

φίλω δὲ ὄντι ἐξαπατᾶν αἰσχρόν; Xenophon's Friendly Deceptions

Deception, together with its utility, its value, and the appropriateness of its use, recurs as a topic throughout the works of Xenophon. In some instances, deception is treated uncritically, and its skillful practice praised, while in others it is censured. The ambiguity of Xenophon's views on deception practiced by others has been well outlined by Gabriel Danzig in his evaluation of Tissaphernes (Danzig 2007: 27-50). The relationship between Xenophon's reflections on deception and his own recourse to deceptive practices in the *Anabasis* has received less scrutiny. Apparent contradictions have been explained as accidental failures of the narrator to smooth out inconsistencies in a studiously contrived narrative (Basset 2002: 460). Such an interpretation requires an untenable hermeneutic of strict separation between the Xenophon as author and character (Grethlein 2012: 23-40). It is the purpose of this treatment to evaluate Xenophon's own use of deception in the *Anabasis*, within the framework provided by the descriptions of deceit, reflections thereon, and reactions thereto, found both within the *Anabasis* and across the Xenophontine corpus.

Among frequent approving references to the practice of deception, Xenophon issues the rather gnomic pronouncement (*Hipp.* 5.9) that “nothing is more advantageous in war than deception” (ὄντως γὰρ οὐδὲν κερδαλεώτερον ἐν πολέμῳ ἀπάτης). When the art of deception is turned against the deceiver's friends however, the assessment is less clear. In no treatment of the issue of deception does Xenophon endorse the practice of deceiving one's friends. He gives a verbal pronouncement on the matter in the *Anabasis*, where he states (*Ana.* 7.6.21) that “to one who is a friend, to deceive seems to me to be more disgraceful than to be deceived” (φίλω δὲ ὄντι ἐξαπατᾶν αἰσχρόν μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἢ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι). Likewise, Xenophon records approvingly (*Ag.* 11.4) that Agesilaus held to this fundamental distinction between the deception of friends and

enemies: “He did not censure those deceived by friends, but he wholly disparaged those deceived by enemies and he judged deceiving the suspicious to be wise, but deceiving the trusting to be wicked” (τοὺς μὲν ὑπὸ φίλων ἐξαπατωμένους οὐκ ἔψεγε, τοὺς δὲ ὑπὸ πολεμίων πάμπαν κατεμέμφετο, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀπιστοῦντας ἐξαπατᾶν σοφὸν ἔκρινε, τὸ δὲ πιστεύοντας ἀνόσιον).

This moral judgement seems to be affirmed in several episodes. In his unflattering obituary of Menon, Xenophon enumerates the faults of the deceased, particularly noting (*Ana.* 2.6.26) that “just as a person takes pride in reverence and truth and justice, so Menon took pride in being able to deceive, to craft falsehoods, and to ridicule friends (ὥσπερ δὲ τις ἀγάλλεται ἐπὶ θεοσεβείᾳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ καὶ δικαιοσύνη, οὕτω Μένων ἠγάλλετο τῷ ἐξαπατᾶν δύνασθαι, τῷ πλάσασθαι ψεῦδη, τῷ φίλους διαγελάειν). The fault which Xenophon emphasizes repeatedly in the obituary is that the victims of his deceptive predations were not enemies, but friends (*Ana.* 2.6.24).

Despite this apparent moral distinction, Xenophon frequently recounts in positive terms deceptions practiced upon friends, and throughout the *Anabasis* Xenophon himself has repeated recourse to deception of friends as a means of managing the army. He relates with no reproach how Agesilaus lied to his troops in order to prevent desertions and thus won a significant victory (*Hel.* 4.3.12-14). On three occasions in the *Anabasis* Xenophon resorts to similar deceptions for the sake of bolstering the morale of the soldiers. Further examination shows that in each instance where deception practiced on friends is praised, or at least allowed to pass uncensured, the motives of the deceiver are somewhat oriented toward the common good and are not wholly self-serving. Why, then, does Xenophon not only leave this category unexpressed, but even deliberately exclude it when he does elaborate standards of acceptable deception?

The answer lies within two of Xenophon's philosophical works: *Memorabilia* and the *Cyropaedia*, both of which include interlocution on the topic of deception. By examining the seeming contradictions within Xenophon's position on deception through the lens of the philosophical principles voiced by the characters in the philosophical works, I will show that Xenophon's concurrent use and castigation of deception practiced upon friends is not the result of confusion or duplicity. Rather, it corresponds to a coherent ethical framework which acknowledges the necessity of deception, while also recognizing the dangers of endorsing such practice.

Bibliography:

Bassett, S. "Innocent victims or Perjurers Betrayed? The Arrest of the Generals in Xenophon's *Anabasis*." *The Classical Quarterly* 52. no. 2. 2002: 447-461.

Danzig, Gabriel. "Xenophon's wicked Persian, or, What's wrong with Tissaphernes? Xenophon's views on lying and breaking oaths." In Tuplin, C. (ed.) *Persian Responses: Political and cultural interaction with (in) the Achaemenid Empire*. Classical Press of Wales. 2007: 27-50.

Grethlein, J. "Xenophon's *Anabasis* from character to narrator." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 132. 2012: 23-40.