

VIVIENNE GRAY (ed.), *Xenophon on Government*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 231, ISBN: 978-0-521-58154-7.

A statement in the general introduction of this volume serves well as the rationale for the work as a whole: “Xenophon has liberal and inclusive views on government that are not well represented in the scholarly literature” (p. 2). Vivienne Gray is admirably suited to fill this gap in the scholarship on Xenophon’s approach to government. She has not only produced a number of significant articles and monographs on literary and historiographical aspects of Xenophon’s works,¹ but has more recently produced a couple of important articles on the political views of Xenophon.² Both these articles dispense with the overly simplistic--and still all too common--view of Xenophon as a traditional aristocrat with a preference for moderate oligarchy. In *Xenophon on Government*, Gray continues to flesh out a more nuanced approach to Xenophon’s politics, one which reflects the complex currents which flow through and around Xenophon’s ideas.

The title of this work partially belies the content. The book indeed analyzes two writings authored by Xenophon, the *Hiero* and the *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum* (*Lac.*), but it includes a third, the *Respublica Atheniensium* (*Ath.*), written by an anonymous author usually called the Old Oligarch. The inclusion

¹ See especially *The Character of Xenophon’s Hellenica*, London 1989 and *The Framing of Socrates: the Literary Interpretation of Xenophon’s Memorabilia*, Stuttgart 1998.

² “Le Socrate de Xénophon et la démocratie”, *Les Etudes philosophiques*, 2, 2004, 141-74 and “Xenophon and Isocrates”, in C. Rowe and M. Schofield (edd.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, Cambridge 2005, 142-54.

of *Ath.* in this volume is jarring. *Ath.* is a cranky, partisan tract thoroughly anti-democratic in its approach. Xenophon's writings, on the other hand, display the broad application of philosophical principles to all sorts of constitutional forms, including democracy, as Gray herself recognizes. Furthermore, with its bluntly partisan, anti-democratic stance, *Ath.* seems to have arisen in a very different, fifth-century context from that of the fourth-century writings of Xenophon; fourth-century writers were constrained to be less extreme, or at least more subdued, in their critique of the democracy, which constraint is quite lacking in *Ath.* So although *Ath.* provides a site for the discussion of democracy, just as *Hiero* does for monarchy (in its most literal sense) and *Lac.* for oligarchy, it strikes me as out of place in this volume. *Xenophon on Government* would have retained a better sense of wholeness if it had rather included, say, Xenophon's *Poroi*, which Gray, in her introduction to the *Ath.*, presents as a tract written to encourage its readers "to serve the democracy rather than merely to express the 'politics of dissent'" (p. 57).

Gray begins this volume with a General Introduction (pp. 1-29). Here, she first argues that Xenophon has a system of rules of governing which apply broadly to the management of a *polis* or a household, an army or a chorus. So universal are these rules that they can be used profitably not only by citizens, but also by women and slaves. Then, to form a comprehensive view of how these rules apply specifically to Xenophon's political thought, Gray uses the two poles of his thinking on government: "Personal Rule" (explored in *Hiero*) and the "Rule of Law" (found in *Lac.*). With regard to personal rule, Xenophon holds that the leader must work to benefit not himself but those who are led and that this will result in the willing obedience of those who are ruled. This then paves the way for the reconciliation of his views on personal rule and the rule of law: when a good ruler looks after the well-being of the ruled he sets up practices to which the ruled readily assent, which by definition are laws. The laws that a city has in place are to be obeyed because they encourage the good and deter the bad just as do the practices of the good ruler. Moreover, the inherent rigidity of recognized laws are assisted by the "eyes" of the good ruler who gives them the virtue of flexibility of application.

