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Ruling through Fear. Cyrus the Great in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

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Summary: This paper explores Xenophon's depiction of Cyrus the Great as a ruler in the *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon's Cyrus is often regarded by the scholarship as an ideal, benevolent leader sincerely concerned with virtue, friendship, and honour-related dynamics. However, it is clear that Cyrus equally resorts to malicious and divisive means, employing psychological subjugation, fostering mutual rivalry among his friends, and weakening his subjects. His actions ultimately arouse fear, envy, and insecurity, as Cyrus displays some of the typical features of a tyrant. Xenophon possibly meant to show how Cyrus, by successfully balancing different and contrasting aspects, succeeded in maintaining power no matter the costs by 'domesticating' his subjects.

Keywords: *phobos*, *phthonos*, Leadership, Honour, Tyranny, Emotions

"Fear is the mind-killer."
F. Herbert, Dune (1965)

1. Introduction

This paper offers an exploration of Xenophon's description of Cyrus the Great as a ruler. By focusing on the means employed by Cyrus to build and maintain power, I shall discuss some of the emotions elicited in his subjects by his actions. Textual comparisons (mainly with the Xenophontic corpus and with Aristotle) and modern research on social interactions and emotions guide the main argument.

Often regarded as the base for the (much later) mirror-of-princes genre,¹ Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* has enjoyed massive influence and diffusion as a treatise on the

¹ On the topic see now Roskam – Schorn 2018, esp. the chapters by M. Haake (on the genre and the limits of its applicability to antiquity), A. Joosse and P. Christodoulou (for some discussion of Xenophontic works).

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ideal, virtuous ruler. However, the value of the *Cyropaedia* was not unchallenged in antiquity (e.g. Plat. leg. 3, 694c), and substantial criticism has re-emerged from the nineteenth century onwards. In an influential analysis of Xenophontic leaders (including, but only marginally, Cyrus the Great), L. Strauss famously argued that Xenophon produced a sort of deceptive, and ultimately ironic exercise aimed to subtle criticism. Although Strauss' approach has been rightly questioned, later scholarship, from both within and outside the field of Classics, has either partially retrieved his views or provided differently grounded, but still sceptical (or at least nuanced) views of Xenophon's motives.² Others have, in turn, vigorously responded to these "darker" (in V. J. Gray's words) readings by providing new insights, arguing in favour of Xenophon's genuine praise, further demonstrating his refined approach, and, in some cases, reverse-engineering a comprehensive Xenophontic 'theory' of leadership.³

Regardless of their side in this dispute, scholars generally agree about the puzzling nature of the final section of the *Cyropaedia*: Xenophon's narrative seemingly contradicts most of what he had previously outlined as virtuous precepts of statesmanship as his Cyrus adopts a despotic turn once he conquers Babylon in Book 7. This abrupt turning point has been occasionally addressed by cherry picking passages and discarding materials which do not fit modern, non-scholarly reinterpretations of the work.⁴ On the other hand, scholars have focused on Books 7 and 8 in the attempt to find the meaning of Xenophon's biographical fiction of Cyrus; even a scholar who acknowledges the narrative function of the change, like D. Gera, has called it "surprising", "disturbing", "uneasy", and a sign of "tension" in Xenophon's treatment.⁵

I do not intend to deny that (at least most of) what Xenophon wrote is a rather sincere reflection of his thoughts, void of irony or other hidden meanings. I shall, however, argue that such thoughts might not be as straightforwardly laudatory as they are sometimes considered. Namely, while Xenophon certainly praises Cyrus for a large part of the narrative, if we look at the overall picture it seems quite

2 See various relevant arguments and studies in e.g. Carlier 1978; Farber 1979; Breebaart 1983, 126–127; Pomeroy 1984, 98–102; Gera 1993, 294; Danzig 2012, 500–501; Zuolo 2012, 24; Azoulay 2018, e.g. 187–188. For a summary of criticisms to Strauss' approach see Carlier 1978, 137 n. 12, and esp. Azoulay 2018, 4–5; a review of 'Straussian' studies in Tamiolaki 2020.

3 In addition to Gray 2010, esp. ch. 5, see Danzig 2012; Sandridge 2012, who bases what he calls Xenophon's "theory of leadership" on Cyr. 1.2.1; Field 2012; see also Keim 2016; Illarraga 2021; additional studies in Tamiolaki 2020, 378.

4 For example, by best-sellers such as Hedrick 2006, xvi: "I've cleaned up Xenophon's story line and deleted sections that, with the passage of time, have become difficult to understand".

5 Gera 1993, 285–296; see also e.g. Breebaart 1983; Field 2012 argues that Cyrus' failure is meant to illustrate the risks a virtuous ruler faces in cultivating healthy politics.

clear that the king's primary goal was not the good of his people, but the preservation of his own power by just any means. Cyrus might have been subtle, smart, and prudent enough to obtain the latter goal (also) by performing the former, but this only reinforces the impression that Xenophon built a complex literary edifice which requires careful analysis.

2. Obedience, Willingness, and Fear

At the very beginning of the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon anticipates that everybody 'wanted to obey' Cyrus, in an apparently laudatory description of his fame (Cyr. 1.1.3):

Κύρω γοῦν ἴσμεν ἐθελήσαντας πείθεσθαι τοὺς μὲν ἀπέχοντας παμπόλλων ἡμερῶν ὁδόν, τοὺς δὲ καὶ μηνῶν, τοὺς δὲ οὐδ' ἑωρακότας πώποτ' αὐτόν, τοὺς δὲ καὶ εὐ εἰδότας ὅτι οὐδ' ἂν ἴδοιεν, καὶ ὅμως ἤθελον αὐτῷ ὑπακούειν.

"We know that people obeyed Cyrus willingly, those who were far away from him a journey of many days, or even many months; and those who had never seen him, and even those who knew well that they would never see him. Nevertheless, they were all willing to be his subjects."

This statement can be regarded as puzzling in light of the subsequent passage, in which universal fear for Cyrus' rule has the first place among the reasons for his success (1.1.5 *phobos*: for a detailed analysis of this passage see below). The apparent contradiction between voluntary obedience (1.1.3) and fearful submission (1.1.5) might be simply seen as one of Xenophon's many inconsistencies,⁶ but an alternative explanation might come from internal intertextuality.

