

The Politics of Benefit: On the Identity of Household Management and Politics in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*

Yashar Feirani

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING political doctrines in Xenophon's Socratic writings is the identification of the household manager and the statesman, or the household and the city (henceforth the 'identification doctrine'). The simple or even blunt nature of the identification can cause annoyance or wonder on the part of readers: we can enumerate two types of reaction to this doctrine.

One can be called the democratic citizen's reaction. Thus Aristotle at the beginning of the *Politics* claims that "those who suppose that the same person is expert in political rule, kingly rule, managing the household ... do not argue *finely*" (1252a5–15: οὐ καλῶς). He then explains the not-fine or ignoble character of their argument: their analogy transfers the despotic character of the household to the city, and thus violates the equality which is essential for an understanding of political life as embodied in a unit like the polis (1255b). In the second book, he concludes his criticism with the assertion that their argument utterly "destroys the city" (1261a5), as it transfers an absolute unity to an entity that is inherently pluralistic. This is why he calls their argument "not fine" rather than "false" (*pseudos*). It is not fine in the sense that promoting, for example, an idea of absolute rule in a liberal democracy is not fine or noble, but is not necessarily false. It is not fine because it is inimical to a democratic way of life represented by the polis. It carries the foul smell of paternalism or despotism. Thus, by using a subtle terminology ("not fine" instead of false), Aristotle anticipates the reaction of the typical democratic citizen, an essentially political or partisan

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reaction to the identification doctrine.

We can label the second reaction the scholar's reaction: the scholar's wonder or scorn at how a philosopher can put forth such an absurd, simpleminded, and hence false doctrine on the nature of the political, because the identification doctrine manifestly rests on eliminating the essential characteristics of the political, or because it is completely invalid.¹ Political life involves a higher degree of objectivity and impersonal relations,² hence the centrality of crucial notions like justice, honor, glory, law, and so on. These notions, which manifestly are absent from any household, qualitatively turn political life into a class of its own. While understanding the household can help us to describe the genesis of political society (*Pol.* 1252b–1253a), it does not suffice for describing the phenomenon of political life in its entirety, complexity, and maturity. Thus, it seems that the identification is not only an evident denial of essential characteristics of the political, but an evident blunder.

These considerations induce us in this paper to ask why Xenophon put forth such a simple-minded and blunt doctrine.³ Why did he risk the anger of his democratic fellow citizens and the scorn of future scholars? In other words, what was his intention in putting forth such a doctrine? What is meant in his identifying household management and statesmanship?

¹ Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (London 1972) 63. And in the case of the same doctrine in the works of Plato: John M. Cooper, "Plato's *Statesman* and Politics," in *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton 1999) 169; Malcom Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (New York 2006) 167; C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Statesman* (Warminster 1995), on 258e11.

² See Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York 1991) 10.

³ The identification itself was not an innovation on the part of Xenophon. We can find various formulations of that doctrine in political literature before and after his time. See Roger Brock, *Greek Political Imagery: From Homer to Aristotle* (London 2013) 25–43. However, Xenophon and Plato are the first political 'philosophers' who put forth that doctrine in their writings. But Xenophon's version, with his extensive treatment of the doctrine in his main Socratic and philosophical work, is more explicit and provocative, and thus more interesting.

To answer these questions, I chiefly concentrate on that section of the *Memorabilia* in which Xenophon's Socrates puts forth and defends the identification doctrine (3.4–7). First, I argue that Socrates claims that the essence of the art of managing the household is identical with the essence of the art of managing the city.⁴ Next I argue that Xenophon's identification of household management and statesmanship is an attempt to put forth a new benefit-based political doctrine: his Socrates claims that “knowledge of what is beneficial and harmful” and “the ability to procure what is beneficial” is the ultimate standard for evaluating and being a statesman.⁵ Furthermore, the context of the

⁴ Socrates begins in 3.4.12 by defining the essence or underlying principle of household management (τῶν οἰκονομικῶν ἀνδρῶν) and reaches the climax at 3.7.1, where he tries to guide a man who was “more able than those then engaged in political affairs” (μὲν ἄνδρα ὄντα καὶ πολλῷ δυνατώτερον τῶν τὰ πολιτικὰ τότε πραττόντων) according to the essence of household management.

⁵ Fiorenza Bevilacqua, in her interesting paper on a passage of the *Cyropaedia*, paints a more or less similar picture Xenophon's Cyrus as a statesman: “Seduzione e potere nella *Ciropedia* e nell'Economico di Senofonte,” in F. Benedetti et al. (eds.), *Studi di filologia e tradizione greca in memoria di Aristide Colonna* (Naples 2003) 139–140. She argues that what distinguishes the good statesman from the bad is the former's ability to confer “concrete and generous benefits” on his “simple subjects.” What distinguishes her account from mine is that she bases her argument chiefly of Xenophon's Cyrus, and I base mine on Xenophon's Socrates. She provides a roughly similar economic conception of statesmanship, but includes the necessity to “bewitch” (*stregare*) the masses as one of characteristics of Xenophon's statesman. By contrast, I argue that Xenophon's Socrates, by insisting on a strict identity between household manager and statesman, not only provides a clearer and more consistent economic image of the statesman, but also a more sober one, which culminates in the rejection of his need for “chanting incantation” (the Athenian or rhetorical equivalent of Median or Persian purple robes and other majestic cosmetics). On the other hand, V. Azoulay rightly argues that the Xenophonic tendency to erase any distinction between the public and the private is instrumental to his political doctrine: “Cyrus, disciple de Socrate? Public et privé dans l'œuvre de Xénophon,” *Etudes platoniciennes* 6 (2009) 153–173. An important point distinguishes my argument from his: on *Mem.* 3.4, Azoulay focuses on the general concept of private versus public, and thus is forced unnecessarily to find a way to reconcile Ischomachus' position in *Oeconomicus*

dialogue shows that Xenophon's Socrates puts forth this calculative and benefit-based political doctrine as an anti-doctrine to a more 'noble' political doctrine which stresses noble virtues or honor-based distinctions as the ultimate standard for evaluating and being a statesman (Nietsche's "pathos of distance").⁶ I argue that Socrates provides two reasons for supporting his doctrine identifying statesmanship and household management; these two reasons, by focusing on the interests of the ruled and the rulers respectively, prove the point that the identification doctrine is a political doctrine (or Socratic political doctrine) proper.⁷