To my mind this section is a great success. Gray uses Xenophon's other works, especially the *Memorabilia*, the *Oeconomicus* and the *Cyropaedia*, to explain and illustrate her take on Xenophon's universal rules and she displays good insight into how these rules apply to our understanding of *Lac.* and *Hiero*. I believe the basis of Gray's success here lies in her overall approach to Xenophon: "Xenophon was a philosopher..." (p. 3). Using this rather obvious, but widely neglected, reality she takes Xenophon's political ideas as part of a considered system. What results is a synthesis which, taking into account many disparate elements, brings a great clarity to Xenophon's overall political program. For example, applied to *Hiero*, this holistic approach makes (non-ironic) sense of Simonides' instructions to Hiero that he not relinquish his tyrannic rule but rule for the benefit not of himself but of his city and its citizens, since if he does so he will be a legitimate ruler and his decrees will have the validity of laws that will be willingly received by the citizens. It also makes straightforward sense of the very troubling *Lac.* 14, which seems to undermine all the virtuous Lycurgan practices extolled in the rest of the work: the lapses of contemporary Spartans who live abroad (recorded in *Lac.* 14) no more negate the value of the Spartan system than the sins of Critias and Alcibiades after they left their association with Socrates negate the previous, positive influence of Socrates (*Mem.* 1.2.19-23). In this way, Gray produces a very convincing alternative to Straussian ironic interpretation of Xenophon, since she both takes Xenophon seriously as a philosopher and shows how some of the more confusing and complex items in his writings can make sense without resorting to an extreme ironic approach.

Gray's General Introduction also includes a section entitled "Xenophon's Life". Her premise here is that "Xenophon's life is intimately connected with the development of his political thought" (p. 14). I am skeptical, however, about the efficacy of this biographical approach. For one thing, the only details of Xenophon's life that we can be somewhat certain about are those found in his own writings,³ which makes them primarily

³ See E. Badian, "Xenophon the Athenian", in C. Tuplin (ed.), *Xenophon and His World*, Stuttgart 2004, 33-52.

literary, rather than biographical, realities. Moreover, a focus on Xenophon's life experiences have often led to a misperception of his political views, as with those who hold that his aristocratic background or the condemnation of Socrates and his own exile predisposed him to despise the Athenian democracy. It should be noted, however, that in practice Gray herself avoids the usual pitfalls of the biographical approach.

In the section entitled "Textual Tradition" Gray provides a summary of the textual tradition of the works in view, without giving details about her own approach to the construction of a critical text. In "Xenophon's Language and Style", the author points out how highly regarded the style of Xenophon was in the ancient world and agrees with this ancient opinion, illustrating Xenophon's stylistic grace briefly but effectively with passages in *Hiero* and *Lac*. In the same way she refutes the charge of Palmer that *Ath.* is characterized by 'untidy arrangement', 'awkward syntax', and 'monotonous diction'.

Gray begins her introduction to *Hiero* (pp. 30-8) by placing this work in its philosophical context. She points to Plato's *Laws* 710d, which suggests that a reformed state is most quickly and effectively instituted by a tyranny in which a disciplined tyrant (cf. *Hiero*) has the good fortune to come together with a great lawmaker (cf. Simonides). She also cites Aristotle's distinction between kingship and tyranny in which the former is a constitutional type that may foster the common good and the latter a deviant form that serves the interests of the ruler alone. In the *Hiero*, Gray argues, Simonides' advice is calculated to turn the tyranny into a true kinship. Also enlightening is her reference to the *Antidosis* where Isocrates justifies to his Athenian democratic audience his advice to King Nicocles by claiming that he spoke as a free man to the king on behalf of his subjects so that the king would rule them in the mildest way possible. Now it may be argued that Xenophon's political theory distinguished clearly between kingship and tyranny (*Mem.* 4.6.12), but what Simonides urges upon Hiero is so strikingly similar to what Isocrates claims to have urged upon Nicocles that the parallel presented by Gray retains its validity.

In the section "Literary Tradition" Gray helpfully points to Plato's *Epistle* 2 (310e5-311b6) where Plato speaks of the natural

attraction of power and wisdom, and mentions many meetings between wise men and rulers including that between Hiero and Simonides. Citing other literary discussions between ruler and wise man about the relative happiness of ruler and non-ruler she concludes that Xenophon's *Hiero* "seems to swim against the current" because it presents the happiness of the tyrant as a distinct possibility. In the section 'The Characters,' Gray argues that though Xenophon does not violate the historical traditions about both Hiero and Simonides, his lack of specific historical references make it such that Hiero "plays the generic tyrant to Simonides' generic wise man". She also cites historical plausibility as the reason Xenophon avoids using Socrates as his wise man in this dialogue. In a section on 'Structure' Gray shows that the two-part structure of *Hiero* is typical of Socratic "aporetic" style in that Simonides brings Hiero to despair though dialectic in the first part (chs. 1-7) and then prescribes the solution in the second (chs. 8-11). The most interesting feature of the 'Content' section is Gray's insistence that Hiero is sincere in his denial of the tyrant's happiness and in his lament that he can achieve neither freedom nor friendship as a tyrant nor lay his tyranny safely down. Gray points not just to the "passionate quality of his utterances, which persuade the reader that here is a man in genuine torment" but also to the paradigm of leaders like Cyrus the Great in the *Cyropaedia*, an absolute ruler who obtained friendship and freedom because he ruled in the way that Simonides outlines in the *Hiero*. Overall this introduction provides a very stimulating and convincing philosophical and literary context for the *Hiero*.

