genuinely cascade down through the hierarchy.

Even Cyrus' initial adoption of his new mode acknowledges this problem. His power is incomplete until he demonstrates it through performances that can be institutionalised and commemorated. But he needs to secure the approval of his friends to do so (σὺν τῇ τῶν φίλων γνώμῃ, 7.5.37); in asserting that any good form of kingship rests on the assent of the political class, Cyrus distinguishes his rule from tyranny. Many scholars have worried that Cyrus tricks his friends into assenting to the new restricted access arrangements that he puts in place, but this is a formulaic part of kingship accession stories, also seen with Herodotus' Deioces and Darius.[24]

Kingship between performance and essence

Xenophon opens the *Cyropaedia* by asking how Cyrus became such a successful ruler, whether his ability to rule is the result of his nature, his education, or the circumstances of his birth (1.1.6). Is kingship innate in individuals, or is it asserted through actions and behaviour as an acquired characteristic or status? Plato and Aristotle raise similar questions; Plato's Eleatic Stranger doubts that kings are a natural occurrence, unlike the natural rulers of beehives (Pl. *Plt.* 301d8-e4), while the final chapter of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasises the role of nature versus that of education and law in forming the character of the statesman or lawgiver (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 10.9.1179b19-21, b31-32).

The ancient debate about the essential or acquired nature of kingly characteristics is analogous to the long-standing debate within feminism between "essentialist" and "constructivist" positions on the nature or origin of female identity. The former view

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[23] Lane 2013 surveys the immense literature on Aristotle's "Wisdom of the Multitude" argument, updating Jeremy Waldron's reading (Waldron 1995).
[24] The negative evaluation of Cyrus as deceitful (Nadon 2001: 99-100; Reisert 2009: 298; Whidden 2007) ignores the tradition of ambiguity seen in the ancient cross-cultural figure of the trickster king (cf. Detienne and Vernant 1974).

is exemplified by "difference" feminists who assert a natural distinction between sexes, sometimes determining a fixed link between sex and gender; the latter view is exemplified by Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (de Beauvoir 1983: 295).

Judith Butler's work is characterised by rejection of naturalist ideas about gender. She has argued that performance provides a form of habituation to a behaviour or acquired characteristic: "Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1990: 33). Just as, in Butler's model, a person produces her female identity through performance, so might a king produce his royal identity in Cyrus' model of performance. The problem of the relationship of that performance to the body of the performer, the shape into which the bodily matter is formed, is further explored in *Bodies that Matter*, where Butler engages with Aristotle's view that "the principles of [matter's] recognizability, its characteristic gesture or usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter" (Butler 1993: 8). Body and language have a complex relationship that Butler identifies as a "chiasmus" (Butler 2004: 198).

For Aristotle's contemporaries, the concept of *eugeneia* enabled nobility to be identified as innate, just as was sex; his fragmentary dialogue *Peri Eugeneias* (*On Noble Birth*) suggests that the idea of innate nobility lacked universal acceptance (Rose Frs. 91-92). The concept generated a binary opposition as distinctive as the binary division of sexes, and to which the same analyses might be applied. Butler's thought on performativity of gender provides a means of assessing the performativity of kingship and nobility and interpreting problematic aspects of Cyrus' performance. Her interest in parodic performances that destabilise established gender norms may provide a means for assessing Cyrus' puzzling performance of despotic kingship.

For Cyrus, as he consolidates the territories he has won as a general into an empire he can rule as a king, marking his changed status through performance is a deliberate process. In asserting his identity as a king through performance, he adopts a new form of dress, and new modes of behaviour that change his shape and appearance:

ἐκ δὲ τούτου ἐπιθυμῶν ὁ Κῦρος ἤδη κατασκευάσασθαι καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς βασιλεῖ ἡγεῖτο πρέπειν, ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ τοῦτο σὺν τῇ τῶν φίλων γνώμῃ ποιῆσαι, ὡς ὅτι ἥκιστα ἂν ἐπιφθόνως σπάνιός τε καὶ σεμνὸς φανείη (7.5.37).

