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The Straussian Reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

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ABSTRACT

In *On Tyranny*, Leo Strauss wrote about Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*: "This work has never been studied by modern historians with even a small fraction of the care and concentration it merits and which is needed if it is to disclose its meaning." Thanks in part to his students, this is no longer true, and this article reviews the Straussian reception of the *Cyropaedia* between 1969 and 2015. But it begins with Strauss, who could scarcely have recognized the difficulties involved in disclosing "its meaning" unless that meaning had disclosed itself to him, and it is the elusive nature of that disclosure that has given his students the interpretive freedom to reach conclusions that are sometimes diametrically if not explicitly opposed to Strauss's own. An investigation of those differences sheds light on both Strauss and his followers, and also on the distinction between Strauss's interpretive methods and his political philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Leo Strauss; *On Tyranny*; Straussian; Xenophon; *Cyropaedia*.

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Whether as an exercise in political philosophy or intellectual history, the Straussian reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* – *i.e.*, the attempt of Leo Strauss and his followers to interpret this enigmatic and important work – may be considered not altogether unworthy of scholarly attention.[1] Although swirling in controversy, Strauss himself is presently considered one of the pre-eminent political theorists of the twentieth century; this invites investigation. But Strauss is notoriously difficult to understand, and some of his followers have protected his legacy in ways that make his views anything but transparent.[2] For the sake of gaining clarity, this paper uses the Straussian reception of a single work to illuminate some issues of more general concern.

The reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* is particularly revealing because Strauss himself, despite his well-known interest in this classical author,[3] never published either a book or an article on this important work. In the absence of the master's *ipse dixit*, his followers were forced to think for themselves, and the ways in which they did so are of particular interest because even though Strauss *seems* never to have explicated the way he understood Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in print, he not only managed to do so, but did so in a manner that is for the most part incompatible with some of the problems with which his followers would subsequently struggle. Nor should this surprise us: Strauss himself distinguished "a hard center" of a school of thought from its "flabby periphery".[4] It is also illuminating to observe how some of his more independent followers, by failing to understand Strauss, came closer than Strauss had done to understanding Xenophon.

There would appear to be only two major schools of thought as to how Xenophon relates to the character Cyrus in his *Cyropaedia*, and the "sunny" reading – that Cyrus is Xenophon's hero throughout and that his deeds are uniformly defensible as opposed to reprehensible – plays no part in the Straussian

reception of this work.[5] Although proponents of this "sunny" reading tend to regard all Straussian readings as "dark",[6] in fact the Straussian reception splits into two streams. This paper will document that split and its purpose is to show what non-Straussians can learn from it. Only one stream is what should truly be called "dark", and that's the one that makes a moral distinction between Xenophon and Cyrus. This reading could also be called "ironic", because while Xenophon is apparently praising Cyrus and celebrating his accomplishments, he is really criticizing and even deploring him and them "between the lines". The use of this phrase captures what all non-Straussians understand about Strauss, and it would therefore be logical to assume that Strauss's reading of *The Education of Cyrus* was "ironic" and "dark" in this sense. I will show that this is an error. Although some of Strauss's followers would read *Cyropaedia* in this way, a consideration of Strauss's own published remarks on *The Education of Cyrus* will show that his reading was "sunny" in the decisive sense: even if Cyrus's deeds were what *others* might consider morally reprehensible, they are *nevertheless* defensible, and more importantly, Strauss's Xenophon is defending them throughout. In short, while a traditionally "sunny" reading defends Cyrus as Xenophon's ideal despite any objectionable practices, a more Machiavellian approach will celebrate him because of them.

By examining this split between Strauss and some of his followers, I hope to separate a vital and useful hermeneutic method from the morally reprehensible purposes that Strauss himself advanced by using it. There are, I believe, good reasons why Strauss is a controversial figure, and even for deploring his influence. But there are equally good reasons for a more nuanced approach to his legacy, and more specifically for an approach that separates what outsiders regard as characteristically "Straussian" methods like reading between the lines and finding ongoing irony in ancient texts from Strauss's own conception of political philosophy.[7] In order for there to be an irreconcilable gap between philosophy and the city, Strauss famously construed philosophy itself as inherently subversive; because it was and always will be so,

philosophers must practice "an art of writing" that shields their subversion from view. But even if this nexus of ideas was bedrock for Strauss, the hermeneutic methods he used to illustrate it admit other uses, and some of them are the opposite of immoral and subversive. To take Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, for example: if reading this text proves that Xenophon is rejecting Cyrus on *moral* grounds, and that the author deplores his character's subversive speeches and actions, then we are not reading this text in accordance with Strauss's published views and hints. But the fact that some of his self-professed followers read the text in this way proves my basic point: one can read like a Straussian without being one,[8] for what make Strauss justifiably controversial are not his methodological means but rather his political ends.

Strauss reveals his understanding of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in *On Tyranny*, and more specifically in the synergy between his discussion of *Hiero* in the text of that work and his references to *Cyropaedia*, primarily in the notes.[9] To be sure, Strauss mentions *The Education of Cyrus* in other works.[10] For example, it is only in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* that he records the important fact that Machiavelli, who "if I am not mistaken mentions Xenophon in the *Principe* and in the *Discorsi* more frequently than he does Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero taken together",[11] "refers only to the *Hiero* and the *Education of Cyrus*, not to the *Oeconomicus* or to any other of Xenophon's Socratic writings".[12] Although this later notice certainly helps us to better understand *On Tyranny*, Strauss's interpretation can be ascertained from that text alone, for it gradually becomes manifest that no interpretation of *Hiero* is possible except in juxtaposition with *The Education of Cyrus*. As revealed in *On Tyranny*, Strauss's reading of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* turns on three distinctions: between tyrants and kings, between a theoretical work and a practical one, and between *Hiero* and *The Education of Cyrus*.

From the start, Strauss *almost* insists that one of these two works deals only with a perfect king, and not, like Xenophon's *Hiero*, with a tyrant: "The *Education of Cyrus* may be said to be devoted to the perfect king in contradistinction to the tyrant,

whereas the *Prince* is characterized by the deliberate disregard of the difference between king and tyrant".[13] As should already have become clear, the route to understanding Strauss's interpretation of *Cyropaedia* will run through Machiavelli. It should therefore also be evident that Strauss's "may be said" does not entirely rule out the possibility that Xenophon's *The Education of Cyrus*, if only because it illuminates his *Hiero*, is not entirely "devoted to the perfect king in contradistinction to the tyrant". This is not to say that Strauss's reading of *Cyropaedia* is Machiavellian to the extent that it too, like the *Prince*, "is characterized by the deliberate disregard of the difference between king and tyrant"; it is sufficient to keep in mind that what Strauss calls "tyranny at its best" does not disclose itself as tyranny.[14] But let's not get ahead of ourselves: for now, consider the passage that introduces *The Education of Cyrus*, and is then immediately followed by the sentence quoted at the start of this paragraph:

> Instead one should concentrate on the only mirror of princes to which he emphatically refers and which is, as one would expect, the classic and the fountainhead of this whole genre: Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*. This work has never been studied by modern historians with even a small fraction of the care and concentration it merits and which is needed if it is to disclose its meaning.[15]

Strauss is pointing out that both Machiavelli's *Prince* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* belong to the same genre, thus indicating that the prince of one may not be quite so different from the prince of the other as the sequel might suggest to those who regard as truth merely what Strauss tells us "one might say". Be that as it may, a review of the Straussian reception between 1969 and 2015 will demonstrate, simply on a historical basis, that thanks to Strauss himself, *we* can no longer say that *The Education of Cyrus* "has never been studied […] with even a small fraction of the care and concentration it merits". But no one should imagine that Strauss's point here is that it will be thanks to those "modern historians" – even if they should include or rather be joined by a

large number of his own followers – that *Cyropaedia* will "disclose its meaning". In order for Strauss to know the kind of effort "which is needed" for such a project, he must have already expended it, and made it disclose that meaning to him.