Much of this introduction to the *Hiero* touches on the question of the nature of the irony found in the work. The author also devotes Appendix I to the topic ("The Ironic Reading of the *Hiero*," pp. 211-3). Irony is evident right at the start of the *Hiero* with the insistence of the wise man Simonides that the tyrant has greater knowledge in a particular matter than he himself has. The irony is also quite obvious as the wise man insists on the happiness of the tyrannical life while the tyrant himself insists on its inherent misery. But with what level of irony is the work best read? Gray argues for a moderate irony against the rather more extreme form of irony found in the Straussian interpretation. Strauss reads Hiero's denigration of tyranny as

an insincere attempt to dissuade Simonides from usurping the tyrant's power, and he considers Simonides' advice as insincere since it did not involve the ultimate destruction of the tyranny itself. Gray on the other hand argues that the irony is limited to what I suppose is the traditional idea of Socratic irony: Simonides in essence pleads ignorance when he insists that Hiero knows more on the topic of happiness than he himself does and he plays "dumber" than he actually is in putting forward a popular idea of happiness (*Hiero* 2.3-5). The strength of Gray's argument lies in the use of what she calls the "paradigms" of Xenophon's political thinking that she derives from the whole Xenophontean corpus (pp. 13-14). So she points, for example, to the *Cyropaedia's* Cyrus, who was able to live with freedom and true friendships as an absolute ruler, to show that the positive tyranny apparently advocated by Simonides in the *Hiero* is plausible in Xenophon's universe. I suspect that Gray will not convince the committed Straussian (not least because such interprets other Xenophontean works like the *Cyropaedia* as largely ironic) but Gray puts forward a broadly based, well integrated argument for a more straightforward, yet still somewhat ironic, reading of Xenophon's political writings.

In her introduction to *Lac.* (pp. 39-48), Gray provides context in the section entitled "Literary Tradition and Political Thought". She points out that Xenophon was not a literary pioneer in writing a constitution of the Spartans--Critias had written two versions in the late fifth century--but that "his originality lies in explaining Spartan success as the single-minded and coherent purpose of the law-giver, and in contrasting his customs so uniformly with those of other Greeks" (p. 39). She also indicates that Xenophon was aware of more Spartan laws than he records in *Lac.* but that he included only those which related to education since his purpose was to show how the ordinances of the Spartans encouraged habits of success which led to the prominence of Sparta. She shows too how *Lac.* serves as a foil to Athenian constitutional rhetoric: Thucydides' Pericles boasted that the Athenian constitution and resultant character led to that city's greatness (Thuc. 2.36.4) and that the laws of the Athenians constituted a unique model for others; Isocrates, moreover, claimed that Lycurgus copied the laws of the ancient

Athenians (*Panath.* 12.153-4). In “The Structure”, Gray lays out the mostly simple pattern of the *Lac.* The only controversy here is the place of chapter 14. Its content, according to many, subverts the virtues outlined in the previous chapters; the problem is compounded (or so it is thought) by the reversion in chapter 15 to the final virtue of the Spartans, which is the enduring status of the kingship. Gray treats this controversy in Appendix 3 (pp. 217-21). She argues that the subject of the *Lac.* is the admirable legislation of Lycurgus and not Spartan obedience to it. The lapse of the Spartans recorded in chapter 14, therefore, does not contradict Xenophon’s argument but rather supports it. In fact, Xenophon exaggerates the situation for rhetorical purposes to show that Spartan deviance from the laws led to their more recent loss of position in Greece. With regards to the relationship of chapter 14 to 15, “the idea that the kings remain obedient to the law within the *polis* makes a nice contrast with the preceding account of the disobedience of the harmosts outside the *polis*, (p. 217). Her argument here is convincing and serves again to give a straightforward and holistic solution to what is perhaps the main critical problem of *Lac.*