After this Cyrus was already desirous of establishing himself in the way he held to be fitting for a king. He decided to do this with the concurring judgement of his friends, so that he could appear seldom and with dignity, while provoking as little envy as possible.[25]

But even before he put on the costume and began this performance, other characters identified kingly qualities as innate within him, suggesting that Xenophon wants readers to recognise an innate quality of kingliness within his character.

Even while Cyrus is a young soldier on campaign, the Medes see him as man of unusual potential; this is apparent in their willingness to leave Cyaxares' party to pursue the Assyrians with Cyrus (4.2.10) – arguably the turning point in the narrative of the *Cyropaedia* as a whole. Croesus, defeated by Cyrus, assigns *eugeneia* to Cyrus when he compares his own claim to rule, as a descendant of the usurping slave Gyges, with that of Cyrus, with his ancestral links to the divine (7.2.24). Cyrus' friends, whose approval he seeks for his changed self-presentation, express approval of his actions (along with some ambivalence about imitating his new appearance themselves) (8.1.1-5).

The idea that there was something inherently special or different about kings, often a connection to divine or cosmic forces, characterised ancient thought on kingship.[26] It is seen in early Greek poetry, in the physical distinction drawn between Agamemnon and Thersites in their confrontation (Hom. *Il*. 2.211-77), and in historiography, especially when Greek historians considered non-Greek kings. Egyptian pharaohs presented themselves as sharing in the golden flesh thought, in Egyptian belief, to

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[25] Translations of *Cyropaedia* adapted from Ambler 2001.

[26] Cosmic kingship has been studied as a cross-cultural phenomenon by anthropologists (Hocart 1927; Oakley 2006: 10-43). Jean-Pierre Vernant argued that it was challenged by Greek thinkers (Vernant 1982: 38-48). Cyrus' father Cambyses emphasizes that ability to connect with the divine will be vital for Cyrus (*Cyropaedia* 1.6.44-6). See also Cartledge 2001: 63 on Spartan kings as priests of Zeus.

characterise gods. This latter idea is exploited by the trickster king Amasis in asserting the legitimacy of his acquisition of power (Hdt. 2.172).[27]

One aspect of kingly difference was aesthetic, suggesting a tradition of performative evaluation of kingship. Superlative size and beauty were traditional iconographic attributes of Persian kings, part of the ideology of Achaemenid monarchy.[28] They are also important value terms in Greek ethics. In his rendering of a passage from the *Cyropaedia* that describes Cyrus as *megan te kai kalon* (8.3.14), Ambler (under-) translates Xenophon's wording as "tall and beautiful" but expands the term in his notes. In fourth-century virtue ethics both these words, especially in combination, speak of value as well as appearance; the pairing is particularly prominent in Isocrates' ethical thought.[29] This failure to recognise the virtue inherent in and enacted through performance may be where the Straussians lose track of Cyrus' virtue in their readings of the *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon describes a performance through which Cyrus recognises and asserts qualities that he identifies within himself, and that are consonant with others' assessment of him.

In the *Cyropaedia*, size and beauty repeatedly describe valued people and objects, including, in the superlative, Cyrus' own empire (καλλίστη καὶ μεγίστη ... βασιλεία, 8.8.1). Other characters, such as the Armenians, assess Cyrus as possessing these important markers of virtue kingship:

> ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἦλθον οἴκαδε, ἔλεγον τοῦ Κύρου ὁ μέν τις τὴν σοφίαν, ὁ δὲ τὴν καρτερίαν, ὁ δὲ τὴν πρᾳότητα, ὁ δέ τις καὶ τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος. (3.1.41)

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[27] Briant 2002: 240-54; Root 1979: 186-92, 300-8; Root 2013. The question of whether Achaemenid kings did or did not claim any divine status or special affinity with the divine continues to be debated, and their self-representation in performance and in art was often ambiguous in this respect. On the gold flesh of Egyptian gods and kings, see Frankfort 1948: 46, 135, cf. Kurke 1999: 92-4.

[28] Briant 2002: 225-7; Llewellyn-Jones 2015: 222-30; cf. the depiction of Darius on the Bisitun relief.