That Cyrus' subjects everywhere were all "willing to obey" (Cyr. 1.1.3 ἐθελήσαντας πείθεσθαι) is a rather ambiguous formulation, as it does not clarify the reasons behind their motivation. In fact, the king of Armenia later employs the very same expression to define the status of those who have been forced to submit: once a polis has been defeated, it becomes "willing to obey" the winner instead of continuing fighting (3.1.18 οὐπω ἐώρακας πόλιν ἀντιταπτομένην πρὸς πόλιν ἑτέραν, ἧς ἐπειδὴν ἠττηθῆ παραχρῆμα ταύτη ἀντὶ τοῦ μάχεσθαι πείθεσθαι ἐθέλει;); in the

⁶ For a discussion of the involved issues see Flower 2020, 138–140, with different arguments and results. Gray 2010, 277–278, instead argues that by the end of the *Cyropaedia* fear of Cyrus has disappeared as he has become "the perfect friend": I agree that Xenophon generally approves of the normative use of fear (cfr. Zaccarini 2022, 159), but here I shall give a rather different evaluation of Cyrus' friendship.

same context, Tigranes points out that one may “be willing to obey even without compulsion” (3.1.20 καὶ ἄνευ ἀνάγκης ἐθέλουσι πείθεσθαι), implying that people can be forcefully led to do so. But such desire has much more to do with self-preservation and fear of consequences rather than with spontaneous recognition of a superior authority, let alone with sincere affection for the conquering force: what Xenophon may actually be referring to with these formulations, therefore, seems to be an informed choice dictated by the circumstances, a peculiar form of necessity driven ‘imposed will’ or – at best – consent, stemming from fear-inspired rational decision, but hardly implying free choice.⁷ As a comparison, consider Aristotle’s entirely consistent treatment of warfare as just when waged against humans who, despite being naturally disposed to being ruled, refuse to do so (Pol. 1, 1256b25 τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅσοι πεφυκότες ἄρχεσθαι μὴ θέλουσιν).

Elsewhere, Xenophon uses a different expression to refer to what is more clearly a sincere form of persuasion. Right between the aforementioned two passages from Book 1, he provides the list of Cyrus’ conquests, pointing out that (only) two nations submitted “willingly”, the Medians and the Hyrkansians (Cyr. 1.1.4 ἐκόντων μὲν ἠγήσατο Μήδων, ἐκόντων δὲ Ὑρκανίων), whereas all the many others “were subdued” (κατεστρέψατο δέ).⁸ The kind of willing obedience here expressed by ἐκόντων is later discussed by Cyrus and his father (1.6.21 τὸ ἐκόντας πείθεσθαι) and seems to apply especially to Cyrus’ closest subjects. However, as we shall see, this sentiment is also coupled with fear and has ambiguous connotations (see § 3).⁹ So far, rather than constituting a discrepancy, it seems that the kind of submission in 1.1.3 is consistent with the fear mentioned in 1.1.5. It is now convenient to focus on this latter passage, in which Xenophon anticipates the reasons for Cyrus’ success (1.1.5):

ἔδυνάσθη ἐφικέσθαι μὲν ἐπὶ τοσαύτην γῆν τῷ ἅφ’ ἑαυτοῦ φόβῳ, ὥστε καταπλήξει πάντας καὶ μηδένα ἐπιχειρεῖν αὐτῷ, ἔδυνάσθη δὲ ἐπιθυμίαν ἐμβαλεῖν τοσαύτην τοῦ πάντας αὐτῷ χαρίζεσθαι ὥστε αἰεὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ γνώμῃ ἀξιούν κυβερνᾶσθαι.

“[Cyrus] was able to cover such a territory with fear of him that he struck everybody, and no one attempted to oppose him. He was also able to instil into all such a desire to please him that they always thought it worthy to be governed according to his will.”

7 Cf. an. 7.7.29–30 on the similar condition of Seuthes’ subjects: fear leads them to σωφρονεῖν; see Lendon 2006, 89 (and generally on Tigranes’ episode). Cf. also Aristot. eth. Nic. 10, 1179b10–13: fear and punishments regulate *hoi polloi* (on Aristotle see below); Cic. de orat. 2.178 *plura enim multo homines iudicant [...] timore* etc.

8 Pace Tamiolaki 2020, 367; similar expressions follow for even more countries.

9 Note that, on the other hand, in some cases the two expressions (or some variations thereof) here considered are used essentially as synonyms, e.g. at Cyr. 5.1.25 (ἐθέλουσίους συνεπομένους and ἐκόντες ἠκολούθησαν).

Both components were obviously interconnected and extremely important to Xenophon's analysis. Since the latter statement about *charis* has generally attracted more scholarly attention, I shall focus on the former about *phobos*.¹⁰

By mentioning fear, Xenophon might reflect Greek stereotypes on a typically Persian (and, more generally, Asian) attitude to power. As a comparison, in the *Anabasis* the Greeks are concerned with Artaxerxes' aim to instil *phobos* in all human beings (Xen. an. 3.1.18). Fear of the king is also a prominent component of the Assyrian protocol, for example in epistolary formulas of obedience: consistent portrayals of kingship are found both in Ctesias' oriental courts and in the *Cyropaedia* itself for what concerns at least Astyages.¹¹ These elements frame Cyrus' rule in broader terms, but Xenophon's treatment soon becomes more detailed as reliance on fear turns into a major component of Cyrus' 'stick-and-carrot' attitude to power.

Both *phobos* and *charis* emerge as complementary aspects of a way of conquering and governing masses recommended to young Cyrus by his father (Cyr. 1.6.10, asking: ποῖον οὖν ἔθνος τῶν πέριξ οὐ δοκεῖ σοι καὶ χαρίζεσθαι βουλόμενον ὑμῖν ὑπηρετήσῃν καὶ φοβούμενον μὴ τι πάθῃ;). Cambyses refers to fear employed against both enemies and subjects alike: for example, soldiers find their leader's words more persuasive (1.6.10 πειστικωτέρους) when these are backed up by the awareness that he can both benefit and harm (καὶ εὖ ποιεῖν ἰκανὸς ὦν καὶ κακῶς).¹² This is confirmed by an unnamed *homotimos* (2.1.13, see § 3); by Cyrus' awareness that personal address to his commanders can both inspire and frighten (5.3.47); and, as a comparison, by the Younger Cyrus' reputation (an. 1.9.11).

The aforementioned passages from the *Cyropaedia* all suggest that Cyrus mostly relied on just the threat of punishment as a psychological deterrent, instead of recurring to fear-inducing manifest actions. It is, therefore, true, as V. Azoulay notes, that in the *Cyropaedia*'s narrative *phobos* "tends to disappear", but only – with some exceptions – in its overt manifestations.¹³ It is also true that Tigranes' episode above eventually ends with a trust-based reconciliation, rather than punishment (Cyr. 3.1.27–32),¹⁴ although fear-inducing retaliation by Cyrus is reported.

¹⁰ Sandridge 2012, 9, underlines that this reference to fear is neither ironic nor subtle, but does not treat it in detail. On *charis* see Azoulay 2018, esp. 15–16, and 289 n. 109, for other examples of *phobos* and *charis* together; Zaccarini 2022, 159; see also below on Cyr. 1.6.10.