In the section devoted to “The Purpose” of *Lac.*, the main question addressed is: for whom was this work intended to serve as a “paradigm for imitation”? While not discounting Athens as the intended beneficiary, Gray puts more emphasis on small Greek cities (for example, Phlius), and on the universal (Hellenic) applicability of the work. Yet perhaps more could be said for Athens as the main target, since Spartan constitutions are generally thought to have been a particularly Athenian aristocratic method of social critique.⁴ Gray concludes her introduction to the *Lac.* by dealing with issues surrounding the “Spartan mirage.” She maintains that though Xenophon

⁴ “The prominence of the theme of education in *politeia* writing at Athens, and the Spartan focus of much of this literature, is already apparent. The whole business of *politeia* writing before Plato and in his own time was a politically partisan activity particularly—perhaps exclusively—favored by aristocratic admirers of Sparta: “Laconizers”. M. Schofield, *Plato. Political Philosophy*, Oxford 2006, 37-8.

used Lycurgus as the mouthpiece for his own political ideas and though he exaggerated the contrast between Lycurgan legislation and that of the other Greeks, he kept for the most part a connection with historical realities. For those who seek to understand these realities, “a law by law approach is in order” (p. 48).

Gray begins her introduction to *Ath.* (pp. 49-58) with a section entitled “Political Thought”. Here she asserts that *Ath.* is “in the same tradition of constitutional praise and blame as *Lac*” (p. 49). Now this statement may be true depending on how broadly one defines the genre of ancient Greek *politeia* literature, but it is not necessarily helpful for indicating just how different *Ath.* is from *Lac*. For one thing, the writer of *Ath.* endorses the inevitability of class strife as solidly as any Marxist, whereas *Lac.* generally mutes the topic of class. Furthermore, *Lac.* has the positive goal of promoting practices that produce virtue, whereas *Ath.* is a single-minded condemnation of the Athenian democracy, showing how the *demos* was successful only in preserving itself by protecting its own self-interest. Gray does, however, nicely clarify an important aspect of *Ath.* by pointing out, after Ober, the chord of *aporia* struck by this aristocratic diatribe in that it presents the Athenian democracy as at the same time both corrupt and capable of self-preservation. Significant too is Gray’s point that this combination served as a challenge to traditional political thought which normally held that the endurance of a constitution indicated its quality.

Ath. makes much of the essential connection between the Athenian democracy and sea power. After an introduction condemning the Athenian constitution for favoring the dishonorable over the noble, the first point *Ath.* makes is that in the democracy it is right that the *demos* has more than the nobility since the *demos* drives the navy which provides the city with its stature and power. The main strength of Gray’s exposition in “The Structure and Content” is in showing the distinctive approach of *Ath.* to this relationship between democracy and fleet: in contrast to Isocrates (*Panath.* 12: 114-18) and Thucydides (1.141-4, 2.62-5) who see Athens’ navy chiefly as a counter and contrast to Spartan power on land, *Ath.* views it as the means by which the *demos* procured

profits for itself. In her section “The Author” Gray addresses the problematic relationship between the author of *Ath.* and Athens. She concludes that the “we” passages must be read as the author’s self-identification as a native Athenian, though “the identification of our upright author with the base collective must of course carry a degree of irony” (p. 55). She provides a brief word study to show that the use of αὐτόθι does not require the author to be living outside of Athens. Does this then make him a hypocrite for living under in the democracy when he condemns those who choose to live under a democratic rather than an oligarchic constitution (2.20)? No, as long as he stands aloof from its moral flaws by advertising its shortcomings in his tract. In the section “In Contrast to Xenophon” compares *Ath.* and Xenophon’s *Poroi*. She concludes that Xenophon does not approach the democracy as a representative of the “politics of dissent” but notes rather his overall “creative thinking about the improvement of constitutions” whether they be the democratic constitution of Athens (in *Poroi*) or a tyranny (as in the case of *Hiero*). This surely is a broadly significant observation.