[29] Ambler 2001: 248, 80; cf. *Cyropaedia* 8.8.1. Similar phrases appear in Arist. *Eth. Nic.* at: 1.9.1099b24, 1.10.1101a13, 2.9.1110a21, 3.5.1114b9, 3.6.1115a30-31, 4.2.1122b16, and in Isocrates at: *Helen* 43; *Ad Nicoclem* 42; *Antid.* 220, 276, 306, 309; *To Philip* 134; *Areopagiticus* 13, 68; *Panath.* 36; *Evagoras* 12. Aristotle's interest in the virtues of greatness, *megaloprepeia* (munificence, magnificence), and *megalopsuchia* (greatness of soul) in *Eth. Nic.* 4.2-3 places a similar emphasis on the atypical superlative person.

> When they went home, one spoke of Cyrus' wisdom, another of his steadfastness, another of his gentleness, and someone else of his beauty and height.

These qualities combine the physical and the moral: strength (*karteria*), mildness (*praotes*), and then *kallos te kai megethos*. The former two are characteristics particularly associated with the monarch in theories of virtue kingship.[30] While the association of such qualities was well-established in Greek and Persian thought, Xenophon follows rather than questions the ideology of *eugeneia* that underlies it.

Kingship, gender, and performance

Many of the other signs with which Cyrus marks his performance of kingship are signs that Xenophon elsewhere treats as markers of the performance of gender. For him, the performance of being female takes two forms, one evaluated positively, the other negatively.[31] The descriptions of Virtue and Vice in the *Memorabilia*'s story of the Choice of Heracles (*Mem*. 2.1.22) provide an important statement of these distinctive performances.[32] Virtue's modest dress and natural appearance mark her out as a good girl, while Vice flaunts her plentiful flesh and enhances it with make-up and revealing clothes. These two modes of performing gender are mapped closely to good and bad moral qualities. Virtue emphasises the importance of hard work in learning the good and fine things (*Mem*. 2.1.28). The two modes of performing kingship appear to operate similarly, matching elements of the opposition between Virtue and Vice.[33]

Cyrus' use of make-up in his self-presentation as a king has often been contrasted with the views of Athenian gentleman Ischomachus (*Oec*. 10.2-9); the latter chides his young wife for concealing her true appearance beneath cosmetics, and demands

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[30] Isocrates *Nicocles* 16-17; Isocrates emphasizes gentleness as a feature of kingship, in contrast to the harshness associated with tyranny.

[31] Xenophon is more interested in the positive capacities of women than earlier Greek traditions represented by Semonides F7.

[32] Virtue's inspirational message, that the gods teach none of the good and fine things to men without toil and effort (*Mem* 2.1.28) underlines Socrates' response to Aristippus' rejection of the *polis* and political life. See Johnson 2009.

[33] The appropriate actions for each gender can be performed at an excellent level; Ischomachus, at *Oec*. 7.32, praises the queen bee as a leader who performs her tasks to the benefit of her community (Pomeroy 1984, 1994: 276-80).

that her performance be in line with her nature.[34] But the behaviour appropriate for a secluded wife is not a perfect parallel for the public performance of a concealed king, and the question is whether this enhanced appearance might reflect Cyrus' changed and almost super-human status.

Xenophon's assessment of Cyrus' visual transition is therefore not a straightforward criticism. Cyrus' new performance transgresses Xenophon's more usual views of masculine excellence. That markers of gender may not apply straightforwardly to absolute monarchs is brought out well by Mark Franko's analysis of the drag appearances of early-modern French kings such as Louis XIV in court ballet performances. He observes: "although kingship is generally understood to exemplify patriarchal power through hyper-masculine identity, this does not always prove to be true in early 17th-century ballet" (Franko 2003: 71). Franko, also using Butler's concept of performativity to understand the self-presentation of monarchs, points to the difficulties that the transvestite ballet performances of the French kings present for any simple linking of masculine bodies and power, and suggests that the performativity of kingship embodies the eternal body of sovereignty, the second of the king's two bodies in Kantorowicz's influential model, rather than the personal body of the king as a human individual (Kantorowicz 1957). Cyrus' new costume and mode of performance may therefore denote his assumption of this second body, in addition to his physical body, the one with which he performs the acquisition of virtue through practice and hard work.[35]

Xenophon presents Cyrus' assessment of the Median robes' effects as he gives them to his associates:

> αὕτη γὰρ αὐτῷ συγκρύπτειν ἐδόκει εἴ τίς τι ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐνδεὲς ἔχοι, καὶ καλλίστους καὶ μεγίστους ἐπιδεικνύναι τοὺς φοροῦντας· (8.1.40)

> …for this robe seemed to him to hide it if anyone should have a bodily defect, and they displayed their wearers as especially beautiful and tall.