Naturally the effort needed to disclose Strauss's own meaning will require reading his notes with care, and he will supplement his "one might say" in the text with the following in a note: "For the moment, it suffices to remark that according to Xenophon, Cyrus is not a tyrant but a king".[16] Although the caveat is only present in the note, the text still maintains the distinction:

> The reader is left wondering whether experience offered a single instance of a tyrant who was happy because he was virtuous [note 21, attached here, has just been quoted]. The corresponding question forced upon the reader of the *Oeconomicus* is answered, if not by the *Oeconomicus* itself,[17] by the *Cyropaedia* and the *Agesilaus*. But the question of the actual happiness of the virtuous tyrant is left open by the *Corpus Xenophonteum* as a whole. And whereas the *Cyropaedia* and the *Agesilaus* set the happiness of the virtuous kings Cyrus and Agesilaus beyond any imaginable doubt by showing or at least intimating how they died, the *Hiero*, owing to its form, cannot throw any light on the end of the tyrant Hiero.[18]

At this point, then, Strauss is "for the moment" upholding the conventional view that Cyrus is not only a king but also a virtuous king, thus upholding a "sunny" reading of *Cyropaedia*. Clouding this appearance will be Strauss's subsequent rejection of Agesilaus as a virtuous king,[19] but we won't need to wait that long. Quite apart from what happened to Persia after his death,[20] Cyrus dies happy, and does not die as a tyrant, however theatrical he may have become.[21] Meanwhile, Strauss permits himself a deliberate self-contradiction by pointing out a few pages later: "Xenophon, however, describes the tyrant Astyages as securely enjoying those pleasures [sc. 'of gay companionship'] to the full".[22]

Mediating between tyranny and "tyranny at its best" is what Strauss calls "beneficent tyranny",[23] and the third time he

uses this term, he begins to reveal "in what light a tyrant should appear to his subjects", *i.e.*, as not only a king but a virtuous king:

> Simonides' praise of beneficent tyranny thus serves the purpose not merely of comforting Hiero (who is certainly much less in need of comfort than his utterances might induce the unwary reader to believe), but above all of teaching him in what light the tyrant should appear to his subjects: far from being a naive expression of a naive belief in virtuous tyrants, it is rather a prudently presented lesson in political prudence [note 66]. Simonides goes so far as to avoid in this context the very term 'tyrant'.[24]

Likewise, Xenophon never mentions the term "tyrant" in the context of Cyrus, for the *Cyropaedia* – on Strauss's reading, that is – is "a prudently presented lesson in political prudence." Note 66 suggests this:

> As for bewitching tricks to be used by absolute rulers, see *Cyropaedia* VIII 1.40-42; [8.]2.26; [8.]3.1. These less reserved remarks are those of a historian or a spectator rather than of an adviser. Compare Aristotle, *Politics* 1314a40: the tyrant ought to *play* the king.[25]

What allows Strauss himself to be "less reserved" is that he prudently presents Xenophon as merely *describing* Cyrus's bewitching tricks,[26] while Simonides is *advising* Hiero "to play the king". He promptly undermines the basis of *this* distinction by applying the word "ought" to Aristotle, which rather suggests advising a tyrant than describing one. Meanwhile, his use of the umbrella term "absolute rulers" tends to weaken the more fundamental distinction between Cyrus as virtuous king and something else it would be imprudent and thus improper to call him.

What makes it somewhat less imprudent is Strauss's improvement on "beneficent tyranny", *i.e.*, "tyranny at its best". Naturally the word "contradistinction" will once again play a part in blurring distinctions:

> Tyranny is defined in contradistinction to kingship: kingship is such rule as is exercised over willing subjects and is in accordance with the laws of the cities; tyranny is such rule as is exercised over unwilling subjects and accords, not with laws, but with the will of the ruler [the attached note cites *Cyrop*. 1.3.18]. This definition covers the common form of tyranny, but not tyranny at its best. Tyranny at its best, tyranny as corrected according to Simonides' suggestions, is no longer rule over unwilling subjects. It is most certainly rule over willing subjects. But it remains rule 'not according to laws,' *i.e.*, it is absolute government.[27]

One might be forgiven for thinking that Simonides is the relevant agent here, and *Hiero* the relevant text. But as Strauss will point out on the next page, "Simonides does not go so far in his praise of beneficent tyranny as to call it 'paternal' rule",[28] as a friend of Cyrus's – an observer, not an advisor – will describe Cyrus's rule. And five pages after that, Strauss creates a new term (italicized in what follows) to explain why "tyranny at its best" can dispense with laws without becoming tyrannical in contradistinction to kingship:

> If justice is then essentially translegal,[29] rule without laws may very well be just: *beneficent absolute rule* is just. Absolute rule of a man who knows how to rule, who is a born ruler,[30] is actually superior to the rule of laws, in so far as the good ruler is 'a seeing law,' [note 46] and laws do not 'see,' or legal justice is blind. Whereas a good ruler is necessarily beneficent, laws are not necessarily beneficent.[31]

Naturally, the passage cited in note 46 cites *Cyropaedia*,[32] and will be quoted in Wayne Ambler's translation, itself an important turning point in the Straussian reception of The *Education of Cyrus*:

> He [sc. Cyrus] thought he perceived human beings becoming better even through written laws, but he believed that the good ruler was a seeing law for human beings, because he is

> sufficient to put into order, to see who is out of order, and to punish.[33]

With note 46 attached to page 74 – between the eleventh and twelfth of the fifteen references to "tyranny at its best" – the denouement comes on 75, following the fifteenth:

> In the *Hiero* as well as in the *Memorabilia* [sc. 'the two thematic treatments of tyranny at its best which occur in his works'], the tyrant is presented as a ruler who needs guidance by another man in order to become a good ruler: even the best tyrant is, as such, an imperfect, an inefficient ruler [note 50].[34]

Cyrus is so advanced in the relevant art that *Cyropaedia* does not treat tyranny *even at its best* because unlike Hiero, Cyrus needs no advice or guidance. The attached note spells this out:

> The tyrant needs essentially a teacher, whereas the king (Agesilaus and Cyrus, *e.g.*) does not. We need not insist on the reverse side of this fact, viz., that the tyrant rather than the king has any use for the wise man or the philosopher (consider the relation between Cyrus and the Armenian counterpart of Socrates in the *Cyropaedia*). If the social fabric is in order, if the regime is legitimate according to the generally accepted standards of legitimacy, the need for, and perhaps even the legitimacy of, philosophy is less evident than in the opposite case. Compare note 46 above and V, note 60 below.[35]

To unpack this note would require a paper of its own; several of its more salient points – "the relation between Cyrus and the Armenian counterpart of Socrates",[36] the importance of the earlier note 40,[37] and of the later note 60[38] – will therefore be no more than noted. As for the conceivable illegitimacy of philosophy in the case of a "legitimate" regime, the less said about that the better. But consider what Strauss writes next in the text:

> Being a tyrant, being called a tyrant and not a king, means having been unable to transform tyranny into kingship, or to

> transform a title which is generally considered defective into a title which is generally considered valid [note 51].[39]

Lest we miss the forest for the trees, the important point is that Strauss is offering an interpretation of *The Education of Cyrus* while appearing to be interpreting Xenophon's *Hiero*, and he does so first and primarily in the notes of *On Tyranny*.[40] Strauss will never call Cyrus a tyrant, excellent or otherwise, for if he were to do so, his Cyrus would have failed "to transform a title which is generally considered defective into a title which is generally considered valid". In fact, Xenophon's Cyrus himself has no need to effect such a transformation in the strict sense: he is or rather becomes Persia's legitimate King.[41] But this does not mean that Persia itself isn't transformed into "beneficent tyranny" or "tyranny at its best" in everything but name. The two major poles in the business of interpreting *Cyropaedia* are a "dark" as opposed to a "sunny" reading of it: the latter insists that Xenophon regards Cyrus throughout as the perfect and virtuous king, the other shows how Xenophon's praise of Cyrus is ironic, for Cyrus has transformed Persia into tyranny and leaves it in shambles. Strauss's interpretation subverts this polarity: he is fully aware of the phenomena that make Persia recognizable as a tyranny but insists that Xenophon, who is describing a King rather than advising a tyrant – as his Simonides does in *Hiero* – is in no way rejecting or even criticizing Cyrus's accomplishments. This is why Strauss insists that Cyrus is a legitimate King, and thus insists: "But Cyrus is not a tyrant strictly speaking".[42]

All of this – including the distinction between "a historian or a spectator" and "adviser"[43] – is closely connected to Strauss's insistence that *The Education of Cyrus* is a theoretical work, not a practical one.[44] If it were the latter, it might be read as a wise adviser's guide to effecting the aforementioned transformation. But for reasons already indicated, including but not limited to the important and obvious circumstance that it is not Xenophon's *Hiero*, this it cannot be. But the necessity of this insistence must also be located in *Cyropaedia* itself, and above all in response to the

principal basis for every "dark" reading of it: Persia falls apart after Cyrus's death, and thus the "sunny" portrait is called into question in the book's last chapter. Although he says nothing about this chapter in *On Tyranny* proper,[45] his later "Restatement" uses it to distinguish the book's "explicit intention"[46] from its implicit one:

> As for the implicit intention of the *Cyropaedia*, it is partly revealed by the remark, toward the end of the work, that 'after Cyrus died, his sons immediately quarreled, cities and nations immediately revolted, and all things turned to the worse.' If Xenophon was not a fool, he did not intend to present Cyrus' regime as a model.[47]

And it is on this same page that Strauss is forced to grant the legitimate basis of every "dark" reading of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*:

> The Persia in which Cyrus was raised was an aristocracy superior to Sparta. The political activity of Cyrus—his extraordinary success—consisted in transforming a stable and healthy aristocracy into an unstable 'Oriental despotism' whose rottenness showed itself at the latest immediately after his death.[48]

It is this "practical" demonstration of the ultimate failure of Cyrus's "political activity" that causes Strauss to insist: "beneficent tyranny is theoretically superior and practically inferior to the rule of laws and legitimate government".[49] And Strauss also provides himself with another line of defense: even as "seeing law", Cyrus is in any case a legitimate king, and no matter how beneficent, his is therefore "strictly speaking" no tyranny.