As with other volumes in the series, this includes the Greek text of the works treated (pp. 59-105). For her *apparatus criticus*, Gray adopts the very simplified style of Denyer (*Plato. Alcibiades*) and refers the reader who desires more detailed textual information to other works. Her textual notes are sparse but helpful. She writes, “Information about the readings of the manuscripts and the majority of conjectures comes from Marchant’s edition” (p. 60). Indeed, for the text of *Hiero*, Gray follows Marchant (Oxford Classical Texts) without deviation, except that she omits entirely Marchant’s square-bracketed, suggested deletions and includes in the text with no markings the suggested additions to the text which Marchant has in angular brackets. In *Lac.* Gray occasionally includes the suggested deletions of Marchant and excludes his suggested additions. On rare occasions (13.2,10) she follows the codices against Marchant’s emendation. For *Ath.*, Gray again sometimes omits Marchant’s additions and includes his deletions, but for the most part follows the text of Marchant slavishly even down to the detail of a missed accent of ἀρετη [sic] in 1.7. Some might criticize the minimal nature of the author’s work on the text, but a thorough

critical reconstruction of the text was not, apparently, one of her goals.⁵

Gray's section-by-section commentary runs just over one hundred pages (pp. 106-210). In the preface to the volume she writes, "The focus on government continues in... the commentaries, which also address as a priority the literary manner in which this thought is presented". The author accordingly does not allow herself to get bogged down in the details of text or syntax. She appears to limit grammatical comments to those forms which might prove especially puzzling to students. She often provides a translation for a difficult construction that serves as a concise and effective way to explain the form. Her grammatical explanations are generally clear and accurate.⁶ She regularly refers the reader to standard works of Greek grammar, most commonly Goodwin's *Greek Grammar*, less often his *Moods and Tenses* and Denniston's *The Greek Particles* and only rarely Smyth's *Greek Grammar*. This priority of reference strikes me as odd, since in my experience Smyth has become the standard grammar, though admittedly Goodwin is conceptually more accessible for students.

The author regularly points out significant literary figures such as anaphora, which is especially common in *Hiero*. Helpful too are the occasional word studies, for example, the brief notes on the shifting significance of ἰδιώτης depending on context (on *Hiero* 1.2, p. 107). But the real strength of the commentary is

⁵ I should add here that the only typographical errors I was able to find in this book were in Greek, whether in the Greek text itself (p. 91, line 12: double accent on κέρως) or in citations of the Greek in the introductions (p. 23, in quote from *Hiero* 1.6 πῶς should not be accented) or commentaries (p. 198, γῆς should not be followed by a period).

⁶ The occasional confusing comment appears, as for example on δίκην δοῦναι καὶ λαβεῖν οὐκ ἐν ἄλλοις τισὶν ἄλλ' ἐν τῷ δημοί, ὅς ἐστι δὴ νόμος Ἀθήνησι (*Ath.* 1.18). Gray writes, "the relative takes the entire sentence as its antecedent and has been attracted to the case of its complement" though in fact the issue is not the case of the relative but its gender, which would normally be neuter but has apparently been attracted to the gender of its complement.

the insight the author provides in placing these works, especially the *Hiero* and *Lac.*, in their literary and philosophical context. She makes telling references to Herodotus, Thucydides, Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Hippocratic writings and others. Some indication of the richness of this context is given by noting that in a comment on the eugenic ideas found in *Lac.* 1.3-4, Gray cites Theognis, Stobaeus, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Varro, Columella and Foucault! Moreover, Gray is especially strong in showing repeatedly how *Hiero* and *Lac.* fit into the broader philosophical context of Xenophon's works as a whole.

To conclude, the success of this volume is at two levels. First, one could envision this volume succeeding brilliantly as a class text for a senior undergraduate course in Xenophon's political writings. In my experience, the typical Classics undergraduate student is given little exposure to Xenophon and this text could well convince the student that the breadth and interest of Xenophon's ideas are worth further exploration. Second, although there have been a rare few scholars within the last hundred years who have commented upon the range and richness of Xenophon's political views,⁷ Gray's presentation of same in the present volume is supported by the most thoughtful and convincing understanding of Xenophon's writings and philosophy as a whole and is without doubt the clearest and sanest available.

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⁷ See for example, W. Weathers, "Xenophon's Political Idealism", *CJ* 49, 1954, 317-21, 330 and W. E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian: The Problem of the Individual and the Society of the Polis*, Albany 1977.