with Socrates' position in *Memorabilia*. By contrast, I shall show that in 3.4, Socrates draw an analogy between a reductive definition of household management (excluding from it other elements such as fatherhood, conjugal relations, and farming) and generalship, which results in a cold, calculative, and 'all too human' conception of managing the public sphere. In this way, he not only distinguishes his position from honor-loving and public-spirited Nicomachides, but also from Ischomachus, who, by drawing an analogy between a conventional or noble conception of household management and the art of ruling, arrives at a "divine" or "inspirational" conception of statesmanship, which is at odds with Socrates' conception (i.e., conventional gentleman's conception vs. philosopher's conception). Thus I do not need to reconcile Ischomachus' position and Socrates', as attention to Xenophon's editorial remarks about the character of Socrates and Ischomachus on the one hand, and their vastly different concepts of household management on the other (Azoulay's focus on the "private" as a general term tends to conceal that difference) makes such a reconciliation unnecessary.

⁶ *On the Genealogy of Morals* 1.2.

⁷ While I shall argue that the identification doctrine is a device for changing our understanding of politics and political life in contrast to noble conceptions of politics, some scholars have argued that the analogy is a device for replacing one form of noble politics with another. G. A. Nelsestuen has argued that Xenophon uses the analogy for elaborating "an original theory of empire government": "*Oikonomia* as a Theory of Empire in the Political Thought of Xenophon," *GRBS* 57 (2017) 78. On the other hand, Carol McNamara argues that the Socratic identification of polis and household, and his insistence on prudent calculation, stems from Socrates' anti-imperialist tendencies: "Socratic Politics in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*," *Polis* 26 (2009) 234. I think that McNamara overlooks that Xenophon's Cyrus, founder of the greatest empire

Before we turn to the *Memorabilia*, something must be said about the exclusion of the *Oeconomicus* as the basis for the argument of this paper, as there too we find the identification of household management and politics. There is a subtle difference between the two. In the *Oeconomicus* it is chiefly Ischomachus the gentleman, and not Socrates the philosopher, who advocates the identification doctrine. Moreover, in the final and clearest pre-

in Xenophon's time, succeeds in his career by adopting the same calculative and sober stance towards politics. Nelesten bases his claim on the fact that both the Persian empire and *oikonomia* presented in the *Oeconomicus* are "agriculture-focused." But this disregards the complex status of agriculture in the *Oeconomicus*. Far from assuming or proving the centrality or necessity of agriculture for household management proper, the *Oeconomicus* portrays its role as quite questionable. In the conversation between Ischomachus and Socrates, there is a tacit disagreement concerning agriculture's status and importance. To Ischomachus' long speech in praise of agriculture as a noble art that makes its practitioner "well-bred in character," Socrates replies "that is a fine [*kalos*] preface, and not such as to turn your listener from questioning" (15.13): for Socrates, this is only a noble speech; whether or not it is true is an entirely separate matter. This tension culminates in their disagreement about Socrates' knowledge of agriculture: while Ischomachus attributes this strange phenomenon to the "gentleness and philanthropy" ("nobility") of agriculture, Socrates playfully understands it in the light of the Socratic method of question and answer (i.e., a philosophical method), and in this way denies the nobility and philanthropy of agriculture (19.14–19). The most striking example of the problematic nature of agriculture is at the conclusion, where Socrates mocks Ischomachus' father and role-model for his "love of agriculture" and unmarks it as a "love of benefit" (20.27–29). After the disagreement about the nature of agriculture, Ischomachus attempts to end the dialogue with an agreeable discussion concerning "ruling" as the common element of farming, politics, household management, and war (21.2–3). By denying the necessity and centrality of agriculture, or its inherent desirability, for the man whom Ischomachus considers his role-model (and Ischomachus himself is supposed to be a role-model for farmer-household managers), Socrates points to the problematic or tenuous status of agriculture in household management in general. Cf. Gabriel Danzig, "Why Socrates was not a Farmer: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* as a Philosophical Dialogue," *G&R* 50 (2003) 71; Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse* (South Bend 1998 [1970]) 121–122. Thus, understanding the identification doctrine in terms of the interests of empire must first overcome such difficulties. The very presence of Socrates in the dialogue should be a warning against such simple and reductive interpretations.

sentation of the doctrine by Ischomachus, Socrates is completely silent (*Oec.* 21). While Xenophon introduces Ischomachus (through the testimony of his Socrates, and Socrates via hearsay) as the model for gentlemanliness (6.17), he in no way belongs to the list of Xenophon's heroes (Socrates, Cyrus, Agesilaus). Therefore, while his views could be considered as a valuable source for understanding the perspective of conventional Athenian gentlemen, he is not one of Xenophon's spokespersons. And since the aim of this paper is to understand Xenophon's intention in presenting the identification doctrine, it is safer to rely, as the basis for close reading, on that version of the doctrine which is presented by one of his heroes or spokespersons. Thus, *Oeconomicus* is not the basis of my interpretation, but treated as a supplementary source for understanding Socrates' claims in *Memorabilia* (see n.5).

The Socratic conception of household management and the identification of politics with household management

In the section which describes how Socrates assisted his friends regarding noble things, Xenophon narrates a conversation between Socrates and Nicomachides, prompted by the former. The latter is a brave veteran whom the Athenians have declined to elect as general. As he tells Socrates, they have instead chosen a man named Antisthenes. As a result he is self-righteous and indignant, and condemns the Athenians for electing a man "who has never gone on campaign as a hoplite nor done anything admirable among horsemen, and who understands nothing other than how to gather wealth" (*Mem.* 3.4.1). Socrates, to Nicomachides' surprise, offers a defense of the Athenians' choice.