But Strauss's description of Cyrus's "political activity" in his later "Restatement" indicates that if he, as Persia's legitimate king, had no need "to transform tyranny into kingship", he did manage to effect what might be styled the reciprocal transformation:

> The first step in this transformation [sc. 'transforming a stable and healthy aristocracy into an unstable 'Oriental despotism"] was a speech which Cyrus addressed to the Persian nobles and in which he convinced them that they ought to deviate from the habit of their ancestors by practicing virtue no longer for its own sake, but for the sake of its rewards.[50]

The speech in question – hereafter "the Subversive Speech" – plays a major role in the Straussian reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, and for the sake of economical clarity, it will play *the* central role in my discussion of that reception. Quite apart from that later reception, there is the important fact that Strauss refers to this passage in *On Tyranny* itself, albeit only in two notes,[51] and it is with some critical comments on what Strauss says about *Cyropaedia* 1.5.9 in one of them that I will conclude the discussion of Strauss as opposed to the Straussians. But first, of course, there is the text to which the note is attached:

> To point, therefore, to facts which are perhaps less ambiguous, Xenophon no more than his Simonides contends that virtue is the most blessed possession; he indicates that virtue is dependent on external goods and, far from being an end in itself, ought to be in the service of the acquisition of pleasure, wealth, and honors [note 48].[52]

Quite apart from note 48, this is a remarkable text: it makes a claim about Xenophon himself that Strauss is well-advised to mark as merely "perhaps less ambiguous". Anyone with even a passing knowledge of Xenophon's writings would demand proof of this claim on the spot; the note's purpose is to provide that proof. But consider first what Strauss wrote at the end of his life about one of the passages he will cite as proof, and which he had already described in "Restatement" as quoted above:

> In the first speech the adult Cyrus addressed to the Persian nobility, he persuaded them that virtue ought not to be practiced as it was hitherto practiced in Persia, for its own sake, but for the sake of great wealth, great happiness, and

> great honors. That is to say, he persuaded them to cease being perfect gentlemen.[53]

"Great wealth, great happiness, and great honors" is a more faithful translation of the last triad in *Cyropaedia* 1.5.9 than "pleasure, wealth, and honors" in *On Tyranny*, and it will be this triad that informs the Straussian reception of this crucial passage, as we will see.[54] But the important point for now – in addition, that is, to the mention of pleasure – is that Strauss is clearly aware that it was *Cyrus* who persuaded his audience along these lines, and thus that it would run counter to perhaps the principal benefit wrought by Strauss's own approach to reading classic authors – *i.e.*, the necessity of distinguishing authors from their characters[55]– to jump from how Cyrus regards virtue to how Xenophon regards it, the amazing and illegitimate jump Strauss will make in note 48:

> Compare *Hiero* 11.15 with *Anabasis* VII 7.41. See *Anabasis* II 1.12 (*cf.* Simonides fr. 5 Bergk) and *Cyropaedia* I 5.8-10; also *Agesilaus* 10.3.[56]

As was the case with note 50, it would require a separate article to unpack this note but for now it is only the citation of *Cyropaedia* that is relevant. Regardless of what Xenophon may say of Agesilaus,[57] or even about himself in *Anabasis*[58] – to say nothing of what Simonides says[59] – the only legitimate way to cite 1.5.8-10 in this context would be to prefix it with a "*cf.*", *i.e.*, to *compare* what Xenophon's Cyrus thinks about virtue to what other texts prove or suggest that Xenophon himself may have thought about it. In short: by no manner of means is it acceptable interpretive practice to derive what Xenophon thought about virtue from what Cyrus says about it in 1.5.9. But what makes this (deliberate) error something far more serious than an error – for surely Strauss knows why 1.5.8-10 is not "strictly speaking" apposite, and for precisely the reason I have indicated – is his documented awareness of the role Cyrus's Subversive Speech played in "transforming a stable and healthy aristocracy into an unstable 'Oriental despotism'". By *suggesting* that Xenophon shares Cyrus's

views on virtue, and by *stating* the role those views played in transforming Persia – albeit not in *On Tyranny* itself – Strauss has nevertheless revealed his interpretation of *The Education of Cyrus*, an interpretation that combines the salient characteristics of both a "dark" and a "sunny" reading of this enigmatic text.

It would better honor Strauss's own conceptions of the intersection between his methods and his views to force his readers to spell out exactly what that interpretation is for themselves; his own version of "subversion" demands "moderation" and thus a certain degree of opacity. Suffice it to say that Strauss justifies the transformation that Cyrus wrought in theory but not practice. The reason Cyrus cannot be said to have transformed Persia's aristocracy into "tyranny at its best" is that Persia was already a monarchy and that its prince became king legitimately rather than "by force and fraud". As for the revealing gulf between *Hiero* and *The Education of Cyrus*, it is in the latter where Xenophon – as merely "a historian or a spectator" – describes a king who required no advisers, the way Hiero required Simonides, to do what he did. This gulf might well seem less great than it appears, but only if we understand the distinction will we realize how Strauss's interpretation of *Cyropaedia* unites the two works on the theoretical plane. In any case, Strauss's views are not expressed so clearly in the notes to *On Tyranny* that his followers knew exactly how to follow him,[60] and this is what makes the subsequent Straussian reception worthy of study.

As already indicated, Strauss repeatedly refers to the old Persia that Cyrus will transform as an "aristocracy"[61] and indeed it is somewhat surprising – given the interpretive necessity of presenting Xenophon's Cyrus as a legitimate king[62] – that he does not call it by its rightful name: Cyrus can't be a legitimate king unless Persia is a monarchy; at the utmost stretch, it is a "constitutional" monarchy.[63] It therefore marks an important turning point in the Straussian reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* that Christopher Bruell, as already indicated in the second sentence of his 1969 doctoral dissertation,[64] then made thematic in two of its chapters,[65] and only implicitly defended in one of them,[66] would

begin calling the old or pre-Cyrus Persia "Republican Persia". Leaving aside whether Strauss approved of this change – even if he did, he would never have allowed himself to use this language in 1948[67] – Bruell's nomenclature would stick, and a "sunny" reading of Cyrus's "The Transformation of Republican Persia"[68] might easily be mistaken as a radicalization of Strauss. But Bruell's is by no means a straightforwardly "sunny" reading, and when he was tasked some years later with contributing an article on Xenophon to the canonical *History of Political Philosophy*, he concludes on a "dark" note that shows just how radically he misunderstood Strauss: "Xenophon has led us to suspect that Cyrus himself lacked an education of this highest [*sc.* Socratic] kind".[69] And Cyrus's limitations are difficult to separate from praise, however qualified, of "the stable if austere politics of the republican regime".[70]

In addition to the shift from "aristocracy" to "republic", Bruell set in motion two other significant changes to the reception of *Cyropaedia*. He began to shift the blame for "Cyrus' corruption of the Persians"[71] away from Cyrus himself – exactly what a "dark" reading would not do – to the inadequacies of "Republican Persia".[72] Bruell suggests that it was the faulty sub-Socratic pedagogy of the old regime that was also to blame for Cyrus's success. But because Bruell's reading is by no means "sunny" despite this new approach to subverting a "dark" reading, he introduces an ingenious solution to "a curse on both your houses" reading of *Cyropaedia*, *i.e.*, one that attends to both the (pedagogical) inadequacies of "the republic" and the (despotic) excesses – leading directly to the regime's post-Cyrus degeneration – of "the empire".

> The *Education of Cyrus*, by uncovering the failure of Cyrus, thus appears to point to Socrates as, by making manifest the failure of Cyrus' empire, it appeared to point to republican Persia, or more generally, the aristocratic republic.[73]

At this early stage, Bruell remains consistent with Strauss to this extent: he is looking to philosophy to see whether "Socrates was able to discover a pursuit of excellence which is intrinsically pleasant",[74] and thus to find a Socratic justification for the instrumental virtue that Strauss had attributed to Xenophon.[75] As a result, he remains closer to Strauss's spirit than Christopher Nadon, who would find in the turn to philosophy the only way to escape the insoluble political problem presented by the twinned inadequacies of both "republic" and "empire".[76]

But more than twenty-five years separate Bruell's thesis from Nadon's article, and there were important developments both in the non-Straussian reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* – and which would prove to be of decisive importance to Nadon – and also, albeit to a lesser degree, in the Straussian reception. The preeminent figure in the latter is Waller R. Newell, who completed a dissertation at Yale on "Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and the Classical Critique of Liberalism" in 1981,[77] and he will receive independent consideration in a moment. But lest the 1970s vanish entirely, it is worth mentioning that W. E. Higgins, who published a study of Xenophon in 1977 that includes a chapter on *Cyropaedia*, expressed his gratitude to Strauss, albeit as an outsider.[78] The next decade was more productive quite apart from Newell: citing the dissertations of Bruell and Newell, along with Higgins, Leslie G. Rubin pointed forward to Nadon by drawing inspiration from non-Straussian sources as well as by relying on her own good sense.[79] But not least of all because of his return to Machiavelli – who had presumably led Strauss to Xenophon in the first place – Newell is the key figure in the 1980s.