¹¹ On the topic see Lanfranchi 2010, esp. 41–47 (41 on the Assyrian formula "I am one who fears [scil., and consequently obeys] the king"). On fear and the Persian king see also § 4.

¹² Again, this echoes court statements in Achaemenid sources: cfr. Briant 2002, 302–303.

¹³ Azoulay 2018, 16. See, however, Cyr. 7.2.7 (Cyrus' allies experiencing fear: cfr. Sandridge 2012, ch. 4). For fear (mainly) experienced by or used against Cyrus' enemies see e.g. Cyr. 1.4.25, 3.3.18, 4.5.6, 4.5.41, 5.2.31–35, 5.3.47, 5.4.51. Note that, in the case of external enemies, Xenophon often treats fear in a different way, related to irrational (over)reaction: Lendon 2006, 91.

¹⁴ See Lendon 2006, esp. 91–93; Field 2012, 728–730.

In any case, fear largely remains as an underlying element for, as we shall see, Cyrus' subjects soon internalize awareness of the potentially harmful implications of his power. Such perception persists during the work and informs their emotional reactions and power relations with Cyrus. But how does fear work exactly in cases such as this?

According to Aristotle, fear itself involves a (painful) physical response (rhet. 2, 1382a21 ἔστω δὴ ὁ φόβος λύπη τις ἢ ταραχή).¹⁵ Fear, Aristotle explains, first and foremost works through the subject's informed evaluation that something harmful might (and likely will) happen in the near future¹⁶ (1382a21–22 ἐκ φαντασίας μέλλοντος κακοῦ φθαρτικοῦ ἢ λυπηροῦ), for example when someone who clearly has the power and the intention to act with hostility is about to do so: Aristotle stresses that such threat must be perceived as close (30–31 ἐγγύς γὰρ φαίνεται τὸ φοβερόν. 33–35 τοιαῦτα δὲ ἐχθρα τε καὶ ὀργή δυναμένων ποιεῖν τι [δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι βούλονται τε καὶ δύνανται, ὥστε ἐγγύς εἰσιν τοῦ ποιεῖν], and *passim* in the following passages). The unbridgeable disparity of forces between Cyrus and his subjects (cfr. § 3) serves this purpose: as Xenophon rhetorically asks at the end of the *Cyropaedia*, “who else than the king of the Persians was able to retaliate on enemies who were many months of road away?” (Cyr. 8.2.9 τίς δ' ἄλλος ἐδυνάσθη ἐχθροὺς ἀπέχοντας πολλῶν μηνῶν ὁδὸν τιμωρεῖσθαι ὡς Περσῶν βασιλεύς;), implying that Cyrus' virtually infinite resources allows him to be perceived as always close and, therefore, always a threatening presence. The expression of the long reach of Cyrus' potential retaliation at 8.2.9 closely recalls, and clarifies, why even distant people had been defined as ‘willing’ to be conquered by him at 1.1.3.

This form of oppressing awareness is certainly the primary way fear of Cyrus works in the *Cyropaedia*: Tigranes and Cyrus agree that *phobos* is the strongest way to discipline human beings as it breaks will and instils slave-like submission (Xen. Cyr. 3.1.23–25). The persons experiencing this form of fear as an evaluative response

15 A view which reminds the so-called James – Lang controversial theory of emotions, i.e., that emotions do not produce bodily changes (‘expressions’), but rather that bodily changes are themselves part of the emotion: for an overview and some points of criticism of the theory see Myers 1969, e.g. 67–68. When not itself equated to a physical reaction, fear is often analysed in terms of the physical reactions it triggers: e.g. Tappolet 2016, 48 and 50–77 (*passim* distinguishing between fear for oneself and fear for others, and mostly treating the latter). Fear is sometimes included among the ‘basic’ (‘primary’, or ‘natural’, as opposed to ‘cognitive’, ‘secondary’, etc.) emotions: Sanders 2014, 3; Tappolet 2016, 6; but see Cairns 2019b, 2–3 on the limits of such categorization. On Aristotle's treatment of fear see also Beltrametti 2021, 87–89.

16 Cfr. Kavka 1983, 603–604. Kapust 2008, esp. 356–364, provides some discussion of fear as a restraining power, and at 357–359 argues that fear can have “positive effects” (on which, however, see § 4) when dealing with groups by providing moral motivation. On evaluative vs phenomenological elements in emotion scripts see Cairns 2022, 21–23.

are led to restrict their agency (cfr. e.g. Demosth. or. 21.124) in the sense that, even in absence of concrete action, fear of possible retaliation is already a means to discourage, and therefore control, the subjects' (re)actions: as Pindar calls it, fear is "man-taming" (Nem. 3.39 φόβος ἀνδροδάμας).

Similar references to mass-regulatory and enslaving uses of fear can be found in Xenophon's *Hiero* (2.2, but see also 6.12), in the *Memorabilia* (3.4.5 φόβος προσεκτικωτέρους τε καὶ εὐπειθεστέρους καὶ εὐτακτοτέρους ποιεῖ, and cfr. 3.5.5 on slavery), and also in the Platonic observations that fear alone is enough to safeguard the Persian queen (Plat. Alc. 1 121c οὐ φρουρεῖται ἡ βασιλέως γυνὴ ἀλλ' ἡ ὑπὸ φόβου), and that Great kings are educated to become fearless, "for to be afraid is to be a slave" (122a ἄφοβον καὶ ἀδεῖ παρασκευάζων, ὡς ὅταν δεῖσῃ δοῦλον ὄντα).¹⁷

However, for fear to exert such prescriptive and preventive action, it requires a second element of subjective, informed anticipation: those who experience fear must not be completely devoid of hope and expectations for the future, otherwise they would be immune to fear out of desperation (Aristot. rhet. 2, 1383a1–8).¹⁸ Consistently, (soft) control and coercion, but also (volatile) distribution of honours and benefits, turn out to be important and closely linked components of Cyrus' power: his actions eventually led or forced his subjects to choose obedience simply because it became, in a sense, both convenient and inevitable for them to do so. To go back to the "Politics", we might posit that Cyrus' subjects lacked the fundamental cause to question his power, that is the disposition to do so according to a conception of distributive justice (of honour and wealth) different from that displayed by their ruler (Aristot. pol. 5, 1302a20–37).¹⁹ Cyrus, in fact, established a wide-ranging system of rewards meant to win affection from his subjects, but also to increase their fear-induced dependence upon him.

¹⁷ For a wider treatment of the traditional Iranian motif of the king as fearless see Panaino 2022, esp. 71–72.