What is first important here is Nicomachides' characterization of Antisthenes' qualities. He is said to have not done anything "admirable" in military matters, and knows only how to gather wealth. Later in the chapter Nicomachides implicitly counts Antisthenes among the "good household managers" (3.4.7). Thus, in his moral indignation, Nicomachides unintentionally provides us a definition of the good household manager: a master of wealth-gathering; and in so being, he does not need to be an admirable person at all. It seems that the first part of this defini-

tion is in accord with Critobulus' first definition of the household manager in *Oec.* 1.4. However, we cannot regard Nicomachides' definition as Xenophon's, or as Xenophon's Socrates', for two reasons: first because it is uttered in anger, and second because he cannot be counted among Xenophon's mouthpieces or wise men. Therefore, we must instead consider Socrates' responses to his angry definition.

In tacit agreement with Nicomachides, nowhere in the conversation does Socrates call any action of Antisthenes admirable, or call him an admirable person. He may be a victorious person, or even some sort of knower (*Mem.* 3.4.11), but he is in no sense admirable, with all the distinctions and noble tones inherent in such a term. Of the first, and more important, element of Nicomachides' definition, we can say for now that Socrates neither denies nor limits it in any way. He begins his defense of Antisthenes with an argument that he is competent in procuring soldiers' provisions—i.e., with a clear example of his ability in unlimited wealth-gathering (3.4.2).⁸ We can say, then, that Xenophon's Socrates hesitates to break the common-sense⁹ relation between wealth-gathering and household management. He does not, at any rate, limit the pursuit of wealth gathering by any 'noble' constraint.¹⁰ In other words, Xenophon's Socrates *avoids* the question of nobility in describing such activities. Two related facts confirm this: first, the whole discussion occurs within the framework of Socrates defending the election of an allegedly ignoble (or not-admirable) person over a noble (or brave) man whose "wounds" or noble qualities distinguish him from other citizens. Second, in describing Antisthenes' or the good household manager's activity, Socrates isolates it from all the noble aspects of that art, e.g. agriculture, horsemanship, education of wife and children, and so on. Such abstraction, or avoidance, reminds us of the problematic nature or even the glaring absence

⁸ For the argument that procuring provisions should be in some sense unlimited ("never to delay providing provisions until *need* compels you") see *Xen. Cyr.* 1.6.10–12.

⁹ Cf. Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse* 113.

¹⁰ Cf. *Arist. Pol.* 1256a25–35; also *Xen. Oec.* 4.1.

of those aspects in the *Oeconomicus*.

We have noted (n.7) the precarious status of agriculture in the *Oeconomicus*. In addition, we should not forget the total absence of the discussion of children and the relevance of the tragic fate of Ischomachus' wife (his failure in educating her: *Andoc.* 1.124–127). More importantly, we must remember the 'recapitulation' of his discussion with Critobulus in the *Oeconomicus*. There he offers the final (and perhaps most authoritative) definition of household management: even in this final definition, he does not abandon "increasing the household." And while in his further elaborations he qualifies the "household" part (indeed, not by "noble" considerations, but by "benefit" and "knowledge"), he in no way limits the "increasing" part (*Oec.* 6.4). In other words, his final definition neither denies nor contradicts unlimited wealth-gathering as an element of household management.¹¹

Thus, according to the *Oeconomicus*' Socrates, the *end* of household management is the increasing, or unlimited increasing, of the household, i.e. what is beneficial. So for the time being, we can say that the *Oeconomicus*' Socrates agrees with the *Memorabilia*'s Socrates concerning the integral role of "unlimited wealth gathering" in the definition of household management. We conclude that Socrates, both in *Oeconomicus* and *Memorabilia*, frees household management from all noble or honorable notions: his manager is not a good farmer, a good husband, a good father, or even a good horseman, he is only a good economist, only *knows* what is beneficial and how to procure it. This household manager is thoroughly devoid of honor. As we shall see, this reductive definition of household management is essential for

¹¹ It is very revealing to contrast Socrates' explicit inclusion of wealth-gathering in the formal definition of household management (or taking it for granted) with Aristotle's account of the status of chrematistics in the art of household management. As one commentator on the *Politics* has written, chrematistics "is hardly a part of household management at all, or a very subordinate part": Peter A. Phillips Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill 1998) 27–28. In other words, the very inclusion of wealth-gathering in the formal definition of household management is, at least, a valid *question* for Aristotle (*Pol.* 1256a5–10).

Socrates' benefit-based and economic political doctrine in the *Memorabilia*.

After Nicomachides' scornful answer regarding Antisthenes' ability in procuring provisions, Socrates resumes his defense of Antisthenes' (or the good household manager's) competence as a general. Socrates points to Antisthenes' "love of victory." Since he loves victory, he is very successful in presiding over choruses; he tries his best to "discover and select those who are best" and achieve victory both in choral contests and in war. And, since he shares his victory in choral contests with his tribe, and victory in war with his city (i.e., he acquires more honor by winning a war), he is even more eager to spend his wealth on achieving victory in war (*Mem.* 3.4). It seems that Nicomachides' scornful reply to Socrates' first argument has forced Socrates to abandon defending Antisthenes in economic terms. Now, instead, he depicts him as a *philonikos* and *philotimos* man, a *thumos* incarnate (Pl. *Resp.* 580D–581B). Thus, Antisthenes ceases to be merely a household manager and appears now as primarily driven by an intense *desire* for victory. His slavish calculative prudence turns into a master-like intense desire for victory, distinction, and honor. If this is so, we may say that he and Nicomachides belong to the same tribe (*Oec.* 9.6–11), because Nicomachides shares his desire for victory, honor, distinction, and also bears the marks of *thumos* on his body (*Mem.* 3.4.1).

However, it seems that the difference between them in this regard resides in the fact that they occupy different ranks in that tribe. Nicomachides, 'son of a victorious fighter', because of his wounds and military experience is one of those experts selected by a superior victory-lover and victorious man to serve in his army (note that Nicomachides never speaks about his victories, while Socrates emphasizes Antisthenes' numerous victories as a *choregos*); and he shares in the victories and honors of that superior man as much as a 'son of a victorious fighter' shares in the victories and honors of his father. It is obvious that such an interpretation of Socrates' second defense of Antisthenes, by placing him in the same tribe as Nicomachides, ultimately eliminates his identity as a good household manager, and thereby confounds the intention of the chapter and its conclusion. However, this

interpretation is deficient, and precisely its deficiencies can point us in the right direction.