"That Cyrus can shatter some twenty-five years of painstaking habituation in a speech of about fifteen minutes' length may be taken as Xenophon's comment on just how naturally choiceworthy republican virtue is for its own sake".[80] The seeds planted by Bruell have sprouted in Newell: on the basis of the Subversive Speech, he is now prepared to find in *Cyropaedia* "The Critique of the Virtuous Republic".[81] But if "the virtuous republic" or even "classical republicanism as a whole"[82] carries

within it the seeds of its own subversion – the post-Bruell mainstay of the "sunny" reading – Newell also emphasizes equally the basis of the "dark" reading:

> But Cyrus's perfection of the use of fear to elicit 'willing' obedience is the very reason for the empire's precipitate decline after his death, indicating that, in Xenophon's own mind and as he represents it in the cumulative progression of the pseudohistory, this speculative experiment proved to be a failure.[83]

It is "Xenophon's unusual and equivocal position"[84] that accounts for Machiavelli's "reservations about Xenophon",[85] and the proof that Newell, for all his expertise in Machiavelli, has failed to understand Strauss's account of what might be styled Xenophon's prudent "reserve" is that he is willing to situate Cyrus in proximity to tyranny,[86] exactly what Strauss's emphasis on legitimacy and the lack of advisers had been designed to preclude. Finally with Newell's concluding comment that "within the realm of politics strictly speaking, however, it appears that the longing for the noble can have no issue",[87] the ground is prepared for Nadon's claim that *The Education of Cyrus* is "a critique of politics and political life tout court".[88]

But as already indicated, interest in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was flourishing outside of the Straussian orbit, and by the time Nadon published *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the* Cyropaedia (2001), it had become necessary for him to respond to three monographs on the subject that had been published between 1989 and 1993.[89] But "necessary" is far too strong: after all, Bruell had not cited any secondary sources in his thesis, and Nadon – who subsequently translated an intellectual biography of Strauss written in French[90] – shows an unusual interest not only in Strauss, but also in non-Straussian scholars. Moreover, Nadon's 1996 article had not cited Newell, so it seems likely that his "curse on both your houses" reading of both "republic" and "empire", along with his conclusion that Xenophon had offered "a critique of politics", resulted from the otherwise irreconcilable readings of

Bodil Due, James Tatum, and Deborah Gera. In any case, Nadon's argument is breathtaking, and explains "Xenophon's reluctance to criticize Cyrus" on the basis of two equally improbable claims: that Xenophon foresaw the extinction of the polis along with the resulting rise of "empire on the Asiatic model", and therefore muted his criticism of empire so that his book would survive in the environment whose rise he foresaw.[91]

Nevertheless, Nadon's *Xenophon's Prince*, beginning with a magisterial discussion of Machiavelli's various remarks about Cyrus, must stand out as a landmark.[92] Of particular interest is the chapter on "Transformation," and especially its section on Cyaxares, the king Cyrus defeats in Herodotus and merely outsmarts in Xenophon.[93] Having made the apt observation that "Xenophon is a writer capable of putting sound arguments into the mouths of otherwise disreputable characters",[94] he makes a more important point about Xenophon's ability to do the opposite, *i.e.*, to place unsound arguments in the mouths of characters of highest repute:

> Like most of Cyrus's deeds, this, too, does not lack a colorable pretext or honorable justification: loyalty to long-standing and faithful soldiers can hardly be faulted in general. Yet the quiet and indirect way in which he leads and manipulates even the Persians causes us to wonder whether his fellow countrymen, no less than the allies, are mere tools or instruments to his own ends (*cf.* 5.3.46-51).[95]

An apt observation of this kind causes us to wonder if Xenophon was really as reluctant to criticize Cyrus as Nadon claims that he was.

In any case, thanks to both Nadon and Wayne Ambler, 2001 was the *annus mirabilis* in the Straussian reception of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. It is not simply because most Straussians would henceforth use Ambler's translation but because his introduction, evidently based on an unusually comprehensive knowledge of the text, concludes with a nice statement of why it is an error to think that Xenophon was offering a critique of the

political life.[96] More importantly, Ambler points to the proper solution of the "sunny"/"dark" polarity: we begin with the first; closer examination, *i.e.*, "Cyrus' Successes Reconsidered",[97] points to the second:

> Whereas we were at first pleased to see a man of such apparent virtue as Cyrus' come to acquire political power and begin to set the world aright, we have come to doubt that Cyrus' virtues and benefactions are genuine. And although it is not a pretty sight, the dissolution of Cyrus' empire should neither shock nor cause dismay.[98]

I regard Ambler's "at first" as the post-Straussian highpoint of the Straussian reception of *The Education of Cyrus*, which is itself an education, provided by the story of Cyrus,[99] in how to read Xenophon: naively "sunny" at first, attuned to his "dark" bewitchments on rereading.[100]

Now armed with Ambler's translation, two Straussians would offer more valuable readings of *Cyropaedia* than had their predecessors in the new century's first decade, although it should also be mentioned that Paul Rasmussen followed in Newell's footsteps as well.[101] In a lengthy chapter in *The Case for Greatness* called "Imperial Grandeur and Imperial Hollowness: Xenophon's Cyrus the Great",[102] Robert Faulkner strikes the properly dyadic note from the start, and opens the floodgates wide to a reading that would appear to any non-Straussian to be Straussian without being in any way compatible with Strauss's own approach in *On Tyranny*: "Xenophon's Cyrus is at once a conspicuous model and a model questioned inconspicuously".[103] In other words, a careful reading or better yet an Ambler-inspired and indeed "Strauss-styled" rereading will find a critique of Cyrus beneath the showy and praise-filled surface.[104] Emphasizing the shock-value of the final chapter,[105] and addressing the important question, raised earlier by Due, of the work's audience or audiences,[106] Faulkner confirms Rubin's long-forgotten insights about the critical sunlight that Panthea and Abradatas bring to the darkness of Cyrus.[107]

Even better is one of the two articles that Joseph Reisert published on *The Education of Cyrus* in 2009. But even the weaker of the two begins with a usefully false claim: "Xenophon presents Socrates and Cyrus the Great as exemplars of the alternative candidates for the best way of life known to ancient philosophy: philosophy and political rule".[108] As indicated by the conclusion of Ambler's Introduction, and flagged as anachronistic from Solon to the Allegory of the Cave, an Aristotle-based polarity between the active and contemplative lives is being systematically read back into Xenophon, who chose neither because he combined both. The same anachronism also infects Strauss's insistence that *Cyropaedia* is a theoretical as opposed to a practical work, and anyone who fails to realize that we are continuously being taught a series of best practices about hunting, horsemanship, eating, drinking, sweating,[109] urinating, and self-control, is already, as it were, trying to reread what has not yet been read. But Reisert's "Ambition and Corruption in Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*" is virtually unimpeachable from beginning to end, combining scholarship that surpasses Nadon's with the necessary distinction: "Xenophon's description of Cyrus' rise to power and rule is so attractive that his critique of Cyrus can be difficult to perceive".[110] And his remarks on the Subversive Speech, especially its deployment in support of an exculpatory portrait of an already rotten "Persian republic," are a model of good sense.[111] To top it all off, there is this:

> Perhaps the most chilling things about Xenophon's portrait of the perfect tyrant who passes publicly for a legitimate king are Cyrus' own apparent sincerity in his professions of benevolence and the eagerness with which we, as readers, tend to believe him.[112]

At this point, it is tempting to return to Strauss in order to spell out just how radically inconsistent with his own interpretation of *The Education of Cyrus* Reisert's statement – a model of good sense and close reading on my account – really is, but to "moralize this spectacle" can be left to the discerning reader, for the contrast

speaks for itself. The only point about Strauss that is worth making in this context is that it is by no manner of means "Cyrus' own apparent sincerity in his professions of benevolence and the eagerness" that persuaded *him* that Cyrus was "a legitimate king" and not "the perfect tyrant". In short, Strauss's is anything but a naïve "first reading".