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[34] Glazebrook 2009; Pomeroy 1994: 304-6.

[35] Cf. Arist. *Pol*. 5.10.1311a31-2. Cyrus' grandfather Astyages had previously presented him with Median costume (1.3.2-3), although Xenophon does not describe the ephebic Cyrus wearing it.

When he hands out robes to his companions prior to the procession, he repeats this view with a greater emphasis on value, *kalliston kai ariston* (8.3.2). But in urging his friends to accept and wear the robes, Cyrus perhaps expresses Xenophon's ambivalence towards his transition.

Cyrus is not the only one of Xenophon's characters whose characteristics, speech or behaviour cross apparently rigid gender lines.[36] Elite status often disassociates these characters from gender characteristics linked to their biological sex; across the *Cyropaedia*, heroic individual virtue overrides characteristics, especially deficiencies, typically attributed to women or eunuchs, while defeat associates male characters with femininity and emasculation. The daughter of the Assyrian aristocrat Gobryas is described as "marvellous somehow for her beauty and size" (δεινόν τι κάλλος καὶ μέγεθος, 5.2.7); the ethical component sits alongside the aesthetic.[37]

Tigranes' wife is shown to be brave and loyal and is praised for her courage; Cyrus gives her "womanly adornment" (γυναικεῖον κόσμον), most likely jewellery, "for acting bravely while on campaign with her husband" (ὅτι ἀνδρείως συνεστρατεύετο τῷ ἀνδρί, 8.4.24). The castrated prince Gadatas does not share the lowly status of other eunuchs of slave status (5.2.28).[38] Panthea is unusual in withstanding Cyrus' gifts and entreaties (7.3.12-13), just as she previously resisted her protector Araspas' unwanted and abusive attentions (5.1.18, 6.1.31-35).[39]

Loss of kingly power is marked by the identification of the defeated with the female. Croesus, transitioning from king to captive, likens his new situation to that which his wife has long enjoyed in relation to him (7.2.28). Earlier, Cyaxares, in ceding effective leadership of the Medes to his nephew, has complained that he is being

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[36] Cartledge 1993; Gray 1989: 29-32.

[37] Cyrus' delicate refusal of the girl leads into a comparison of Persian and Assyrian dining styles, in which Persian simplicity and austerity comes out best (cf. 8.8.9). Such comparisons are typical of Greek-Persian comparison, e.g. Hdt. 9.82.

[38] Gadatas was castrated by the king of Babylon because of the response of the king's concubine to Gadatas' handsome appearance. Briant argues that Xenophon conflates senior court officials with castrated slaves: Briant 2002: 274-7; cf. Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 38-40.

[39] Panthea provides Cyrus with an exemplar of virtue, but in her final conversation with Cyrus she argues that their friendship was not a virtue friendship but a utility one, which enabled Cyrus to ensure Abradatas' loyalty to the death (7.3.10). Cyrus' exploitation of Panthea and Abradatas is frequently cited as evidence of his vicious realism or utilitarianism (see, for example, Reisert 2009). However, the textual parallels between Cyrus and Panthea as characters marked by difference suggest that this darker reading is too pessimistic.

treated "like a woman" (ὥσπερ γυνή, 5.5.33). Both men suggest that the "most blessed life" of a woman involves being the recipient of an unfair distribution of goods that have not been earned, a denial of political agency. Vice too offered Heracles profit from the work of others (*Mem*. 2.1.25).