While it is evident that Socrates wishes to reduce Nicomachides to a mere soldier or commander in Antisthenes' army, we should not understand Antisthenes' superiority solely in terms of the intensity of his desire for victory and distinction. He is superior not merely because he is more victory-loving, but because he has an enormous amount of wealth, which is the direct result of his expertise in unlimited wealth gathering (*Mem.* 3.4.5). Without his wealth, he could not employ "those who are best": mere desire, in this case, is insufficient. At least in the case of Antisthenes, the gap between his desire for victory and the act of being victorious could be filled by his wealth. The link between being wealthy (that is: knowing the ways and means to provisions and being able to procure them) and entitlement to generalship is obvious enough. Without some ability, not to say expertise, in wealth-gathering, becoming or remaining a general is impossible: "you certainly know that if the army does not have provisions it needs, your rule will dissolve at once" (*Cyr.* 1.6.9).¹² Therefore, we can conclude that Socrates still preserves the identity of Antisthenes as a household manager in the claim of his superiority to Nicomachides.

But such preservation is still not an unqualified preservation. Although Antisthenes' wealth-gathering, and all the abilities that go with it, are necessary for being a general, they are not sufficient. These abilities are at the service of an intense thumotic desire for victory, honor, and distinction. Given this, it seems that Socrates' defense and understanding of the role of household management in generalship is indistinguishable from that of the prudent Persian gentleman Cambyses, for whom house-

¹² As Cyrus makes clear, we should not understand the "needed" provisions in a minimal way. He knows that he has to provide provisions and pay "in excess" of the agreed terms (1.6.11). Furthermore, we can argue that precisely his ability to provide and to promise "in excess" is the key to stealing Cyaxares' soldiers and reducing the latter to one of the many "sons of a victorious fighter." (In the course of the *Cyropaedia*, Cyaxares gradually transforms from a giver to a receiver.)

hold management is “among the things that pertain to the general” (*Cyr.* 1.6.12)—that is, household management as a part of generalship. But unlike that prudent Persian gentleman, Socrates in this chapter of *Memorabilia* defends a “not fine” doctrine affirming the essential similarity between household management and politics; and since such a doctrine stands or falls by the fact that the manager’s abilities as such must be sufficient for being a statesman, Socrates could not stop at understanding household management “as a part” of generalship and politics; he must be more radical. His omission of nobility and also his radicalism can be the marks that distinguish the philosopher from one of the most prudent gentlemen in the Xenophontic corpus.¹³

Therefore, we must examine how Socrates understands that mysterious “love of victory.” We have said that if this is only an unreflective desire, or characterized solely by its intensity, then the identification doctrine at the end of the chapter would be unsustainable and unjustified. So there must be some way to overcome this apparent contradiction. To do so, we must look at Socrates’ second account of Antisthenes’ love of victory at the end of the chapter. After Nicomachides marvels at the claim about the similarity of a good household manager and a good general, and after “reviewing the tasks of each of them,” Socrates mentions Antisthenes’ attitude towards victory for the second time. Interestingly, this time he omits any reference to love or *philia* and mentions only “victory.” Even more interestingly, here he mentions “defeat” (τὸ ἡττῶσθαι) for the first time (*Mem.* 3.4.11). It seems that dropping the love or, at any rate, the intense desire opens the possibility of defeat, and crucially, an awareness of defeat. Such awareness is the result of

¹³ Cambyses is the only gentleman in Xenophon’s writings who, like Socrates in *Memorabilia* (3.1.6), mentions many of the harsh and immoral acts that generals are condemned to commit (*Cyr.* 1.6.27). His conversation with Cyrus in *Cyr.* 1 is one of the most prudent attempts on the part of a gentleman to present an effective version of ruling and generalship, without violating the framework of nobility and gentlemanship. He rides his horse at the boundaries of gentlemanship.

the fact that Antisthenes is not a mere unreflective lover of victory; rather he “*knows* that nothing is more *profitable* and *gainful* than being victorious.” More than that, he knows that “nothing is so *unprofitable* and *costly* as being defeated.” Antisthenes’ knowledge of profit, or, in other words, his calculation of profit, takes precedence over his raw desire for victory. His desire for victory is, in this cast, a reflective one, based on the knowledge or calculation of profit. That is why he is also aware of the harm of being defeated. His reflective desire for victory is accompanied by a reflective desire to avoid defeat, which is in no way identical with a mere unreflective desire for victory. Thus, Antisthenes is no typical victory-lover. The importance of the knowledge of profit and harm paradoxically excludes Antisthenes from the tribe of victory-lovers, yet at the same time makes him perpetually victorious. Furthermore—and again paradoxically—this outcast from the victory-lovers’ tribe, by being always victorious (owing to his knowledge of profit and harm), is also the king of the victory lover’s tribe. Thus, Antisthenes’ profession, far from disqualifying him for generalship, makes him a better general than the courageous and honor-loving Nicomachides.

Let us summarize Socrates’ argument thus far. The first step was that Antisthenes could be a good general because he was an expert in wealth-gathering. Nicomachides’ scorn for that argument led Socrates to the claim that Antisthenes could be a good general because he is a wealth-gathering victory-lover. We have seen that that middle position was a provisional one. In the third step, he argued that Antisthenes could be a good general because he was a good calculator of profit and harm. In other words, he asserts that (1) Antisthenes is a good household manager, (2) a good household manager is the one who has knowledge of the beneficial and harmful, (3) the one having the knowledge of the beneficial and harmful is preferable to the one who lacks that knowledge both in private and public affairs, (4) thus the good general/statesman is the good household manager.