But the spirit of Strauss will live on despite the achievements of some of his followers, and I will end the forward progress of this account with Robert C. Bartlett's "How to Rule the World" (2015). Offered to Faulkner on the occasion of his eightieth birthday,[113] and thus presumably representing a token of respect, it in fact negates precisely what makes Faulkner's "dark" reading luminous, twice using his own words against him.[114] Giving Danzig his due,[115] Bartlett adds a generous helping of the theological-political problem to his "sunny" defense of what allows others to find what is "dark" in Cyrus.[116] And without citing Reisert, he does his best to disarm the same passage the latter had used to defend "the republic" from the instant (Newell's "fifteen minutes") effect of the Subversive Speech in order to perform a *reductio ad absurdum* –via a rhetorical question – on the kind of virtue that aims at something higher than securing the ability to πλέον ἔχειν,[117] *i.e.*, to take advantage. The passage is worth quoting at length, for it illustrates that Strauss's spirit still lives:

> In response to Chrysantas' concern that Cyrus is giving no exhortation to his men as the leader of the Assyrians has just given to his, Cyrus assures him that no single speech or argument (*logos*), uttered on a single day, is sufficient to improve men's souls, not even if it should be 'nobly spoken' (3.3.55, end). No such *logos*, that is, could fill the men with the requisite respect or sense of awe (*aidōs*) or keep them from ignoble acts, just as it could not urge them to take upon themselves every toil and every risk 'for the sake of praise' (3.3.51). No *logos*, moreover, could prompt the soldiers to 'grasp firmly, by means of the judgments {they form}, that it is more choiceworthy to die while fighting than to save themselves by fleeing' (3.3.51). This last formulation is especially striking, since Cyrus has never

> uttered and will never utter such a thought, in such blunt terms, to his men – that is, to prefer 'death' (*apothnēiskein*) to flight and to do so only for the good that is 'praise' (compare the immediately preceding remarks of the Assyrian leader: 3.3.45 [*apothnēiskousi*]). Is this the whole of the 'profit' or 'advantage' [*cf.* πλεονεξία and πλέον ἔχειν] including the pleasure, that actions in accord with the peak of nobility procure for one?[118]

Here then is the central question of virtue: is it a means to an end or is it to be treasured and cultivated for its own sake? I have shown that at a critical moment of his interpretation of *Cyropaedia* in *On Tyranny*, Strauss claimed that Xenophon shared the instrumental conception of virtue that his Cyrus had used to corrupt what later Straussians – albeit not Strauss himself – would call "the republican regime". In opposition to Faulker's celebration of Panthea's nobility,[119] Bartlett has kept that spirit alive, and he therefore ridicules the notion that it is "praise" that would persuade someone "to prefer 'death' to flight". The negation involved here is extreme, and therefore revealing, for it is not praise, let alone pleasure, that motivates the philosopher's excellence: it is not so that Xenophon and Plato will praise and remember him that Socrates died in prison.[120] Both of the great Socratics did their level best to create the kind of λόγοι that Cyrus uses a rhetorical question to prove do not exist.[121] In any case, the dialogue between Bartlett and Faulkner illustrates the two poles of the Straussian reception: Faulkner is critical of Cyrus whereas Bartlett follows the clues buried in *On Tyranny* and aligns Xenophon's intentions with the achievements and methods of his Cyrus.

There is a historical coda to the story, one that creates an interesting counterpoint with Ambler's salutary view that Xenophon expected us to give a "sunny" reading to his text *at first*. Shortly after coming to the United States in 1938, Strauss included a section "On Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*" in an unpublished essay called "On the Study of Classical Political Philosophy",[122] and claimed, immediately after his initial encounter with the text, that Xenophon's "apparent praise of Cyrus' apparently marvelous

achievement actually is a most stringent censure of a thoroughly bad management of public affairs: the whole *Education of Cyrus* is thoroughly ironical".[123] There is no trace here of "Xenophon's most perfect ruler",[124] just as there is no trace in *On Tyranny* of "the hatefulness of barbarism".[125] The contrast is especially evident in the following:

> Xenophon's descriptions of the (original) Persian constitution and the Median constitution do not leave the slightest doubt that he judged the former to be absolutely superior to the latter: the Median spirit is characterized by a barbarian coarseness and servility; the Persian spirit apparently unites all which is best in both Sparta and Athens.[126]

Whereas Ambler made a "dark" reading the product of second thoughts, in Strauss's case it would be an initially "dark" reading that would later become something like "sunny".

Since this fragment was only published in 2018, none of the Straussians reviewed in this article had access to it. But it is astonishing to discover that Strauss's first impression of the text anticipates the critical readings of Rubin, Faulkner, and Reisert rather than supporting the more Cyrus-friendly approach that informs Bruell, Newell, and Bartlett. Leaving aside the important question of why Strauss's views changed in the decade between 1938 and 1948 – given the period in question, the obvious explanation is the Second World War – the important point for now is simply that his first reading of the text was unquestionably "dark". There is comfort in that: perhaps a Strauss-inspired method of reading will eventually triumph over Strauss's own political ends. Until then, these recent discoveries now add the master's own voice – however inaudible it was to his followers, and however inconsistent it is with his own remarks in *On Tyranny* – to a sensibly ironic reading of *Cyropaedia*,[127] a reading that finds no legitimacy in Cyrus, no support for his subversion of "the republican regime", and therefore gives no ground whatsoever to "tyranny at its best".

RESUMO

E m *Sobre tirania*, Leo Strauss escreveu sobre *Ciropédia* de Xenofonte: "Essa obra nunca foi estudada por historiadores modernos com sequer uma fração mínima de cuidado e de concentração que ela merece e que é preciso para revelar o seu significado." Em parte, graças aos seus estudantes, isso não é mais verdade, e esse artigo examina a recepção straussiana de *Ciropédia* entre 1969 e 2015. Contudo, tudo começa com Strauss, que dificilmente deve ter reconhecido as dificuldades envolvidas em revelar "o seu significado"; se não foi o caso de esse significado ter se relevado por si mesmo para ele. É justamente a natureza elusiva dessa revelação que deu aos seus estudantes a liberdade interpretativa para alcançar conclusões que, às vezes, são diametralmente, se não explicitamente, opostas àquelas de Strauss. Uma investigação dessas diferenças ilumina tanto Strauss quanto os seus sucessores como também a distinção entre os métodos interpretativos de Strauss e sua filosofia política.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Leo Strauss; *Sobre tirania*; straussiano; Xenofonte; *Ciropédia*.

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[1] *Cf.* Tamiolaki (forthcoming).
[2] ZUCKERT, 2008.
[3] Beginning with Strauss, *The Spirit of Sparta* (1938), then followed by Strauss, *On Tyranny* (originally published 1948), Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse* (originally published in 1972), and Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (originally published in 1970).
[4] See STRAUSS, 1989, p. 24.
[5] For the principal proponent of this reading, see Gray (2011, p. 56, 247) for "dark" and "darker." For "sunny" – Gray prefers "innocent" (2011, p. 5) – see Johnson (2013, p. 82): "For Gray's second goal is to persuade us that we ought not to be tempted by interpretations in which Xenophon's presentation of leadership is less transparent, more nuanced, and less sunny."
[6] *Cf.* TAMIOLAKI, 2017, p. 190.
[7] Strauss (1959, p. 93-94): "From this point of view the adjective 'political' in the expression 'political philosophy' designates not so much a subject matter as a manner of treatment; from this point of view, I say, 'political philosophy' means primarily not the philosophic treatment of politics, but the political, or popular, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy – the attempt to lead qualified citizens, or rather their qualified sons, from the political life to the philosophic life." For Strauss's "On the Study of Classical Political Philosophy" (1938), see Colen; Minkov (2018, p. 126-151); the portion of this only recently published fragment that deals with the *Cyropaedia* will be considered at the end.
[8] TAMIOLAKI, 2017, p. 194: "scholars who discern a greater subtlety in Xenophon are not necessarily Straussian".
[9] See especially Strauss, *On Tyranny*, chapter 4. First published as Strauss, *On Tyranny; An Interpretation of Xenophon's* Hiero (1948), I will cite the new edition. It also includes Strauss, "Restatement".
[10] See especially Strauss (1998, p. 96, n. 7, p. 145, n. 6, p. 155, n. 2, p. 203, p. 205, n. 1); also mentioned in Strauss (1939) and Strauss (1998b).
[11] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 106, n. 3; *cf.* Strauss (1958, p. 291): "For him [*sc.* Machiavelli] the representative par excellence of classical political philosophy is Xenophon, whose writings he mentions more frequently than those of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero taken together or those of any other writer with the exception of Livy. Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* is for him the classic presentation of the imagined prince".
[12] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 291.
[13] Idem, ibidem, p. 24.
[14] The fifteen uses of "tyranny at its best," beginning at Strauss (1948, p. 68), and reaching a resolution on page 75 (along with the supporting notes) make this the most important passage in the book for understanding Strauss's reading of *Cyropaedia* (hereafter, *Cyr.*).
[15] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 24.
[16] Idem, ibidem, p. 108, n. 21.
[17] Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* ends with a vivid description of the difference between kingly and tyrannical rule (21.11-12); all citations of Xenophon will be based on Marchant, *Xenophontis Opera Omnia*. Other abbreviations are *Ag.* (*Agesileus*), *An.* (*Anabasis*), *Mem.* (*Memorabilia*), and *Oec.* (*Oeconomicus*).
[18] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 34.
[19] See Idem, 1968, p. 665: "But it is necessary to pursue this theme much further, *i.e.*, Xenophon's concealed and serious judgment on Agesilaus. I would not hesitate to say that Agesilaus was not a man after Xenophon's heart. How could a man with Xenophon's lack of pomposity and even gravity have unqualifiedly liked a man as absurd, as pompous, as theatrical as the Agesilaus of

Xenophon's description (as distinguished from his explicit judgments)?"