¹⁸ One such case must be represented by fear-induced *stasis* as described by Aristot. pol. 5, 1302b21–24 (cfr. collective opposition to oppression in 1304b23–24; 1311a25–27 and b36–37), a situation generated by the perception that one group is (or will be) abusing its prerogatives according to different notions of distributive justice (on which cfr. below): see Cairns – Canevaro – Mantzouranis 2020, 559–561 esp. 567–568.

¹⁹ Aristotle's treatment of *stasis* (see Cairns – Canevaro – Mantzouranis 2020) focuses on democratic and oligarchic communities: the basic motives and objects of the citizens, however, constitute a model which seems applicable also to Cyrus' monarchy.

3. Honours, Goodwill, and Insecurity

Honour-related dynamics play a major part in Xenophon's conceptualization of power.²⁰ Consistently, Cyrus frequently honours and rewards his men for their loyalty and good service (e.g. Xen. Cyr. 1.2.1), simultaneously punishing those who fail or disobey (1.6.20): as early as Herodotus, reciprocated honour figures as an important Persian custom, according to which "good deeds are honoured in return according to their greatness" (Hdt. 3.154.1 ἐν τοῖσι Πέρσησι αἱ ἀγαθοεργίαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω μέγας τιμῶνται. Cfr. 8.2.9); no one ever surpassed even Herodotus' Cyrus in such deeds (3.160.1).²¹ Xenophon's Cyrus is certainly aware of mechanisms of honour and reciprocity (e.g. Xen. Cyr. 5.1.29, 7.1.43, 8.7.17). However, in the *Cyropaedia* material and non-material honours are also employed to create widespread insecurity which represents an essential component of Cyrus' prominence.

Early on, Cambyses tells Cyrus that it is a man's duty to prove himself *kalos kai agathos* and to care for both his and his household's necessities, a principle which extends to all subjects of an aspiring leader (Xen. Cyr. 1.6.7). After recommending the complementary use of fear to achieve forced obedience (1.6.10), Cambyses discusses a different, more effective way: sincere willing obedience (1.6.21 τὸ ἐκόντας πείθεσθαι, see § 2 on both passages). This is achieved when subjects spontaneously believe their ruler can take the best decisions for them. Cambyses concludes that the most effective way to appear as this kind of leader is, on a purely theoretical level, to be come it (1.6.22).²² In some cases, Cyrus seems to successfully reach this goal: his men are said to follow him voluntarily (5.1.24–25, employing the queen bee metaphor);²³ at times, he presents his requests not as orders, but as something in the interest of his notables (e.g. at 7.5.71). However, after the conquest of Babylon Cyrus becomes aware that the Babylonians are unwilling (7.5.77 ἀκόντων) to accept him as a ruler, somehow realizing that he failed to achieve the general spontaneous obedience originally recommended by his father. Cyrus now adopts measures towards both the masses and the elite.

²⁰ Sandridge 2012, esp. ch. 6; Keim 2016; Azoulay 2018, 56–61; Illarraga 2021.

²¹ See Cairns 2019a, esp. 79–83, discussing these and other passages.

²² On the discussion between Cyrus and Cambyses see Azoulay 2018, 263. Also compare Simonides' final advice in Xen. Hier. 11.12 ἐκόντας δὲ τοὺς πειθομένους ἔχεις etc.

²³ Likely, a laudatory comparison, for bees generally symbolise industrious virtues and good leadership (e.g. Xen. oic. 7.32–38; see Pomeroy 1984, but also Tuplin 1994, 130–131); yet, bees may also represent narrow-mindedness (Democr. B 227, Diels – Kranz); in Xen. hell. 3.2.28 the queen-bees image seems to describe a somewhat erratic behaviour; cfr. the vocabulary of Cyr. 5.1.24 itself: bees have a *deinos erōs* (on whose irrational, dangerous connotations see Zaccarini 2018) to be ruled by their queen.

In regard to the former, while Cyrus reserves a relatively fair treatment to both men and gods in Babylon, he eventually regards the inhabitants as slaves and establishes his Persians and closest allies as masters (Xen. Cyr. 7.5.34–36). Cyrus realizes that the city is supremely belligerent to him (58 πολειμωτάτη) and that he must face a host of hostile subjects (66). He therefore feels the need to acquire a large personal guard, for which he recruits eunuchs (60–61)²⁴ and poor Babylonians through both rewards and exploitation: since these categories used to suffer abuses and humiliations from the rest of the society, Cyrus easily relies on their need for protection to secure their loyalty (59–61, 67–69). Cyrus has the Babylonians pay for additional city guards, ensuring to keep the common people as resourceless, and therefore as humble and submissive, as possible (69 ὡς ἀμηχανωτάτους εἶναι, ὅπως ὄτι ταπεινότατοι καὶ εὐκαθεκτότατοι εἴεν); in the whole empire, he eventually feels safe once those he had subdued are impotent and unorganized (8.1.45 ἀνάγκιδας [...] καὶ ἀσυντάκτους). A related strategy to keep the weak under control consists in granting some of the servants the *timē* of accessing Cyrus' table (on which see below), aiming to produce in them some goodwill (*eunoia*), just as with dogs (8.2.4; on animal domestication see § 4), a form of interested kindness which we should read in light of the passage from the *Oeconomicus* about *eunoia* produced in slaves through good acts (oic. 12.6).²⁵

Powerful individuals were manipulated in similar ways. Gift-exchange held a major part in Cyrus' dealings with his closest followers: invitations, offices, valuables, and table seats were all means to display or deny favour (e.g. Xen. Cyr. 8.2 and 8.4), establishing the famous, long-lasting custom of *poludōria* of the Great kings (8.2.7).²⁶ Dining occasions were a favoured venue to perform these activities, display prestige, and cultivate power relations, as consistently reflected by the Persian tradition on the king's table.²⁷ Gifts and services presented to the king by his subjects were effectively tributes (Hdt. 3.89.3), open attempts to curry favour, performances of obligation, and proof of loyalty.²⁸ Gifts from the king, on the other

24 Notoriously regarded as τιμώτεροι by the barbarians from Asia (Hdt. 8.105); for some comparisons and bibliography see Gera 1993, 287 n. 29 (pace Breebaart 1983, 121); esp. Azoulay 2000, 11–13 on Cyrus); note, however, Plato's remark about the strictly Median appreciation for eunuchs as alien to Persian customs (leg. 3, 695a–b).

25 On Xenophon's slave vs freeman honour system see Gray 2010, ch. 1. Xenophon also treats *eunoia* felt by soldiers for their leaders: Zaccarini 2022, 159. See § 4 on *eunoia*.