Thus far, explicit statements in *Mem.* 3.4 only point to the reductive definition of household management and Socrates’ bold claim that household management and politics are essentially

identical, and so the good household manager is the good statesman, or, the good statesman should be, or imitate, the good household manager. These statements by themselves could not constitute a political doctrine proper, and accordingly do not assist us in reconstructing Xenophon's intention. Therefore, we have to look for Socrates' reasons for establishing the identity between household management and politics. I believe that in the three subsequent chapters he provides us with two fundamental reasons in favor of the identification doctrine. The first is that the doctrine serves the interest of the ruled, the second is that it serves the interest of the rulers. While the first reason proves the legitimacy of the regime which acts according to that political doctrine, the second guaranties its stability. While the first reason proves the justice and goodness of the political doctrine, the second proves its practicality. We should not forget that the first failure of the Socratic political doctrine in Plato's *Republic* was that it failed to convince the rulers to adopt it (*Resp.* 419A). Thus a perfect political doctrine should provide both kinds of reason in its favor.¹⁴

¹⁴ Both reasons provide the basis for the claim that the calculative notion of politics and statesmanship, in contrast to the love of honor, is able to avoid tragedy and defeat. Generally, there is a relationship between courage (intense love of victory) and tragedy: L. Hatab, *Nietzsche's 'On the Genealogy of Morality': An Introduction* (New York 2008) 50–60. Achilles' tragic end was the result of his persistent courage and love of honor vs. his knowledge that if he continues the war, he will die young. The courageous and honor-loving man, at some point, should choose honorable death instead of shameful safety. Particularly, we can find the same relationship in Xenophon's works. For example, courage is absent from the final list of Socrates' virtues (*Mem.* 4.8.11.). Moreover, Xenophon in the *Apology* attempts to argue that the basis of Socrates' *megalēgoria* was not his courage or insolence, but his calculation about the disabilities of old age. More interestingly, for Xenophon's political heroes courage cannot be called a virtue at all without facing difficulties: Cyrus is chastised by his grandfather and relatives for being too rash in hunting ("he leaped on his horse as would one possessed," *Cyr.* 1.4.7–11). Moreover, if we compare his first participation in battle ("just as a well-bred but inexperienced dog rushes without forethought against a boar") with his

First reason: serving the interests of the ruled

In *Mem.* 3.5.1, Socrates appears as teacher to the “son of the great Pericles,” who had recently been elected general. Socrates begins the conversation with the hope that by his election “the city will both be better in matters of war and have a better reputation.” Socrates suggests that “by calculating [*dialogizomenoi*]” about such matters they “examine what is possible at present.” Two points are worth stressing: first, his aim is clearly the interests of the ruled; second, he states that “calculation” can solve the problem.

The first part of the chapter explicitly criticizes the ill effects of contemporary Athenians’ excessive honor-loving and thus their willingness to take risks for the sake of a good reputation or of the fatherland, and culminates in praise of the “ancient virtues” of their ancestors, in contrast to their contemporary characteristics or vices (3.5.2–13). Of the ancestors, the conversation provides two examples: the first is Cecrops, mentioned by Pericles, and the second is the generation of the Persian Wars, mentioned by Socrates. While Socrates does not make clear what the excellence of the former consisted in, he is quite clear about the latter: “they acquired power and resources in amounts

last battle (“let us drop such things as are beyond our power”), a transformation from unreflective victory-lover to prudent calculator of profit and harm can be detected (1.4.20–23, 7.5.8–25). In the case of Cyrus the Younger, there is no doubt that his courageous and vengeful charge against his brother is fueled by his desire for victory and honor; it is one of the main reasons or the one reason for his utter defeat (*An.* 1.8.25–28). Last but not least is Xenophon’s hero Agesilaus. While he is distinguished from his rivals by his prudent calculation of the profit and harm of victory and defeat, Xenophon’s description of his only “courageous” act in the battle against Thebans, which amounts to not choosing “the safest course,” is very revealing: although “victory had fallen to Agesilaus,” yet “many were killed” unnecessarily, and “he himself had been carried, wounded” (*Hell.* 4.3.19–21). This last example shows how love of honor is harmful both for rulers (“he himself had been carried, *wounded*”) and ruled (“many were killed” unnecessarily). Of course, we may add Nicomachides to that list; not only because of his “wounds,” but also because of his humiliating defeat in the election, which can be attributed to his unreflective desire for victory.

surpassing what their ancestors had.” The setting of the conversation can help us understand Socrates’ intention. He is speaking in Periclean Athens, about the defections and problems of Periclean Athens, with the son of Pericles. Moreover, while he praises the Persian Wars generation as the model to be imitated by contemporary Athenians, Pericles, in his famous funeral oration, allowed that it was challenged, or perhaps outshone, by the achievements of his own generation. Also, later in the conversation, he makes young Pericles ask “how the city ever took a turn for the worse” (3.5.13). By this question he makes young Pericles suggest that the turn for the worse began at the time when his great father was in charge. In addition, this theme (defending the superiority of the Persian Wars generation over the Pericles generation) manifests itself in another conversation in which Socrates asserts the superiority of Themistocles over Pericles as a leader (2.6.13).

Two things are certain: first, that Socrates clearly thinks the Persian Wars generation superior to the current Periclean generation, and second, that the former is superior in terms of the interests of the city/the ruled. But the crucial question concerns what that superiority consists in. Socrates’ apparently blunt, but in fact subtle, description of the Persian Wars generation provides an answer by taking us back to the theme of the previous chapter: their virtue and superiority consisted in their ability to acquire huge amounts of “power and resources” for the city. They first and foremost acquired things of a quantitative nature which could be procured through the good household manager’s calculative abilities. Indeed, they also acquired admiration, honor, distinction, and renown, but by not mentioning these, Socrates implies that their ability to acquire vast power and resources (most likely acquired through calculation) is the cause of acquiring the latter good things. In other words, his reason for calling them superior is more or less the same as his reason for calling Antisthenes superior.

Recalling his comparison of Themistocles with Pericles can confirm such an interpretation of Socrates’ intention: while Themistocles “attached some good to the city,” Pericles only relied

on “chanting incantation.” This “chanting incantation” obviously refers to Pericles’ superior rhetorical abilities, but when contrasted with Themistocles “attaching some good to the city,” it manifests itself as a kind of infertile virtue, a virtue without any benefit for the city, like Nicomachides’ infertile courage, which ends up as the profitless display of “wounds.” On the other hand, the mention of calculation at the start of the chapter as the right way to solve the city’s problems, and his insistence on the alleged fact that “fear [in contrast to “self-confidence”] makes people more attentive, more obedient, and more orderly” (*Mem.* 3.5.5), lead us to the conclusion that Themistocles and the Persian Wars generation lacked that self-confidence and its concomitant “chanting incantations” (Pericles’ funeral oration is a great example of such a link) and thus added great power and resources to the city.