[20] *Cyr.*, 8.8.2.

[21] *Cf. Cyr.* 8.3.13-14, which implements 8.1.40-41.

[22] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 46. The attached note cites *Cyr.* 1.3.10 and 1.3.18. He formally retracts the objectionable claim on 75: "It is true, in the *Education of Cyrus* he occasionally refers to a tyrant who was apparently happy; he does not say, however, that he [sc. Astyages] was beneficent or virtuous".

[23] Strauss (1948) mainly the pages 45, 59, 62, 69, 74-76 (note the overlap with "tyranny at its best"), 99 (three times), and p. 120, n. 46 (which cites *Cyrop.* 8.1.22 and is attached to page 74).

[24] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 62.

[25] Idem, ibidem, p. 117, n. 66.

[26] One wonders for whom? *Cf.* STRAUSS, 1948, p. 29-30: "At first glance, the work as a whole [*sc. Hiero*] clearly conveys the message that the life of a beneficent tyrant is highly desirable. But it is not clear what that message means since we do not know to what type of men it is addressed. If we assume that the work is addressed to tyrants, its intention is to exhort them to exercise their rule in a spirit of shrewd benevolence. Yet only a very small part of its readers can be supposed to be actual tyrants. The work as a whole may therefore have to be taken as a recommendation addressed to properly equipped young men who are pondering what way of life they should choose—a recommendation to strive for tyrannical power, not indeed to gratify their desires, but to gain the love and admiration of all men by deeds of benevolence on the greatest possible scale [note 2]". The attached note cites, among others, *Cyr.* 8.2.12, a description of "the eyes and ears of the king", on which see Bartlett (2015, p. 151): "There he [*sc.* Cyrus] attempts to make up for his lack of knowledge by means of the so-called "Ears and Eyes of the King" – that is, a clandestine network of informants who report whatever it may be useful for him to know. The result of this, which Stalin could approve of, is that the people "are everywhere afraid to say what is not advantageous to the King, just as if he himself were listening, and to do whatever is not advantageous, just as if he himself were present" (8.2.10–12).

[27] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 68.

[28] Idem, ibidem, p. 69.

[29] For the importance of *Cyr.* 1.3.16-17 in establishing this principle, see Danzig (2009); although not identifiable as a Straussian – his advisor at Chicago was Arthur W. H. Adkins – Danzig is closer in spirit to Strauss's Xenophon than are most of the Straussians considered in this article. See Strauss (1948, p. 120, n. 38), and Strauss (1998, p. 96, n. 7), for *Cyr.* 1.3.17.

[30] In addition to *Cyr.* 1.2.1, see Strauss (1948b, p. 182): "It must here suffice to note that Cyrus' second step is the democratization of the army, and that the end of the process is a regime that might seem barely distinguishable from the least intolerable form of tyranny. But one must not overlook the essential difference between Cyrus' rule and tyranny, a distinction that is never obliterated. Cyrus is and remains a legitimate ruler".

[31] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 74.

[32] Idem, ibidem, p. 120, n. 46.

[33] Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.1.22. See Ambler's translation and annotations of *The Education of Cyrus* (2001, p. 237).

[34] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 75.

[35] Idem, ibidem, p. 121, n. 50.

[36] *Cf. Cyr.* 3.1.40 (Ambler): "And Cyrus said, 'But by the gods, Armenian, the wrongs you have committed [*i.e.*, killing 'the Armenian Socrates'] seem to me to be human. Tigranes, have sympathy for your father'". *Cf.* RAY, 1992, p. 239:

"Cyrus does not show any interest in an Armenian philosopher".

[37] See Strauss (1948, p. 120, n. 40), begins by citing *Cyr.* 8.1.22 (quoted above); for elucidation of the connection between this passage and the sentence, apparently a non sequitur, that follows it ("Simonides recommends honors for those who discover something useful for the city"), *cf. Cyr.* 8.1.29 and 8.2.27.

[38] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 125-126, n. 60; this note refers to "Xenophon's most perfect ruler, the older Cyrus", and compares him to Socrates with respect to beauty. But it ends by referring the reader back to page 121, n. 50, the very note that leads us to it: "Does Hiero's education explain why he is not a perfect ruler? [Yes, it does; unlike 'Xenophon's most perfect ruler,' he requires an education, *i.e.*, as a tyrant, he requires instruction]. Only the full understanding of the education of Cyrus [*i.e.*, that he required none] would enable one to answer this question. Compare IV, note 50 above." Strauss's interpretation of *The Education of Cyrus* hinges on "the full understanding of the education of Cyrus" not only in a tautological sense, thanks to page 120, n. 50: "The tyrant needs essentially a teacher, whereas the king does not." It is therefore characteristic of Strauss's Xenophon that he did not name his *Hiero* "The Education of Hiero" even though that is what it depicts.

[39] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 75.

[40] Naturally Strauss (1948, p. 121, n. 51) also cites *Cyr.* (1.3.18 and 1.2.1).

[41] See Glenn (1992), a useful piece that challenges Strauss's claims about Cyrus being a legitimate king beginning on 146-47: "But while this 'may be said' [he has just quoted Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 24], it contradicts part of what Xenophon thinks kinship is". Glenn's observation that Xenophon does not call Cyrus a king until the end of the book (on *Cyr.* 8.2.13; see p. 150 and p. 160, n. 3) is easily overlooked and deserves consideration, as do the first and second criticisms of Strauss (GLENN, 1992, p. 162, n. 24).

[42] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 104.

[43] See Idem, ibidem, p. 117, n. 66.

[44] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 107, n. 2.

[45] It is mentioned only once; see STRAUSS, 1948, p. 119, n. 15.

[46] STRAUSS, 1948b, p. 181: "Its explicit intention is to make intelligible Cyrus's astonishing success in solving the problem of ruling human beings".

[47] Idem, ibidem, p. 181.

[48] Idem, ibidem, p. 181.

[49] Idem, 1948, p. 99.

[50] Strauss (1948b, p. 181) cites *Cyr.* 1.5.5-14 in the parenthesis that follows, with this sentence (1948b, p. 181-82) intervening: "The destruction of aristocracy [note that Strauss never refers to the old Persia as a republic or republican] begins, as one might expect, with the corruption of its principle". The principle in question is that virtue is to be pursued for its own sake, not for the sake of other goods.

[51] The only other time *Cyr.* 1.5 is cited in Strauss (1948, p. 123, n. 28) (*Cyr.* 1.5.12).

[52] STRAUSS, 1948, p. 100.

[53] Idem, ibidem, p. 203.

[54] But the mention of "pleasure" is necessary for Strauss; *cf.* Strauss (1948, p. 93): "If Simonides [*sc.* in Hiero] can be said to recommend virtue at all, he recommends it, not as an end, but as a means. He recommends just and noble actions to the tyrant as means to pleasure. In order to do this, Simonides, or Xenophon, had to have at his disposal a hedonistic justification of virtue". For attention to this important passage, see Ray (1992, p. 242, n. 6). As indicated by this attention, Ray's article is *sui generis*, and discussion of it will be confined to the notes. But to return to the issue at hand, Strauss will make the most of this

"have at his disposal" when he makes the jump between Cyrus and Xenophon below.

[55] See Strauss (1964, p. 50): "If someone quotes a passage from the dialogues in order to prove that Plato held such and such a view, he acts about as reasonably as if he were to assert that according to Shakespeare life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".

[56] Strauss (1948, p. 130, n. 48).

[57] The "also" is vitiated by Xenophon, *Ag.* 10.3 (translated by Bartlett): "what belongs less to lamentation than a life of renown and a death in due season?" For the translations here and in the following note, see Xenophon, *The Shorter Writings* (2018).

[58] Xenophon (*An.* 7.7.41) describes himself telling Seuthes that for "a man and especially for a leader", there is no possession "more beautiful" or "more luminous" than "virtue, and justice, and nobility", a text impossible to square with a merely instrumental justification of virtue, whereas the last words of Simonides (*Hiero*, 11.15) clearly present happiness ("without being envied," as per David K. O'Connor) as "the finest and most blessed of all the possessions of human beings". As for Theopompus (Xen. *An.* 2.1.12), it is neither our weapons nor "the good things" of others that make our virtue good.

[59] Simonides, fragment 5 (Bergk) is, of course, the poem that Socrates interprets in Plato's *Protagoras*; it would require an interpretation of that text – and of the exegesis of Simonides just past its center – to determine whether Socrates is endorsing or ridiculing a strictly instrumental account of virtue.