Xenophon's use of the themes of feminisation and emasculation may have drawn on depictions of Persians and mythical characters associated with them in Greek art, such as the wall painting of Marathon in the Stoa Poikile in Athens (Paus. 1.15.3) and many surviving vase paintings (Castriota 2005). Athenian representations feminised the Persians, either by giving them a weak character, or costumes reminiscent of Amazons, or suggesting sexual passivity. At the same time, such depictions aggrandised Athenian masculinity (Cartledge 1998, with reference to the Eurymedon vase).

Physical condition also embodies character, as with the flabby barbarians whom Agesilaus captures while on campaign in Asia Minor in the early years of the fourth century (*Hell*. 3.1.19). The appearance of the captives provides an indication of both their moral worth and practical value. Xenophon's connection of physical appearance and moral worth makes it dangerous to decide that any particular instance of *kalos* or *megas* only contains one of its aspects; Agesilaus, as the lame king, finds that his physical condition is cited in resistance to his contentious accession (*Hell*. 3.3.3).

Gender is therefore established by Xenophon as an analogy for status, and the style of its performance with character virtues. Xenophon portrays the performance of opposing styles of kingship in a similar way to that with which he explores the performance of gender. Deconstructing the aesthetic analysis and normative evaluation within Xenophon's descriptions and narrative helps to reveal a theoretical model beneath it.

Mimesis and spectacle

Xenophon's analysis of Cyrus' performance of kingship reveals its difficulties. His description of the performance at 8.1.40-42 has so troubled commentators that some have rejected it as a possible interpolation: Deborah Gera describes it as "surprising" (Gera 1993: 291-2). But Xenophon uses this display to analyse and explain Cyrus'

adoption of Median dress as a means of achieving the extra capacity he lacked, so that he does not only differ from his subjects by being better than them, but also has the capacity to "bewitch" them (8.1.40):

> καταμαθεῖν δὲ τοῦ Κύρου δοκοῦμεν ὡς οὐ τούτῳ μόνῳ ἐνόμιζε χρῆναι τοὺς ἄρχοντας τῶν ἀρχομένων διαφέρειν, τῷ βελτίονας αὐτῶν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ καταγοητεύειν ᾤετο χρῆναι αὐτούς.

> We think we learned of Cyrus that he did not believe that rulers must differ from their subjects by this alone, by being better, but he also thought they must bewitch them.

Xenophon expresses some uncertainty about this analysis (καταμαθεῖν… δοκοῦμεν) but clearly identifies the importance of projection of image in Cyrus' display of his power. Cyrus achieves this through adopting the Median dress of his grandfather and uncle, changing his appearance with make-up, platform shoes, and extravagant clothing.

In this other form of kingship, hierarchy and power relations are made explicit through ritualised performance and the costume and appearance of the powerful. There is no possibility of mistaking king and subject, even if they could interact directly in any meaningful way.[40] In Xenophon's model, kings like Cyrus' Median grandfather Astyages are essentially invisible to their subjects, other than to the elite courtiers with whom they are secluded, but their magnificence is projected through ritual; Cyrus' Median education exposes him to this model (1.3.2). Should such a king stray into their presence, subjects are required to prostrate themselves, a position that enables imagination rather than vision, and results in the indirect perception of the monarch.

The twin relationships of Cyrus as king, to his immediate circle of subordinate courtiers, and to the population at large, are managed through two different processes, *mimesis* and *thauma*. *Mimesis* of the king's virtue is unthinkable under the political conditions of Astyages' Media and, eventually, Cyrus' empire, except for the limited few with privileged access to the king. Instead, maximalist kingship transmits

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[40] These societies are structurally the opposite of pseudo-Xenophon's Athens, in which slaves and free citizens are indistinguishable by dress ([Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 1.10-11).

obedience through display that results in *thauma*, changing perceptions without the use of reasoned argument or persuasion, the result of the capacity to bewitch. Xenophon emphasises this with his detailed presentation of Cyrus' first royal procession as a manifestation of spectacle (8.3.1-27), one that recreates the hierarchy of the new empire and the power relationships within the royal court through an elaborate performance that will be repeated, and whose magnificence (σεμνότης, 8.3.1) is designed to demand respect from viewers.[41]

Within this description, Cyrus' status is performed and the hierarchy of his empire strengthened. Cyrus' divine affiliations are emphasised by the beauty of sacrificial victims (8.3.11-12). Courtiers lead selected subjects through the ropes to participate in meaningless "meet-and-greet" encounters with their king, replicating court processes (8.3.20-21).[42] The separation of power from the powerless links this archaic spectacle with its modern forms, as described by Guy Debord (Debord 1994: 23).[43] In his analysis, the spectacle generates a political or religious imaginary that enables the subjected to retain the illusion of unity and belonging, one not readily available in the modern world; observers reframe themselves in the terms proposed by the spectacle.