Thus, 3.5 provides an historical argument in favor of the relation between calculation and the interest of the ruled: while the Persian Wars generation, by employing prudent calculations, not only saved the city from calamity but also gained an empire for Athens, the Periclean generation, through extreme ambition, honor, courage, and relying on “chanting incantations,” destroyed the Athenian empire.¹⁵ The Persian Wars generation

¹⁵ We can compare the calculative nature of the victorious battle of Salamis with the ambitious nature of the disastrous Sicilian expedition. Comparing the “despair” of those who stayed in Athens and the eventual victory of those who left Athens in Herodotus’ account easily proves Socrates’ point (*Hdt.* 8.52). One may object, by referring to Themistocles’ speech to the soldiers, that the decision to fight at Salamis instead of Isthmus was an instance of Athenian courage: “If you stay here, you will prove yourself a brave man” (8.62). But to understand the true nature of the decision, we have to consider the earlier advice of Mnesiphilus which convinced Themistocles to stay at Salamis: “‘No! I tell you that if you move these ships from Salamis, you won’t have a country to fight for. Everyone will head for his own city. Neither Eurybiades nor anyone else will be able to prevent them from scattering the fleet, and the Greece will be lost through sheer heedlessness!’ ... Themistocles liked this suggestion very much” (8.57–58). In other words, Themistocles stayed at Salamis out of knowledge of the natural behavior of the soldiers and, thus, out of sheer calculation of benefit and harm. For the Sicilian expedition,

had exploited the opportunities and established an unprecedented and unexpected empire through their prudence and calculative spirit, while the Periclean generation ruined an empire through their uncalculating hopes and ambitions. Awareness of the possibility of defeat and disaster, and diligence in avoiding it, is the chief advantage of the calculative notion of statesmanship. The calculative virtue of the statesman is able to dispel the “enchancements” caused by excessive love of victory, and therewith creates awareness of defeat and disaster; such awareness serves as a reliable foundation for pursuing achievable victories and benefits. It is not an accident that Socrates ended his account of Antisthenes’ superiority by stressing his awareness of the harm of being defeated.

Chapter 3.6 pursues the same theme of calculation contrasted with rhetoric, and the good effects of the former for the interests of the ruled. Glaucon is getting ready to deliver a speech in the Athenian assembly. His relatives know that he is unskilled at speaking, and thus they ask Socrates to stop him from doing so (3.6.1). As the first step, Socrates attempts to convince him that the city honors those who “benefit” it. And he begins his instruction not by teaching rhetoric (or the art of chanting incantations), but by insisting that statesmanship consists in having a calculative knowledge about economic and military affairs, and finishes his lesson by advising him to manage his uncle’s household (4–15). Knowledge, though not the knowledge of Ideas but the calculative knowledge about military outposts and silver mines, which in the last analysis is informed by and reducible to the art of household management, replaces or precedes any rhetoric (18). Since Socrates presents his doctrine as an answer to the question of how to benefit the city, his refusal to teach rhetoric, and his insistence on a kind of calculative knowledge, clearly show that the latter serves the interests of the ruled.

Thucydides’ opening remarks will suffice (6.1): “the Athenians conceived a renewed ambition to subjugate Sicily, hoped to achieve this with a naval expedition of greater scale than those under Laches and Eurymedon. Most Athenians were ignorant of the extent of the island and the size of its population.”

Moreover, in Xenophon's non-Socratic writings we find one of the most important implications of his argument in favor of the identification doctrine: that there is a link between excessive, uncalculated, unenlightened love of honor, and tyranny. This implicit argument of Socrates is confirmed by explicit examples. In the *Cyropaedia*, the chief tyrant figure is the last king of Assyria. His tyrannical acts are manifested, above all, in the way he treated Gobryas and Gadatas. He killed the son of Gobryas because he exhibited his superior hunting skills in front of him and his soldiers, and castrated Gadatas because his mistress admired Gadatas' beauty in his presence (*Cyr.* 4.6.3–5, 5.2.28). Both cases were, in the final analysis, animated by his excessive love of honor and thus love of victory. In Xenophon's mind, this intense obsession with distinction, victory, and honor is deeply linked to tyranny. And since Socrates explicitly defended the economic notion of the statesman in contrast to the honor-loving statesman, he also implicitly defends the calculative notion of the statesman as being a possible remedy against tyrannical tendencies. It seems that the cold, calculative, and prudent quality of the Socratic statesman tends to restrain the unenlightened and unreflective element inherent in all intense desire for honor, and thus restrains tyranny, at least in its most excessive manifestations; and, of course, restraining tyranny is clearly to the benefit of the ruled.

Thus, 3.5 and 3.6 show how the identification doctrine can serve the interests of the ruled. We have argued that Socrates proved this advantage of the doctrine by two distinct lines of argument: first, that the calculative notion of statesmanship, by fostering in the statesman awareness of defeat and disaster, serves as a cognitive foundation for pursuing achievable ends for the city; second, that the calculative notion restrains the unreflective and unenlightened impulses inherent in excessive love of victory and thereby lessens the possibility of tyranny.

The second reason: serving the interests of the rulers

As we have seen, a *practical* political doctrine should also serve the interests of the rulers. Of course, in many cases the interests of the rulers and ruled converge. But a political doctrine in-

formed by the realities of political life takes account of the situations in which their interests collide. In these situations, the most extreme danger for the ruled is the problem of tyranny, and we saw in previous section how the identification doctrine tends to reduce the possibility of tyranny. But what is the extreme danger for the rulers? In other words, what is the most fundamental interest of the rulers?