[60] The most astute comment on *On Tyranny* remains Voegelin (1949, p. 242): "Both works [*sc. Hiero* and *Cyr.*] fundamentally face the same historical problem [naturally Strauss does not regard the problem as simply historical; see his response in "Restatement", 180] of the new leadership; and it is again perhaps only the lack of an adequate vocabulary that makes the two solutions of the perfect king and the improved tyrant more opposed to each other than they really are". It is, however, less a matter of vocabulary than the fact that by contrasting the two works – by making them appear to be "more opposed to each other than they really are" – Strauss is interpreting Xenophon to be offering "a prudently presented lesson in political prudence".

[61] After defining it at Strauss (1948, p. 71) ("aristocracy, the aim of which was said to be virtue"), Strauss applies it to Persia at page 119, n. 25 (the only time in *On Tyranny*, it should be remarked), and at pages 181-182 (five times). See also Strauss (1958, p. 291): "Xenophon's *Hiero* is the classic defense of tyranny by a wise man, and the *Education of Cyrus* describes how an aristocracy can be transformed by the lowering of the moral standards into an absolute monarchy ruling a large empire".

[62] For Strauss's ("the lady doth protest too much") insistence on this point in "Restatement", see 182: "But one must not overlook the essential difference between Cyrus' rule and tyranny, a distinction that is never obliterated (except, that is, by Machiavelli), *cf.* Strauss (1948, p. 24). Cyrus is and remains a legitimate ruler. He is born as the legitimate heir to the reigning king, a scion of an old royal house. He becomes the king of other nations through inheritance or marriage and through just conquest, for he enlarges the boundaries of Persia in the Roman manner: by defending the allies of Persia [note that the later reception will repeatedly puncture this pose, characteristic of the 'sunny' reading]. […] [deleting some remarks on English history]. Xenophon did not even attempt to obliterate the distinction between the best tyrant and the king because he appreciated too well the charms, nay, the blessings of legitimacy".

[63] For the use of this term, never explicitly connected to the old Persia, see STRAUSS, 1948, p. 178-180. *Cf.* GERA, 1993, p. 290: "While we cannot conclude

from Cambyses' statement [*sc.* in *Cyr.* 8.5.24] that Cyrus is to be considered a tyrant, it is clear that Xenophon is distinguishing here between two distinct regimes—the traditional Persian 'constitutional monarchy' described in Book I and Cyrus' more despotic rule over his empire, as outlined in Books 7 and 8 of the *Cyropaedia*".

[64] Bruell (1969): "That the *Education of Cyrus* by Xenophon is today a proper subject of study for a student of political science, insofar as thee subject matter of the book is concerned, no one who has read it will, I believe, dispute. For it deals with republican rule and absolute monarchy and how the one regime is transformed into the other". Strauss left Chicago for California in 1968.

[65] See Bruell (1969), chapter 2 ("Republican Persia") and chapter 4 ("The Transformation of Republican Persia").

[66] In the chapter on "Republican Persia," Bruell momentarily steps back in "Dissertation" (1969, p. 18), when he refers to "the oligarchical Persian regime" (but *cf.* "the Persian republic" on page 16) before settling the issue as follows: "It is perhaps not too much to say that that corruption [*sc.* Cyrus's] appeared for a time to be a solution to the problem of republican Persia, a problem manifested both in the defectiveness of its education to justice and in its oligarchical regime. It is above all Cyrus' apparent solution to the problem of republican Persia and what is represented by republican Persia that constitutes his 'solution' to the political problem".

[67] But he would later do so in the classroom; see Leo Strauss, "Xenophon" (1963), session 16: "Cyrus was just crown prince in a very limited monarchy, in fact a republic" at <http://leostraussstranscripts.uchicago.edu/navigate/8/16/> (accessed August 10, 2020).

[68] The first section of this chapter ("Cyrus' Speech to the Persians") deals with the Subversive Speech; note that he quotes the triad – as Strauss had before him – at the end of *Cyrop.* 1.8.9 in Bruell (1969, p. 27): "they may win for themselves and the city much wealth, much happiness, and great honors (*Cyr.* 1.5.8-9)".

[69] Bruell (1987, p. 102).

[70] NADON, 1996, p. 373: "Certainly, Xenophon's description of the short-lived and hollow splendor of the empire and the particularly dire consequences of its collapse is meant to provide a defense of the stable if austere politics of the republican regime (BRUELL, 1987, p. 101-2)".

[71] BRUELL, 1969, p. 95.

[72] There is only a hint of this move in Strauss (1948b, p. 182): "The quick success of Cyrus' first action [*sc.* the Subversive Speech] forces the reader to wonder whether the Persian aristocracy was a genuine aristocracy; or more precisely, whether the gentleman in the political or social sense is a true gentleman".

[73] BRUELL, 1969, p. 131; *cf.* p. 132: "The *Education of Cyrus* points above all to the necessity of a study of those writings [*sc.* Xenophon's Socratic writings]".

[74] BRUELL, 1969, p. 133: "We would hope to learn from a study of the Socratic writings whether Socrates was able to discover a pursuit of excellence which is intrinsically pleasant, or whose natural attractiveness confirms it to be truly human and thus to effect such a union of the noble understood as the virtuous and the noble understood as the splendid or beautiful as Cyrus seemed to aim at".

[75] As "proved" by STRAUSS, 1948, p. 130, n. 48. Note that Strauss's claim that "Xenophon is more explicit than Aristippus in praising the pursuit of sensual pleasure" (1948, p. 100) is proved by Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.3.8-13 (1948, p. 130, n. 47), the pre-Socratic youngster Socrates calls a fool because he *fails* to realize how strong is the allure of sensual pleasure (1.3.13).

[76] NADON, 1996, p. 373: "The *Education of Cyrus* does not present so much a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of republican and imperial politics as an elaboration of the contradictions and limitations of the attainment of justice and the common good in both regimes: in other words, a critique of politics and political life tout court".

[77] Unfortunately, I have been unable to obtain this document, and my discussion of will depend on Newell (1983) and Newell (1988).

[78] HIGGINS, 1977, p. xiii: "the respect and enthusiasm of such a keen mind for Xenophon's thought have been for a younger reader sharing this attitude a constant encouragement". Higgins takes the view that *Cyrop.* 8.8 indicates the transitory nature of all human achievements (1977, p. 59) and thus does not reflect badly on Cyrus; his is therefore a traditionally "sunny" reading.

[79] Rubin (1989) is much aided in her "dark" reading by both Glenn (1992) and Farber (1979, esp. p. 499-501) on ἀρετή (virtue), the strictly instrumental aspects of which he illuminates without celebrating. Rubin's thesis is stated on page 411: "In the end Xenophon does not endorse Cyrus' approach to rule", and she breaks with the spirit of Strauss earlier on the same page by pointing out the obvious without palliating it: "The end of Cyrus' virtue is his own self-interest". She is quite perfect on the implications of 8.8 (1989, p. 480) and brilliant on page 412: "Not only does Cyrus display a spurious virtue, he renders his political subjects incapable of practicing or even of recognizing true virtue". For the ablest defense of self-interested virtue as anything but spurious, see Danzig (2012). For inconclusive references to "true virtue" – unless, that is, it is "the view that virtue is for its own sake" (2012, p. 230) – see Ray (1992, p. 228, 242, n. 9).

[80] NEWELL, 1983, p. 897. So fond is Newell of this insight that he repeats it in Newell (2013, p. 202), the culmination of his most recent comments on the Subversive Speech (2013, p. 198-202).

[81] The title of a section in Newell (1983, p. 893-98); for another example of even less linguistic restraint than Bruell, see "Xenophon's critique of the republican regime" on Newell (1983, p. 896).

[82] NEWELL, 1983, p. 893: "In keeping with classical republicanism as a whole, Xenophon's idealized Persia [note that he is here referring to pre-Cyrus Persia] does not merely coerce obedience, but assumes that this gentlemanly way of life is naturally the most fulfilling [there is not a shred of textual evidence in *Cyr.* to support this claim]. The most important level of Xenophon's critique centers on the regime's failure to satisfy the nature of Cyrus, its own most distinguished product". Instead of seeing Lincoln's "man of towering ambition" as a threat to the republic, Newell finds a critique of republicanism in "the regime's failure to satisfy" him.

[83] NEWELL, 1983, p. 904.

[84] Idem, 1988, p. 126: "Xenophon's unusual and equivocal position—less republican than Plato and Aristotle, less 'princely' than Machiavelli—explains the double-edged relationship of his political thought to Machiavelli's".

[85] Idem, ibidem, p. 121: "Xenophon's reservations about the methods and character of a ruler like Cyrus help to explain Machiavelli's reservations about Xenophon as an analyst of princely success".

[86] *Cf.* Idem, ibidem, p. 126: "This mixture of admiration for Cyrus [*i.e.*, the 'sunny' reading] and reservations about him [*i.e.*, the 'dark' reading'] makes Xenophon unwilling to depict Cyrus either as an out-and-out tyrant or as morally flawless" with Newell (1983, p. 900): "But neither is Cyrus a king conventionally speaking. He floats somewhere between being a king and a tyrant according to Xenophon's conventional definitions of those terms, for although he rules over willing subjects in accordance with knowledge, he could never

have founded his rational empire without abrogating the laws of Persia and terrorizing the vanquished".