Spectacle does not require close contact for its transmission; *thauma* can be generated both by performed spectacle, such as the royal procession identified in this instance, and by its memorialisation in extravagant buildings such as the "excessively large monument" (μνῆμα ὑπερμέγεθες) Cyrus raises to the virtuous Abradatas and Panthea (7.3.16). The sculptural representation of civic and tribute processions in ancient Near Eastern palace art performs a similar function (Root 1979: 227-84).

However, performed spectacle was not alien to the Greek world; it was also an important element of Athenian democratic society, one much criticised by Plato even

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[41] The royal procession also represents Persian rule in visual art (and the iconography of Achaemenid palaces) and in other literary sources, such as Herodotus' description of Xerxes' procession (7.40) (Allan 2005). Pierre Briant notes its religious function (Briant 2002: 247-52). That Cyrus evokes *thauma* is one of Xenophon's opening assumptions (1.1.6).

[42] Cyrus punishes non-participation in this ritual, depriving Daiphernes of access to him when he fails to respond quickly enough to a request to present himself (8.3.22).

[43] Sections 23-9 (Debord 1994: 18-22) are the most useful for analyzing how, in Xenophon's account, spectacle works to structure Cyrus' society. While Debord's situationist analysis emphasizes the difference between ancient and modern, and the centrality of technology to the dissemination of spectacle, his analysis nonetheless provides a helpful perspective for interpreting the political impact and reception of the display of power.

as he made sophisticated use of it.[44] He pairs his account of *theatrokratia* (*Laws* 3.701a3), summarising the decline of Athenian democracy through inappropriate mixture of performance styles as rule by spectacle (3.700a7-701b3), with his criticism of the excessive monarchy of Persia (3.694e6-696b5) (Cartledge 1997a: 9). Both forms of society, representing the extreme forms of the basic possible political constitutions (3.693d2-e3), fail to transmit the appropriate values from generation to generation. The public and participatory nature of Athenian theatrical spectacle differentiates it from Cyrus' procession, which can only be passively consumed by its viewers (Kavoulaki 1999). In contrast, religious processions, the cosmic ordering of the city, were associated consciously or otherwise with tyranny, as Thucydides and Herodotus note of Athenian tyranny (Thuc. 6.54-9, Hdt. 1.60.4-5).

The performativity of virtue and kingship

However, the question remains open as to whether the performativity of Cyrus' new style threatens his status as a virtue monarch. Despite his changed dress and new palace arrangements, Cyrus himself thinks that he can still act as a virtue king, a *paradeigma* to his courtiers, and in that way virtue will trickle down to the populace. While establishing his new order, Cyrus continues to lecture his friends and former equals (7.5.72-85). He exhorts these courtiers at length to copy his activities, the ones that will keep him virtuous even though he is now performing in a very different style: hunting and exercise will protect them from the effects of luxurious living. Cyrus intends to continue to act as a paradigm for the package of qualities that might be labelled *andragathia* or *kalokagathia*, and expects his subordinates to copy those qualities and transmit them further.

For Cyrus himself, performing virtuous activities activates and maintains his own capacity for virtue, to which he was himself habituated in his education. As Xenophon's frequent phrase *to areten askein* suggests, this is an activity that must be repeated.[45] Practice also transmits it to his juniors, both in status and in age-class

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[44] For example, Plato's *Republic* is framed around Socrates' visit to the Piraeus to see the first celebration of a festival in honor of the Thracian goddess Bendis (Pl. *Resp.* 1.327a1-328b1), but within the dialogue itself Socrates criticizes those who travel to see festivals and performances as the "lovers of spectacle" (5.475d2) and "lovers of sights and sounds" (5.476b4) rather than lovers of knowledge (5.475d4, e1).