26 See Azoulay 2018, e.g. 52–56.

27 For a detailed discussion, esp. based on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, cfr. Henkelman 2010; Wright – Hollman 2021.

28 Cfr. Jacobs 2020, esp. 244–246. As a comparison, consider the meaning that *dōra* may take in clearly asymmetric power relations, that is, something that the stronger part expects to receive and requires as compulsory: cfr. the Scythian king to Olbia, c. 200 BC (IosPE I2 32); the Scythian *dōra* to

hand, were obviously highly coveted but, due to their inherent volatility and to the disparity of status they were based on, they were yet another means to control their receivers.²⁹ Reciprocity was therefore involved, but hardly as a result of spontaneity or generosity: rather, the king's table created a form of "unequal exchange" or "unbalanced reciprocity".³⁰

These strategies had been learnt in due time by Cyrus, who used to master a manipulative use of gifts as early as his youth: when Cyaxares experienced *atimia* because of the young Cyrus' conquests (Xen. Cyr. 5.5.26 and 34),³¹ Cyrus reconciled by arranging gifts, wrongly perceived by Cyaxares as spontaneous acts of respect (5.5.39–40).³² It is, however, at his own court that Cyrus develops favour-based dynamics to the utmost advantage. While servants are sometimes involved (see above), the privilege of receiving gifts and accessing Cyrus' table is normally reserved to his Persian elite, the *homotimoi*.³³ To judge by their title, the *homotimoi* all enjoyed the same status:³⁴ however, their main, common element of equality seems represented by their shared, unbridgeable divide compared to their leader. As the banquet scene in "Iliad" 2 illustrates, by inviting the leaders of the Achaeans to a feast Agamemnon underscores his own prominent position, much in the same way that Cyrus does with his elite. But when the status of the involved parties is equal, or at least comparable, dinner- and gift-giving dynamics change substan-

Darius were interpreted as threats (Hdt. 4.132.2 and 134.2). See also Xen. Hier. 7.8 on gifts presented to a (hated) tyrant as an attempt to avert his punishments.

29 For this dynamic in Persian customs cfr. Colburn 2019, ch. 5, esp. 191–200, employing Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*; cfr. below on Bourdieu 1977.

30 For these definitions cfr. resp. Briant 2002, 316–326 and Azoulay 2018, 14.

31 Cyaxares expresses the strongest confrontational, subtractive, and zero-sum conception of honour found in the *Cyropaedia*. But his narrative role is that of a cruel and greedy antagonist to Cyrus: consistently, such reaction represents the fact that Cyrus' rise directly corresponds to Cyaxares' decline (this narrative function does not seem properly acknowledged by Danzig 2012, 514–537; see now Jacobs 2020, esp. 244–246). On the Greek side, as a parallel to Cyaxares' feelings, consider the two Greek commanders who, evidently perceiving the episode as an insult, defected *φιλοτιμηθέντες* after many of their soldiers went over to Clearchus (Xen. an. 1.4.7).

32 Cyrus the Younger honoured his brothers' dignitaries in a similar way, aiming to seize their support for the throne (Xen. an. 1.1.5 and 9.29): Flower 2012, 193–194; for additional notes on the contrast between frequent deception in the *Cyropaedia* and truth as a royal virtue in Persian sources see Tuplin 1994, 158 and 173 n. 52.

33 Cfr. obvious lexical and thematic parallels with Cyrus the Younger's *homotrapezoi* or *suntrapezoi* (Xen. an. 1.8.25, 1.9.31) and with other related nouns: Pomeroy 1984, 98–100, Flower 2012, 188–194, and Flower 2020, on relevant similarities and differences; see also Hdt. 8.85.3, Xen. an. 7.2.38, and Ath. 4, 144b–146a.

34 Real Persian practice certainly allowed internal hierarchy: Briant 2002, 307–312; see, however, Azoulay 2018, 189–190 on the royal *philoi*. On the *homotimoi* and the Spartan *homoioi* see Tuplin 1994, 142–143.

tially: Menelaos would join the feast *automatos*, of his own account and with no need for an invitation, behaving as Agamemnon's peer (Hom. Il. 2.402–408; cfr. Plat. symp. 174b–c). Similarly, since Achilles perceives Agamemnon's gifts, however apparently lavish, as insincere, he regards them as worthless and even insulting (Hom. Il. 9.312–387).

Encouraging competition to win royal favour is a staple element in Cyrus' strategies, which initially encourage 'good' *eris* among his friends to improve the army (Xen. Cyr. 6.2.4–6).³⁵ Eventually, however, competition becomes profound division and is paired with constant insecurity: the king literally regards his followers as tools (5.3.47, *organa*) and, consistently, makes it very clear that any friend is easily replaceable at Cyrus' own will. Such threat becomes his preferred way of forcing court attendance as he reassigns gifts from 'useless' to 'useful' friends (8.1.20 καὶ οὕτως ἐγένετο αὐτῷ φίλος χρήσιμος ἀντὶ ἀχρήστου),³⁶ showing that, ultimately, any gift remains his own possession. By unilaterally giving and taking away honours, Cyrus establishes the volatile status of the guests, but through his own wealth and power he also manifests his unquestionable superiority.³⁷ his liberality is a way to exert symbolic violence, to use P. Bourdieu's formulation,³⁸ and his monopolising control of honours may be seen as an example of Gramsci's "apparato egemonico".³⁹ By promoting rivalry for his favour, Cyrus shifts the *homotimois*' concerns from what S. Darwall has called "recognition respect", that is the equal status shared by all peers of a community, towards "appraisal respect", which instead is based on acknowledged superiority,⁴⁰ validated and assigned, in

35 See Keim 2016, 124. For thematic parallels cfr. e.g. Xen. hell. 3.4.16, Lac. pol. 4.2, and esp. mem. 2.6.21–22: Socrates argues that *aretē* can reconcile *eris*-driven conflict; consistently, Cyrus still invites his friends to cultivate *aretē* after the conquest of Babylon (Cyr. 7.5.77).

36 Cfr. Xen. oic. 4.7; see Briant 2002, 304–305; Azoulay 2018, 188; on the *organa* simile see also § 4.

37 This dynamic among Asian rulers is well illustrated by the episode of Mania and Meidias as described by Xenophon: Mania literally belonged to Pharnabazus, and therefore all her possessions belonged to him as well (Xen. an. 3.1.26 Μανία δὲ τίνος ἦν; οἱ δὲ πάντες εἶπον ὅτι Φαρναβάζου. οὐκοῦν καὶ τὰ ἐκείνης, ἔφη, Φαρναβάζου; μάλιστα, ἔφασαν); it is clear that this scene reproduces in a smaller scale the way the Great King literally owned everyone and everything in his domain (cfr. Mantzouranis 2023).