The answer to this is provided by Xenophon's political work par excellence, the text which bears the name of the most majestic ruler of ancient times. The *Cyropaedia* opens with "reflection" (ἔννοια) about the problem of instability of regimes, that is, the unpleasant fact that every regime can face the worst kind of tragedy, its downfall by internal enemies. In the process, Xenophon names all the regime forms known to his contemporaries. All of them suffer from this fundamental defect. By naming all the regimes, he implicitly claims that a possible solution to this problem is unrelated to the form of government or regime (1.1.1). Yet he next asserts that ruling over human beings (i.e. avoiding the possibility of a regime's downfall) is not impossible or difficult "if one does it with knowledge" (1.1.3). His stress on knowledge reminds us of Socrates' stress on knowledge in his conversation with Nicomachides, Pericles, and Glaucon. Both texts see knowledge as the most important quality of the statesman. Another similarity between *Cyropaedia* and *Memorabilia* is that both Xenophon and his Socrates have the same knowledge in mind. Cyrus' first speech to the Persian peers, concerning the achievements of their ancestors and his insistence on benefit and profit as the true rewards of virtue (1.5.7–14), has a striking similarity to Socrates' discussion of the Athenians' ancestors and his preference for Themistocles as he benefited the city (*Mem.* 3.6.2). Both Xenophon and Xenophon's Socrates have the same knowledge in mind: "knowledge of what is beneficial and harmful." These similarities point to the conclusion that the fundamental interest of the rulers for Xenophon's Socrates is the regime's stability, and that the "knowledge of the beneficial and

harmful” can overcome that difficulty.¹⁶ The question, then, is how can such knowledge overcome the difficulty and thus serve the fundamental interest of the rulers?

I believe that the answer is provided in *Memorabilia* 3.7. But we must first consider a hint provided in 3.4. Socrates asserts that public and private affairs are identical since “neither takes place without human beings”; and more importantly, “those who attend to public affairs do not deal with any other human beings than those whom they deal with in private affairs when managing their households” (3.4.12). In other words, the identification doctrine is based on knowledge of the nature of human beings, or more precisely, the nature of the ruled, i.e. the people. Such a firm basis (that is, accommodating the nature of the ruled) not only justifies the identification doctrine, but also explains how this doctrine can serve the interests of the rulers.

Chapter 3.7 narrates a conversation between Socrates and *axiologos* Charmides, son of Glaucon. It seems that he is noteworthy because he is “far more capable in politics” than other contemporary statesmen, and because he is “competent to win the victory.” However, unlike that incompetent victory-lover Nicomachides, he is hesitant to “approach the *demos*” and attend to the affairs of the city (3.7.1). Socrates traces his hesitance to a certain kind of fear: being afraid of “conversing with the city.” He is afraid of the city because they “ridicule those who speak correctly” (3.7.7–8). Socrates appears in this chapter as a liberator: he liberates Charmides from the fear of the city, from “shame” (3.8.6). To counter this fear, Socrates tries to remind him that the city is nothing more than the fullers, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, farmers, merchants, or those who bargain in the agora (3.7.6). The city, at least for the most part, consists of

¹⁶ It is obvious that Xenophon preferred a more implicit presentation of the second reason, and the only way to discover that reason (as we saw) is by being attentive to the similarities between *Memorabilia* and Xenophon’s non-Socratic writings. The reason for such a presentation in *Memorabilia* is clear: it is easier to discuss the dark facts of politics in a work which is dedicated to Cyrus rather than to Socrates (especially a work which is dedicated to defending him against accusations, one of which was assisting the tyrants).

profiteering household managers. The statesman deals with the same human beings in both private and public affairs. Accordingly, what the people want from their regime is above all benefit and profit (it is very hard to imagine that an artisan asks for honor or virtue: *Oec.* 4.2, 6.7). They look for benefit both in their private spheres and in the agora; they “bargain” in the agora. This is the chief reason why the Athenians preferred the economist Antisthenes to the “wounded” Nicomachides. While the latter’s wounds could not benefit them, the former’s economic skill had already made them victorious in many contests.

One may object that Socrates’ description of the city in 3.7 is in fact an implicit criticism of Athenian democracy.¹⁷ For in Xenophon’s writings we hear of a regime whose “free square” (ἐλευθέρα ἀγορά) is free of the vulgar cries of merchants (*Cyr.* 1.2.3). In the first book of the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon shows the reader that such a regime was the result of a rigorous education program (1.2.3–16). Therefore, we cannot or should not reduce the ruled to the profit-seeking vulgar. However, Xenophon wants us to realize that such a non-reductive attitude presupposes the possibility and durability of a rigorous educational system. The *Cyropaedia* as a whole, as the title’s inclusion of the term “education” suggests, examines the question of the educability of man, or the possibility of education in the general sense of the term. While the book starts as an account of the education which Cyrus and his peers received in old Persia, it gradually turns into an account of the corruption of old Persia at the hands of Cyrus (1.2.3). The Persian peers’ virtue, which was the result of long and painstaking education, was corrupted overnight by an intelligent speech of Cyrus promising vast riches and benefits (1.5.7–14). Man is both educable and corruptible. The crucial point is that while education to virtue is a long and painstaking process, the route to corruption is short and even in-

¹⁷ See S. B. Ferrario, “Xenophon and Greek Political Thought,” in M. A. Flower (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* (New York 2017) 66; Thomas Pangle, *The Socratic Way of Life: Xenophon’s Memorabilia* (Chicago 2018) 136–138.

evitable. The road to virtue is hard and long, while the road to vice is short and easy (*Mem.* 2.1.29).¹⁸ While corrupting the educated is an ever-present possibility, educating the corrupt is almost an impossibility; that is why any true and practical education to virtue must begin in early childhood (*Cyr.* 1.2.3). In other words, the corruptibility of man overcomes the educability of man. Xenophon explicitly provides the philosophical foundation for that claim in an early passage of the *Memorabilia*: discussing the case of Alcibiades and Critias, he argues that it is possible for the moderate man to become insolent, the just one to become unjust, and the one who has learned something “to lose that knowledge” (*Mem.* 1.2.19).