[45] This phrase appears in the *Cyropaedia* at 1.5.8-9; 2.3.4 (in a chapter devoted to the idea of military training and reward); 7.2.24, 7.3.12, 7.5.70-71, 77, 85; 8.1.12, 21, 8.2.26.

terms. These now include his friends, no longer equal in honour (*homotimoi*) but sharers (*koinones*), perhaps because the group now includes non-Persian courtiers such as Gobryas and Gadatas, as well as Cyrus' older friends, educated to participate in the Persian *politeia* as *homotimoi*.

Xenophon presents Cyrus as attempting to maintain both modes of kingship, simultaneously in the case of the royal procession. Cyrus can govern his empire through the manipulation of spectacle and controlling his own appearances to generate a *thauma* that flows through his vast empire and ensures the subjection of the many. But is doing so through virtue ethics a subversion of the norms of despotic performance? Does the obscuring of his natural body cause difficulties for the transmission of his virtue?

It is hard to see how Cyrus can continue to act as a paradigm of *andragathia* to his courtiers, if they in prostration are stunned by his *thauma* rather than educated by his *paradeigma*. But perhaps Cyrus' underlying virtue makes this performance of kingship ironic or parodic, in the way that Butler suggests as a possibility for escaping rigid gender binaries. Martha Nussbaum noted, in her critique of Butler's work on performativity and transgression, that justice is performative in the same way as gender, but we would not like to see a parodic performance of it.[46] But Nussbaum is perhaps not thinking about the beneficial subversion of despotism that the absolute monarchy of the incommensurable man of virtue might produce. Perhaps Xenophon believes, or hopes, that Cyrus has in some sense hollowed out the ritual and replaced its despotic content with his virtue ethos, so that his performance of despotism becomes a parodic one that empowers his subjects to enjoy greater *eudaimonia* under his protection.

The final chapters of the *Cyropaedia*, particularly the account of Cyrus' homecoming to Persia, still ruled by his father Cambyses (8.5.21-27), show Xenophon still working to show Cyrus combining the two forms of monarchy, the virtue kingship that operates at close quarters and the despotism through spectacle that operates at a distance. Cyrus' status within Persia is complex while Cambyses still lives; Cambyses emphasises his continuing rule within Persia, despite its incorporation into Cyrus'

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[46] Butler 1990: 128-34, 1993: 175-85; Nussbaum 1999: 42-3.

empire. After Cambyses' death, the problem of imposing the new form of rule on Persia becomes more severe, as Cyrus holds both the position of local and external ruler. Cambyses' advice is that Cyrus must not rule Persia as he rules the rest of his empire, and must avoid the temptation to *pleonexia* (8.5.24) that marks his imperial rule.

Cambyses offers an ingenious solution to the problem: Cyrus will obviously be away from Persia (*ekdemos*) most of the time after he inherits its kingship, and so another member of the family should perform the traditional sacrifices (8.5.26). The idea of the moderation of absolute rule, and the preservation of the sort of autonomy prized in Greek *poleis*, through the absence of the king, represents a model for Hellenistic political thought, in which the relationship between the self-governing *polis* and external ruler takes on a new form. Isocrates, writing a decade or so later than Xenophon, suggests a similar approach to Philip II of Macedon by reconfiguring Theseus as a king who gave up direct monarchical rule of Athens to go on adventures abroad.[47] The paradox that remains is that the transmission of virtue requires close contact with the *paradeigma*, but its maintenance requires distance from the dominating presence of the king.

Xenophon's thought on kingship is more complicated and subtle than many readers have thought; his interest in the innate versus performative aspects of kingship can be illuminated through contemporary feminist scholarship that uses the concept of performativity to challenge essentialist models of sex and gender. Xenophon's narrative and description can then be seen to encode an original contribution to Greek political theory, relevant both to its immediate monarchic context and to democracies where performative elements dominate in the construction of the political imaginary. We should not simply be bewitched by Cyrus' performance but acknowledge Xenophon's contribution to Greek political thought for its originality and depth.

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[47] Isocrates *Panath*. 128-9; Atack 2014: 343-54; Masaracchia 1995: 109-10.

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