38 In Bourdieu's view gift-exchange, which is based on institutionally organized misrecognition, is an example of how *habitus*-strategies are turned into "mechanical sequences of obligatory acts" (Bourdieu 1977, 171) according to gift and counter-gift expectations: generosity (expressed through material and immaterial gifts, aid, etc.) is thus a way to apply symbolic, hidden, soft violence in place of overt violence, transforming economic capital into symbolic capital. See also Azoulay 2018, 13–15.

39 I.e., a set of tools used by a dominant class – or, in this case, individual – to either incorporate or suppress different, weaker social groups: Gramsci 1930–1932, esp. 800–801.

40 Darwall 1977.

our case, by the king himself. By underlining inequality and the precariousness of his followers' status, Cyrus' favour simultaneously reflects his own domination and the guests' subordination, reiterating subjection and fear-related mechanisms.⁴¹

This dynamic is supplemented with related practices. Cyrus decides that the most efficient and safe way to deal with the elite is to "make them better friends to him than to one another" (Xen. Cyr. 8.1.48 εαυτῷ μᾶλλον φίλους ἢ ἀλλήλοις), and consistently machinates to come first in their affections (8.2.26 ἐμηχανᾶτο πρὸς τὸ πρωτεύειν παρ' οἷς ἐβούλετο ἑαυτὸν φιλεῖσθαι). Cyrus exploits ambition for his own *philia* to foster *phthonos* among his men (8.2.28),⁴² here expressing begrudgery, envy, and fear-related jealousy.⁴³ Essentially, this is yet another facet of Cyrus' fear-based manipulation, for he is clearly well aware of the socially disruptive consequences of such mechanism: perhaps significantly, in one early instance he had attempted to prevent *phthonos* among his soldiers (3.3.10),⁴⁴ but later, facing the risk of diffused *phthonos* among the Persians, he does not seem to make any effort to stop it (8.5.24). Therefore, Cyrus disseminates mutual mistrust and rivalry, desire for gain matched with anxiety and fear of loss, facilitating his control and effectively transforming a multilateral, diffused network of friendship-based, mostly horizontal relationships into a vertically structured set of personal connections all converging to his dominating figure.⁴⁵ In light of the analysis carried out so far, we can now attempt to summarise the nature of Cyrus' power in the *Cyropaedia*.

41 Cf. Gilbert – Basran 2019, 3, summarizing 'aggressive leadership' as fostering, among the rest, "fear of down rank threat".

42 For the corresponding Persian custom see Wright – Hollman 2021, esp. 1071. Intra-elite *phthonos* destroys, among the rest, *philia* and *eunoia*: Xen. mem. 2.6.20; cfr. Azoulay 2018, 142–143.

43 On these interrelated aspects of jealousy (fear of losing something – in this case Cyrus' favour – to others) and envy (resentment at other's success) cfr. studies and discussion in Konstan 2003, esp. 9–10; Sanders 2014, e.g. 3 and 26–27. On *phthonos* as (mainly) envy cfr. Aristot. rhet. 2, 1386b18–20 and 1387b22–25, on *eupragia* enjoyed by one's peers (note, however 24–25 μὴ ἵνα τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ δι' ἐκείνου, which does not seem to reflect the case of Cyrus' friends); on *phthonos* as (mainly) jealousy felt by the εὐτυχοῦντες see 1387b28–29 (and cfr. Cairns 2003, 239).

44 A few notes on this passage in Hau 2012, 601.

45 Kavka 1983, 605–612 discusses mutual distrust and "the net of fear".

4. King or Tyrant?

Cyrus' frequent displays of generosity, affection, rewards, and kindness⁴⁶ proceed side-by-side with his manipulative ways of fostering fear, instability, weakness, and mutual rivalry among his subjects. One way or another, many of these elements include some form of reciprocity and shared benefits, but these are always complemented by punitive mechanisms functional to cement Cyrus' control. Affection for and from his subjects is regarded as the safest and most stable way to ensure stability, but the subtle, ultimate foundation of his power consists in domesticating the weak, dividing the strong, and ensuring that those in need of him remain in such a condition, lacking the means and the will to question his rule.

These many intertwined aspects inevitably confer an underlying ambiguity to Cyrus' figure as a leader, well represented by Abradatas, who enthusiastically – and, from a Greek perspective, disturbingly – offers himself as a friend, slave, and ally (Xen. Cyr. 6.1.48 φίλον σοι ἐμαυτὸν δίδωμι καὶ θεράποντα καὶ σύμμαχον):⁴⁷ these all become synonyms for one who follows Cyrus. The implied loss of – or even renunciation to – freedom can be easily compared to submission to a tyrant, whose companions are slaves rather than friends (Hier. 6.3 δούλους ἀντὶ φίλων ἔχειν τοὺς ἐταίρους, cfr. e.g. Soph. fr. 873 Radt ὅστις γὰρ ὡς τύραννον ἐμπορεύεται / κείνου ᾽στι δοῦλος, κἄν ἐλεύθερος μόλη); Cyrus' use of his friends as *organa* (Xen. Cyr. 5.3.47, see § 3) also recalls a typical master-slave dynamic (e.g. Aristot. eth. Nic. 8, 1161a30–b5; eth. Eud. 7, 1241b17–24).⁴⁸ Some tyrannical, or in any case ambivalent features in Xenophon's *Cyrus* have been noted by several scholars, but mostly limited to the final part of the *Cyropaedia* when, after the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus faces the results of his actions and fully develops his *divide et impera* strategy.⁴⁹ Few seem to have given proper importance to the fact that this turn corresponds exactly

⁴⁶ I have not treated Cyrus' *philanthrōpia* (e.g. Xen. Cyr. 1.2.1), but I should point out that even this trait eventually emerges as ambiguous (Tamiolaki 2020, 377–378), insincere and interested (Farber 1979, 509), or directly as another way to dominate (Cyr. 8.2.1; see Azoulay 2018, 193–197; a more nuanced view in Illarraga 2021, 177–179). A comprehensive treatment vis-à-vis Cyrus' other virtues in Sandridge 2012, ch. 4: by adopting a philanthropic policy Cyrus seems to renounce some of his merit-rewarding principles to the benefit of generally undeserving, undistinguished masses: comparison with Hier. 7.3 suggests that mere *anthrōpoi*, as opposed to *andres*, do not participate in Cyrus' desire for honour and praise; see, however, Keim 2016, 129–130.

⁴⁷ Cfr. Azoulay 2018, 188.

⁴⁸ On the Great King's friends – even the most privileged – as inevitably slaves, in the Greek perspective, see Mantzouranis 2023. See also Aristot. pol. 1, 1259b22–23, but also 1253b27–1254a17, on *organa*.

