

The Alcibiadic Xenophon: Where Did It All Go Right?

This paper argues that the *Anabasis* models the character of the young Xenophon prior to the death of Cyrus on Alcibiades in order to emphasize the similarities between the two figures. In Book Seven, however, Xenophon is twice offered, and twice rejects, the opportunity to become a new Alcibiades. Xenophon's flirtation with, and ultimate rejection of, Alcibiades as his ethical model encourages the reader to consider the process by which Xenophon became a Socratic during the march.

Many scholars, including Ellis (1989) Forde (1989), Vickers (2008) and Rhodes (20011), *inter alios*, have analyzed the historical and philosophical consequences of Alcibiades' life; yet with the exception of several mentions by Stronk (1995), e.g. 144 and 197, the strong parallels between the young Xenophon and Alcibiades in the Xenophontic corpus have not been noted.

This paper offers the new argument that the young Xenophon, prior to Cyrus' death, follows in the footsteps of Xenophon's Alcibiades: both men abandon Socrates and Athens in pursuit of honor, fame, and money. The *Memorabilia* depicts Alcibiades as an insincere student of Socrates who listens only because he believes it will aid his pursuit of power (1.2.15). As soon as he abandons Socrates he grows corrupted—because of his rich friends (1.2.24), his conceit over his family (1.2.25), and his wealth and power (1.2.25)—and then abandons Athens for Sparta and Persia. The few mentions of Xenophon prior to Cyrus' death suggest that he will follow the same trajectory. His rejection of a fundamental tenet of Socratic philosophy (*Mem.* 1.3.8-14) and his basic failure to follow Socrates' religious advice (*Ana.* 3.1.5-7), establish him as similarly at odds with Socrates philosophically. Xenophon himself then abandons Socrates to be introduced to Cyrus on the grounds that he was “more beneficial to himself than his own country” (3.1.4). Finally, Xenophon awkwardly imposes himself on Cyrus in an apparent attempt

to make Cyrus aware of him just before the distribution of spoils (1.8.15). The young Xenophon, at least through *Anabasis* Book Three, seems to incline toward Alcibiades as his role model, not Socrates.

This paper, however, then identifies two moments in *Anabasis* Book Seven which show that, when Xenophon is actually offered the same sources of power as Alcibiades, he rejects them due to his new moderation. Like Alcibiades (*Hell.* 1.3.20), civil discord hands Xenophon Byzantium (*Ana.* 7.1.21); unlike Alcibiades, he refuses it. The Thracian dynast Seuthes then offers Xenophon the same support he had given Alcibiades (*Hell.* 1.3.10; cf. Nepos VIII) and throws in Alcibiades' old fortresses as incentive (*Ana.* 7.2.38). Yet unlike Alcibiades, Xenophon shuns Seuthes once he learns of Seuthes' viciousness. Xenophon, who left home on account of his Alcibiadic lust for power and glory twice rejects the fulfillment of precisely these desires in Book Seven. The memory of Alcibiades in Book Seven hints that something has returned Xenophon to the Socratic path.

This paper concludes by arguing that Xenophon's refusal in Book Seven to become a new Alcibiades, perhaps Xenophon's goal in Book Three, challenges the reader to consider what has transpired that saved Xenophon from a wholly un-Socratic, wholly Alcibiadic lust for glory and power.

Bibliography

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