Thus, in 3.7 Socrates does not criticize anyone or anything at all, or at least his chief aim is not criticism. Rather, he describes the fundamental nature of the ruled/the people. They are either corrupt (Athenian democracy) or easily corruptible (Persians). This is in agreement with another Xenophontic observation, this time in the *Hellenica*: “it seems most people define as good men those who confer benefit on them” (*Hell.* 7.3.12). This statement about “most people” confirms the Socratic observation that the city is full of fullers and those who bargain in the agora. The polity, whether democratic, oligarchic, or monarchic, mostly consists of benefit-seeking individuals. The city as a whole is a benefit-seeking tyrant. Given this fundamental fact, a political doctrine has two options for dealing with the city: educate or prudently gratify it.¹⁹ As we have seen, the possibility of political

¹⁸ This is one of the arguments of Vice against Virtue in Heracles’ story. Interestingly, this is the only argument which makes Virtue angry (“Wretch!”).

¹⁹ There is an important difference between simple gratifying and prudent gratifying. The former is the function of demagogues. The demagogue is not a statesman proper: he is actually the city personified. He accommodates his prudence (that is, his knowledge of the beneficial and harmful) to the prudence of the city. He resembles the city in both ends and means. He does so to acquire the temporary obedience of the people; eventually, he either becomes the tyrant, or destroys the city. But the Socratic statesman does not subject his prudence to the city; he only accepts the people’s ends and not their calculations about how to achieve those ends. He actually, by his superior prudence, convinces the city to obey him in securing their ends.

education is very slight. Thus, the only option is gratification. Xenophon's Socrates suggests that the art and skill of a good household manager, namely the "knowledge of the beneficial and harmful," is the key to prudently gratifying the people, and hence to stability.

Accordingly, Socrates does not instruct Charmides to *improve* the city. He only asks him "to converse with the city," and assures him that, given his "noteworthy" nature, he would be successful in such a conversation (3.7.1, 7). In other words, Charmides' superiority in knowledge, and not his unreflective honor-loving or courage, is the key to acquiring the obedience of the city. Human beings willingly obey "whomever they think to be more prudent about their own advantage than they are themselves" (3.4.9–11; cf. *Cyr.* 1.6.21). In other words, they only obey the "good household manager." He does not need to force them to elevate or improve their desires through a rigid educational system, rather he only convinces them to entrust the gratification of their desires to his prudence and superior knowledge. The statesman is the good household manager who is employed by the city to manage their households: to "increase" the city and thereby their individual households (*Oec.* 1.4–5). Human beings "do not know from which actions good things will become theirs" (*Cyr.* 1.6.44). They know what they want, but they do not know the ways that can lead them to it. The good household manager, with his "knowledge of the beneficial and harmful," is aware of the causes, the ways and means, the *poroi*. It is not an accident that in his last work,²⁰ Xenophon, "based on his reflections," suggests the proper "ways and means" to justice and city's prosperity. Not surprisingly, all his suggestions revolve around the preference of economic-minded policies over war-minded policies, and he claims that these ways and means not only will let Athenians "feed themselves from their own," but also will lead to "what is always more agreeable and better for the city" (*Vect.* 1.1–2, 6.2). His reflections, by their calculative nature, not only start from humble beginnings (feeding the

²⁰ J. W. I. Lee, in *Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 34.

people), but also aim for what is “always” agreeable to the city, and thus set the stage for a slow and stable progress towards a “better” state. A stable bettering replaces an unstable best.

Last but not least, Xenophon’s Socrates’ *oikonomikos* statesman and his role and function in human life remind us of the gods and their role and function in human life.²¹ According to both Socrates and Cambyses, only gods know the outcomes of human actions. Only they know the results, because they know the causes, the ways and means, the *poroi* of beneficial things. Thus, people must honor the gods through sacrifices and piety—through “obeying them” (*Mem.* 4.3.17)—in order to convince the gods to send signs regarding “what they ought to do and what they ought not” (*Cyr.* 1.6.44–46, *Mem.* 4.3.12–14). The gods are the master *oikonomoi* of the whole cosmos including living things and especially human beings, who through their piety and obedience acquire the counsels of gods regarding what is beneficial (*Oec.* 5.20). The relationship obedience/benefit leads to the willing obedience of human beings, and therewith the stable government of the gods over human beings. The section which contains the identification doctrine (*Mem.* 3.1–7) is completely silent about the gods, i.e. about the *oikonomoi* of the cosmos. Instead, it presents the figure of the statesman as the master *oikonomos* of the city, the one who is supposed to benefit the city through his prudence and knowledge, who acts according to the divine rule of obedience/benefit. His rule will be perennial.

Conclusion

Socrates’ identification of household management and politics is not primarily an anti-democratic doctrine or a manifest blunder or even an ironical doctrine. Rather, it is a political doctrine proper, a doctrine meant to be followed by actual statesmen. As *Mem.* 3.4 makes clear, Socrates especially sets this doctrine against the honor-loving and courageous character of statesmen of his time personified in Nicomachides (a more absurd version of Nicomachides also provided in 3.6 in the character of Glaucon). I have tried to show that the identification

²¹ See Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socratic Discourse* 113.

doctrine first of all relies on a reductive definition of household management. For Socrates, household management is devoid of any “noble” activities or skills; he reduces it to a certain kind of knowledge, “knowledge of what is beneficial and harmful.” This knowledge, and only this knowledge, is his art. After redefining household management, he goes on to argue that a household manager is able to be a statesman, or the statesman and household manager are identical.

I argued that he provides two fundamental reasons for his claim: first, it serves the interests of the ruled; second, it serves the interest of the rulers. Concerning the first, he uses an historical example to show how the more prudent Persian Wars generation was more successful than the bold and honor-loving Periclean generation. Also, he implicitly shows how an economic concept of statesmanship, because of its inherent calculative and prudent qualities, can restrain tyrannical inclinations on the part of the rulers. The second reason focuses on the most fundamental interests of the rulers, avoidance of being overthrown by natural enemies—the regime’s stability. Socrates’ argument relies on a conception of the nature of the ruled/the people, which we called their corruptible nature. A stable and practical political doctrine has no other choice than to affirm this fact about the nature of people; in other words, in politics, prudent gratifying takes precedence over educating. Thus, since the economic statesman, by virtue of his art, excels in prudently gratifying the people (he is not a demagogue), he also guaranties the regime’s stability.

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Islamic Azad University Tehran,
North Branch
Tehran, Iran
jeirani1980@gmail.com