⁴⁹ Cfr. Carlier 1978, e.g. 150–151 and 156; Gera 1993, 285–299 argues that it is not Xenophon's intent to depict Cyrus as a tyrant, but acknowledges the despotic turn after Babylon.

to the formal beginning of Cyrus' monarchy (since for the first six Books of the work Cyrus is no king, but a military leader⁵⁰), and especially that even his earlier actions seem to point inevitably to the same direction.

What label, if any at all, should we then give to Cyrus' leadership and monarchy? Wider parallels may help us situate Xenophon's treatment. In the *Cyropaedia*, Cyrus is obviously defined as a king, albeit one like no other (Xen. Cyr. 1.1.4 τοσοῦτον διήνεγκε τῶν ἄλλων βασιλείων etc.). Nobody ever calls him a tyrant, although the risk of becoming such is foreshadowed by his parents through the pejorative model of his maternal grandfather: Cyrus is warned by his mother against Astyages' tyrannical rule (1.3.18 ἂν παρὰ τούτου μαθὼν ἤκης ἀντὶ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ τὸ τυραννικόν), and by his father against *pleonexia*, itself one of Astyages' traits (8.5.24).⁵¹ In other works from Xenophon's corpus, several of the main elements valued by Cyrus are treated as tyrannical features: praise (ἔπαινος), for which Cyrus displays a certain obsession (1.2.5), is abundantly available to tyrants (Hier. 1.14); Cyrus' desire for submissive and weak subjects (Cyr. 7.5.69, § 4) is shared by tyrants (Hier. 5.4); the power to rule over unwilling subjects, like that of Cyrus over the Babylonians (Cyr. 7.5.77 ἀκόντων, § 3) is noted by Socrates as a mark of tyranny (Xen. mem. 4.6.12 τὴν δὲ ἀκόντων τε καὶ μὴ κατὰ νόμους, ἀλλ' ὅπως ὁ ἄρχων βούλοιο, τυραννίδα).⁵² These Xenophontic parallels provide some elements, but more comprehensive models can be considered.

A starting point is Plutarch's description of the difference between good rulers and tyrants at the end of the *Aratus* (Plut. Arat. 25.7):⁵³

ἀλλ' οὐδὲν οἶον ἀληθινή καὶ βέβαιος εὖνοια φυλακτήριον ἀνδρὸς ἄρχοντος, ὅταν γὰρ ἐθισθῶσιν οἱ τε πολλοὶ καὶ οἱ δυνατοὶ μὴ τὸν ἡγούμενον, ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἡγουμένου δεδιέναι, πολλοῖς μὲν ὄμμασιν ὄρᾳ, διὰ πολλῶν δὲ ὠτων ἀκούει, καὶ προαισθάνεται τὰ γινόμενα.

“There is no protection for a man in charge like a truthful and steady goodwill, for when the mass and also the powerful are used to be afraid not of their leader, but for their leader, he sees with many eyes, hears through many ears, and perceives the events in advance.”

On the one hand, this passage provides a parallel explanation for Cyrus' aim to produce – somewhat artificially – *eunoia* in his subjects (§ 3). On the other, however,

⁵⁰ Granted, there is some earlier prefiguration of his future title: cfr. Tuplin 2013, 75 and 84–85.

⁵¹ Cfr. Gera 1993, 290.

⁵² Cfr. Carlier 1978, 156.

⁵³ Cfr. Plut. Dio 10.3: τοὺς γὰρ ἀδαμαντίνους δεσμοὺς οὐχ, ὥσπερ ὁ πατὴρ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῦ, φόβον καὶ βίαν [...], εὖνοϊαν δὲ καὶ προθυμίαν καὶ χάριν ἐγγενομένην ὑπ' ἀρετῆς καὶ δικαιοσύνης, ἃ [...] ἰσχυρότερα πρὸς διαμονὴν ἡγεμονίας ὑπάρχειν. On *eunoia* towards leaders cfr. Diod. 14.2.1; for a similar metaphor on a beloved king see Dion Chrys. 1.30–32.

it suggests that Cyrus' reliance on his subjects' fear of him reflects his failure in obtaining sincere affection. A rather similar evaluation to Plutarch's is found in Xenophon as well, but primarily concerns *philotimia* rather than safety: Hiero acknowledges that fear-induced services are not (real) honours (Xen. Hier. 7.6 οὐδὲ αἱ ὑπουργίαι αἱ ὑπὸ τῶν φοβουμένων τιμαί εἰσι), for humans truly honour a ruler only when they love and appreciate him, not when they fear him (7.9 φιλοῦντές τε καὶ μὴ φοβούμενοι, and cfr. 1.38);⁵⁴ he also laments that a tyrant's slave-like subjects do not feel any real *eunoia* for him (6.3).

Several Aristotelian passages have been discussed as meaningful parallels so far. P. Carlier first proposed to employ the (rather unclear) model of *pambasileia* (Aristot. pol. 3, 1285b29–37; cfr. 1287a8–12) to reflect the nuances of Cyrus' monarchy.⁵⁵ However, different sections of the Aristotelian treatment of tyranny vs kingship might apply more aptly to some aspects of Cyrus' rule as described by Xenophon. The common, defining features of kingship as being subject to law vs tyranny as being unregulated seem to blend together in Cyrus' description as a far-reaching, all-seeing incarnation of law (Xen. Cyr. 8.1.22 τὸν δὲ ἀγαθὸν ἄρχοντα βλέποντα νόμον ἀνθρώποις ἐνόμισεν, ὅτι καὶ τάττειν ἰκανὸς ἐστὶ καὶ ὄραν τὸν ἀτακτοῦντα καὶ κολάζειν), yet another reflection of his fearful, near-unlimited reach (cfr. § 2).⁵⁶ the metaphor reverses the theme of *δεσπότης νόμος* (Hdt. 7.104.4), the supreme normative source for which one ought to feel a kind of fear close to respect-induced self-restraint.⁵⁷ But this is only possible in the case of an external, disembodied, stable *nomos* which operates regardless of any individual, whereas Cyrus' monarchic authority is institutional and yet personal and transient, its manifestations normative and yet volatile. This is entirely consistent with the generally tyrannical connotations attributed to the Persian kingship by Greek thought⁵⁸ and detailed by Aristotle (e.g. pol. 5, 1313a37–1313b10).⁵⁹ In the "Politics", Aristotle admits that both

54 On Hier. 7.9 with respect to the *Cyropaedia* see Illarraga 2021, 173–175; see also Demosth. or. 20.15–16 for a similar view of fear under a tyranny, in relation with the 'inferior' honours granted by a tyrant compared to a democracy.