[87] NEWELL, 1983, p. 905; last word.

[88] NADON, 1996, p. 373.

[89] Due (1989, p. 234-235) is a reliably "sunny" interpretation nevertheless illuminated by her remarks on "Xenophon's Audience". Tatum (1989) is a "mixed-message" reading at the opposite end from Strauss's. Gera (1993, p. 290) is of altogether higher caliber, and her emphasis on πλεονεξία in Cambyses' final address to Cyrus (*Cyr.* 8.5.24) opens the door to the proper reading of the Subversive Speech, *i.e.*, one that emphasizes πλέον ἔχωσιν at 1.5.9, not the final triad (*cf.* NEWELL, 1983, p. 901; NADON, 1996, p. 365).

[90] See Tanguay (2007). Note that the most careful account (and defense) of Strauss's reading of *Cyropaedia* in *On Tyranny* by a Straussian is in a book about Strauss, not about Xenophon; see Minowitz (2009, p. 75-76, esp. p. 94-95, n. 95).

[91] See Nadon (2001, p. 164): "He [*sc.* Xenophon] therefor mutes his criticisms of empire so as to increase the likelihood that his works will be preserved in the coming political order". On the previous page, he has claimed: "Xenophon both foresees the passing away of the polis and its distinctive way of life and explores the consequences of the almost inevitable emergence of empire on the Asiatic model".

[92] NADON, 2001, p. 13-25.

[93] Idem, ibidem, p. 87-100.

[94] Idem, ibidem, p. 89.

[95] Idem, ibidem, p. 107.

[96] Ambler (2001, p. 18) last word: "And in his *Anabasis* we see Xenophon himself become a ruler and do so to the advantage of all concerned. Cyrus reduced more men to obedience than did anyone else, and Machiavelli testifies to the usefulness of his education about how to rule. But Xenophon puts this impressive accomplishment in the context of other achievements still more worthy of admiration and study". *Cf.* RAY, 1992, p. 241), especially "the complete man".

[97] AMBLER, 2001, p. 11.

[98] Idem, ibidem, p. 18.

[99] *Cf.* Bartlett (2015, p. 154) last word: "The 'education' of the title may include not only the education that Cyrus received but also the education that he makes possible for us, thanks to the artfulness of Xenophon". *Cf.* RAY, 1992, p. 226: "The title is, however, not without ambiguity, for Cyrus both receives and education and imparts (inflicts) an education".

[100] The honor is shared; see Nadon (2001, p. 142): "There is absolutely nothing in the *Cyropaedia* to suggest that its author wished or thought its meaning to be apparent on a single, cursory reading, while there is much in both its contents and peculiar narrative structure [Nadon is discussing 8.8] to indicate the contrary".

[101] Rasmussen (2009). The chapter on "Cyrus' Socratic Education" is cited and praised in Newell (2013, p. 226, n. 16), and it not surprisingly echoes Bruell and Newell near the end on page 95: "Nevertheless, Xenophon's ability, as a philosopher, to benefit the city is ultimately limited by his awareness of the gap between the inevitably contradictory beliefs and requirements of the city and the philosophic understanding of the universal and transpolitical nature of human excellence". I hope I have sufficiently indicated the role this move plays in a "sunny" response to the "dark".

[102] FAULKNER, 2007, p. 127-176.

[103] Idem, ibidem, p. 128.

[104] FAULKNER, 2007, p. 130: "There is no doubt, however, that Xenophon begins with the benefits and the grandeur, and this corresponds to a reader's broad impression that Xenophon's Cyrus is of virtue without defect".
[105] Idem, ibidem, p. 132.
[106] Idem, ibidem, p. 133.
[107] Idem, ibidem, p. 151-158; the opening paragraph of this section will be quoted below. He does not cite Rubin; hence "long forgotten".
[108] REISERT, 2009, p. 23. *Cf.* RAY, 1992, p. 242, n. 12.
[109] See GERA, 1993, p. 291, n. 47.
[110] REISERT, 2009b, p. 308: "The ill effects on the character of those subject to Cyrus' rule are nothing other than the natural consequences of the institutions Cyrus established".
[111] See Idem, ibidem, p. 302-310, esp. p. 303. ("Cyrus and the Corruption of the Peers"): "It is clear, as Newell and Nadon observe, that Cyrus' first speech to his army is an attempt to corrupt his troops by teaching that virtue is not to be practiced for its own sake but only in order to secure external goods. They suggest that Cyrus' success with the Peers suggests that the Persian education did not produce genuine lovers of virtue but only succeeded in inspiring the Peers with the love of honor. Certainly, they are right to doubt whether a single speech could make good men bad, since Xenophon's Cyrus so pointedly, and persuasively, reflects on the impossibility of making bad men good by a single address ([*Cyr.*] 3.3.50–54) [a brilliant point that makes my 'good sense' inadequate]. At a minimum, Cyrus' success demonstrates that at least some of the [hand-picked by Cyrus] Persian Peers had not come to love virtue for its own sake; it need not demonstrate the failure of the educational regime as a whole".
[112] REISERT, 2009b, p. 310.
[113] BARTLETT, 2015, p. 143.
[114] Idem, ibidem, p. 146: "Just as those who fail to see Cyrus's calculating nature misunderstand him, so too do those who see in all his actions nothing but such calculation: 'Cyrus's outlook cannot be reduced simply to the instrumental' (FAULKNER, 2007, p. 152)". Also Bartlett (2015, p. 150, n. 9): "'One will not grasp the problem of a Cyrus if one does not grasp his grandeur, that is, what makes him stand out from boyhood as admirable and attractive as well as able and intimidating' (FAULKNER, 2007, p. 134–35)".
[115] BARTLETT, 2015, p. 147 and p. 153.
[116] Idem, ibidem, p. 149: "Still, the fact that Cyrus sees in pious observance a certain political utility does not by itself establish the insincerity of his practice of it, as little as his conviction of the utility of virtue means that his is a strictly low or mercenary view of virtue." For the theological-political problem, see "The Piety of Cyrus" (BARTLETT, 2015, p. 148-49) – *cf.* Ray (1992, p. 239) – and "The Providential Rule of Cyrus" generally (BARTLETT, 2015, p. 149-150, esp. p. 149): "In such circumstances, one can even say, Cyrus takes on the role of a providential god; he attempts to do here and now what the gods evidently do not".
[117] See Ambler's (2001, p. 279-280) glossary on "Advantage", especially "the disposition to get more". *Cf.* Ray (1992, p. 242, n. 7).
[118] BARTLETT, 2015, p. 147; the {}'s are in the original, as always, the []'s are mine. For well-placed attention to the importance of honor to Cyrus, see Ray (1992, p. 230): "The hedonism of Cyrus is qualified by the nobility of his chief pleasure, honor." (It is to this claim that Ray attaches page 242, n. 6, which references *On Tyranny*, p. 93). See also his remarks on "the love of praise" on page 231.

[119] *Cf.* FAULKNER, 2007, p. 151: "But what of nobility? In particular, what of the grand and almost selfless deeds in which human virtue seems to shine most? The words of Panthea to the husband she so loves bring to mind the shining moment of the *Education*. That moment is not Cyrus's. Abradatas, honor-bound as he thinks to repay Cyrus for protecting his wife and gleaming with gold and bronze above even Cyrus, leads a spectacular chariot charge on the center of the enemy's line – and is killed. The book contains no other incident of such noble pathos. It shows the grandeur of nobility – and a certain foolishness. I consider this event at length, partly for the light and the shadows thus cast on Cyrus's rather cool pursuit of his advantage. Cyrus's advancement of himself may make him 'world famous,' admired by many, and even admired by friends who know him. But is he noble in the precise sense, in the sense of one whose actions involve sacrifice of things important to him for something admirable? Does Cyrus's focus on his own advantage make him disinclined to sacrifice – and thus not noble and even ignoble?".

[120] *Cf.* PANGLE, 2018, p. 211-214. I should also mention Pangle, "Socrates" which discusses *The Education of Cyrus* in "Cyrus as the Alternative to Socrates" (2018, p. 147-50), climaxing with the familiar ("unforgettable") lesson distinction on page 150.

[121] See *Cyr.* 3.3.51. *Cf.* RAY, 1992, p. 236, 242, n. 14.

[122] See Colen and Minkov (2018).

[123] STRAUSS, 2018, p. 143.

[124] Idem, 1948, p. 126, n. 60; note the back reference there to page 121, n. 50.

[125] Strauss to Jacob Klein (November 27, 1938) in Strauss (2002, p. 559) (translation mine): "The *Cyropaedia* is a highly un-barbaric depiction of the hatefulness of barbarism, *i.e.*, of its lack of παιδεία, and thereby a most highly 'educated' (εὐχαριστότατος) προτρεπτικός το παιδεία". The Greek might be translated: "a most elegant exhortation to παιδεία".

[126] Idem, 2018, p. 143.

[127] See Field (2012) and Tamiolaki (2018).