55 Carlier 1978.

56 See observations in Tuplin 2013, 81–82; on the Persian king and the law see Panaino 2014, 194 in relation to the *pambasileia*; on the Achaemenid vs Greek conceptualisation of the 'long arm' of the Great king see Piras 2022, esp. 213–215. Consider also the famous verses from Eur. supp. 431–432 on tyrannical rule: τὸν νόμον κεκτημένος αὐτὸς παρ' αὐτῷ etc.

57 On Greek fear of law see Esu 2021, esp. 155–159.

58 For Xenophon see oic. 4.9, providing a parallel between the Persian king's rule and Ischomachus' household: some observations in Pomeroy 1984, 101–102. The tradition is clearly related to the *topos* of the Asiatic disposition towards slavery.

59 Cfr. De Luna – Zizza – Curnis 2016, 507–508; see Gastaldi 2009 and Zizza 2021; consider also Aristot. pol. 3, 1285a18–29, on some barbarian *basileiai* being close to tyrannies: on this passage see

rulers and subjects should possess and cultivate *aretē*, but also that they should do so to different degrees, because attaining the same level would question the right of one part to rule over the other (1, 1259b32–1260a4): since subjects should seek excellence not so much for the sake of it, but rather in order to respond properly to a good leader (1259b39–41), the implication seems to be that a ruler should foster his subjects' excellence mainly as a tool to refine the application of his own power. More specifically, tyrants pursue the common interest only for the sake of their personal benefit (5, 1311a2–4);⁶⁰ oppress both the masses and the notables (1311a12–18), pauperize their subjects to control them (18–21), spy on their subjects and instil fear in them (1313b7–16), put friends against friends (16–17), and mistrust friends (30–32), all prominent elements of Xenophon's *Cyrus*; among the rest, tyrannies seek to humble, divide, and make their subjects powerless (1314a15–25). An alternative way to preserve tyranny relies on disguising it as kingship through partially virtuous actions (1314a31–1315b10), which would put a stop to hatred for and fear of the tyrant (1315b7 μηδὲ μισούμενον καὶ φοβούμενον διατελεῖν): this model of the actor-tyrant may be original to Aristotle, but seems to present some points in common with Xenophon's *Cyrus*.⁶¹

All these elements further highlight the ambiguity of Xenophon's *Cyrus* as a leader, and then as monarch, throughout the whole *Cyropaedia*. Of course, Xenophon's picture is not necessarily pejorative in moral terms.⁶² We should consider that, right at the beginning of the work, Xenophon does not regard tyrants as necessarily despicable: some, he notes, came to be admired as wise and fortunate (Cyr. 1.1.1 καὶ ὅσοι τυραννεῖν ἐπιχειρήσαντες [...] οἱ δὲ κἄν ὀποσονοῦν χρόνον ἄρχοντες διαγέωνται, θαυμάζονται ὡς σοφοί τε καὶ εὐτυχεῖς ἄνδρες γεγενημένοι). Equally, I have avoided attempting any classification of the emotions related to *Cyrus*' rule as 'negative' or 'positive', as the heuristic utility of such dichotomy is questionable.⁶³ However, we can certainly state that the *Cyropaedia* illustrates how

Panaino 2014, 193–194, also on Aristotle's exemplar use of *Cyrus* as a liberator of his own people (i.e., the Persians only) in *Aristot. pol.* 5, 1310b37–38.

⁶⁰ See Mantzouranis 2023. Cfr. *Aristot. pol.* 5, 1311a2–5: the tyrant considers common interests only if they bring him advantage; see Gastaldi 2009, 139–141 and n. 1. See also *Aristot. eth. Nic.* 8, 1160b2–3: “the tyrant considers his own advantage, the king that of his subjects” (ὁ μὲν γὰρ τύραννος τὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρον σκοπεῖ, ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸ τῶν ἀρχομένων).

⁶¹ On the Aristotelian model see Christodoulou 2009, and, esp. on ‘monarchic tyranny’, Gastaldi 2009, 160–161: however, neither study considers the *Cyropaedia* as part of the few Xenophontic comparisons discussed; see also De Luna – Zizza – Curnis 2016, 515–517.

⁶² Some relevant observations in Danzig 2012, but leading to different conclusions.

⁶³ Cfr. Giacomoni – Dellantonio – Valentini 2021, 1–3, also underlying how moral and social evaluation of emotions depends on cultures and historical period. On the other hand, Kapust 2008 and Tappolet 2016, e.g. 26–27 and 34–35, adopt the dichotomy.

Cyrus substantially based his power on malicious, rivalrous, and antisocial practices, producing insecurity, division, and coercion.⁶⁴ the *Cyropaedia* may well be a study on the ideal leader, provided we first clarify that Xenophon is not interested in a ruler who is sincerely or exclusively good-natured, virtuous, prosocial, and concerned for his subjects' welfare. Rather, Xenophon explores how a ruler whose ultimate aim is power *per se* can achieve and retain stability through subtle but firm control of his subjects, treating every aspect of their welfare and of their misery simply as a tool to restrict their agency and to reach his own ends.

At the end of this analysis, Xenophon's Cyrus may look like a sort of tyrant in disguise, whose political aspiration and rationale can be defined as ruling through fear. Yet, as questionable as he may appear under this light, he is not a ruler without merits: the subtle balance between reward and punishment, his constantly performative leadership, and the soft control he achieves by fostering certain emotions rather than resorting to manifest violence, may have been his greatest successes. Cyrus seems to have made a refined social use of emotions, employing them to affect behaviour and social structures, establishing a politically functional sort of 'emotional regime'.⁶⁵ We should, perhaps, end by going back to the beginning: Xenophon's passages about obedience and fear (§ 2) directly follow his opening, general discussion of the way animals obey their herders vis-à-vis human intractability (Cyr. 1.1.1–3). This consideration should be considered in light of the passages from the *Oeconomicus* about animals taught to obey through either punishment or good treatment (oic. 13.6–7) and, especially, about the application of this kind of θηριώδης παιδεία on slaves (13.9). As its opening and its ambiguous title may suggest, the *Cyropaedia* is not only a narrative of how Cyrus learned to rule, but also of how he domesticated his herd-like subjects to be ruled, no matter the costs.

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⁶⁴ I refer to the definition of antisocial practices/strategies, provided by Gilbert – Basran 2019, 3, as being "primarily self-focused, manipulative, and threat focused, seeking to create inhibitory and submissive compliant states in those to whom they are directed".

⁶⁵ Defined by Reddy 2001, ch. 4, esp. 122–130, as a prerequisite of any stable political regime, employing emotions and related practices to define normative frameworks for their citizens. Cyrus' power does not map perfectly on Reddy's model, but some key elements of the latter can be identified.

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