

ALCIBIADES VERSUS PERICLES: APOLOGETIC STRATEGIES IN XENOPHON'S *MEMORABILIA**

One of Xenophon's chief aims in *Memorabilia* is to defend his beloved teacher from charges raised both during and after his trial. Some readers have thought that he has gone so far in whitewashing Socrates that the resulting portrait makes it impossible to explain the hostility he aroused.¹ Socrates appears here merely as an innocuous friend offering good advice on all sorts of mundane subjects. But the apologetic strategies employed by Xenophon are more complex and subtle than that. The widespread view of him as a simple-minded defender of conventional attitudes blinds us to the places where he speaks with a different, more radical voice. We should not be surprised to find that the enthusiastic student of Socrates, one of the most radical and unconventional thinkers of ancient Greece, has some radical thoughts of his own.

One of the difficult passages for the usual view of Xenophon's apologetic strategy is the conversation between Socrates' student Alcibiades and the great leader of Athens, Pericles, in the second chapter of Book 1 (1.2.41–6). In this conversation, the young Alcibiades delivers a verbal thrashing to the elder statesman, who was also his legal guardian, showing that his conception of law is deeply flawed and implying strongly that his privileging of democracy over other forms of rule is arbitrary. This scene is clearly related to the charge that Socrates transmitted valuable political skills to his students without insuring that they possessed the requisite moral character (*Mem.* 1.2.17). The conversation is problematic both for the behaviour that Alcibiades displays and for the content of his argument. Alcibiades demonstrates disrespect

* Some of the comments in this article were originally presented as part of a review of Louis-André Dorion's commentary on the *Memorabilia* at the Socratica III conference in Trento. My thanks to the participants in the conference and to David Schaps for helpful comments and suggestions. None of them has seen the article in its current form. All translations are my own.

¹ See John Burner's influential comment, 'Xenophon's defence of Socrates is too successful. He would never have been put to death if he had been like that.' *Greek Philosophy. From Thales to Plato* (London, 1914), 120.

for the political and familial authority that Pericles represents, and argues forcefully against the privileging of democratic law. As a whole, the scene appears to show that Socrates taught his students political skills that are easily abused, as well as disrespect for the political and familial institutions of Athens.

Understandably enough, the scene is most often treated as one of Xenophon's blunders: in a chapter dedicated to defending Socrates from the charge of corrupting the youth, Xenophon inadvertently introduces a scene which shows that he did just that. Given the implied dramatic date of the conversation – while Pericles was alive – Xenophon was certainly not witness to it. He is relying on some other authority, or more probably on his own invention, in order to introduce this damning portrait.² But this only sharpens the question. Why would Xenophon believe such a negative portrait of Socrates' influence, or why invent a scene that causes such trouble? And why place it in a chapter devoted to defending Socrates from the charge of corrupting the youth?

When viewed within a broader apologetic framework it is possible to identify many ways in which this scene plays a valuable role in the defence of Socrates. Its arguments are connected integrally to a whole range of characteristically Xenophontic conceptions, both ethical and political. In fact, the conversation between Alcibiades and Pericles presents a unique opportunity to evaluate some of the challenging implications of Xenophon's Socratic thought. Here more than anywhere, Xenophon engages in an aggressive form of apologetics, reminding the reader that Socrates did criticize Athenian democracy, and that he was right to do so. Alcibiades also provided Xenophon, as well as Plato, with a rare opportunity to display Socrates' connection with a prominent player on the dramatic stage of Athenian political life and thereby to bring some celebrity into Socrates' politically unimpressive life. The scene also enables Xenophon to highlight Socrates' competitive abilities. In the interrogation of Pericles, Xenophon demonstrates more vividly than anywhere else the skills that Socrates was able to transmit, even if those skills may sometimes have been used in ways that seemed offensive to some.

However, because he is addressing multiple readerships with various and differing sentiments, Xenophon refrains from passing any explicit

² See L.-A. Dorion (tr.), *Xénophon. Mémoires* (Paris, 2000–11), i.104–5, n. 129.

judgement on the behaviour that he attributes to Alcibiades. He does not say that he approves of behaviour which would have seemed offensive to many members of the audience, but he does not say that he disapproves either. He provides enough material to allow sympathetic readers to draw a positive conclusion on their own without implicating himself in sympathy for behaviour that would have seemed offensive to others.

Apologetic incompetence?

Most commentators believe that Xenophon most emphatically does not approve of the behaviour that Alcibiades displays here, and some argue that the scene is presented not as an example of Socrates' influence on Alcibiades but as the kind of behaviour that Alcibiades engaged in independently of Socrates and against his wishes. Indeed, Xenophon clearly denies that Alcibiades and Critias were fully fledged students of Socrates: they had no real interest in becoming his students but associated with him only as a means to acquiring skills useful for the political careers they had in mind (*Mem.* 1.2.14–16). Students never gain a real education (*paideusis*) from someone with whom they have no genuine sympathy (*Mem.* 1.2.39). Thus the behaviour and opinions of Alcibiades and Critias cannot be taken as illustrative of the goals of Socrates' educational efforts.

The problem is that Xenophon never clearly dissociates Socrates from the conversation with Pericles; on the contrary, he makes it clear that Alcibiades acquired the skills he displays here from his association with Socrates. He says that Alcibiades and Critias knew that Socrates lived independently on very few resources, that he was most self-controlled with regard to all pleasures, and that he could handle all conversationalists however he wished (*Mem.* 1.2.14). They associated with Socrates not in order to gain the moral qualities that he possessed but rather 'to become most competent in speech and action' (*γενέσθαι ἄν ἱκανωτάτω λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν; Mem.* 1.2.15). By saying that, as soon as they judged themselves better than the other associates, they abandoned Socrates' company (*Mem.* 1.2.16), Xenophon makes it clear that they did indeed acquire verbal skills from Socrates. He concludes his description of the interrogation of Pericles by commenting that as soon as they believed they were superior to the politicians they left Socrates' companionship (*Mem.* 1.2.47). Clearly, then, they left

Socrates after they had acquired the skills they sought; no less clearly, the conversation between Alcibiades and Pericles is designed to illustrate the level of competence in disputation that Alcibiades acquired from his association with Socrates.³ It seems evident, therefore, that the young men did learn this kind of verbal skill from Socrates, even if they did not, perhaps, learn the more important moral lessons that he wished to inculcate in them.

Our question, then, is not whether or not Alcibiades acquired the skills he displays here from Socrates, but how Xenophon views this display of these skills, or rather how he intends this illustration of them to affect his audience. Louis-André Dorion acknowledges that the skills Alcibiades displays are Socratic in origin, and in his view this simply shows that Xenophon has blundered in presenting this *maladroit* scene (CLXVII). He tries to minimize the damage, arguing that the conversation must have occurred when Socrates was not around ('probablement l'une de ces bêtises qu'Alcibiade commettait en l'absence de Socrate'; 'probably one of the stupid things that Alcibiades did in Socrates' absence'; CLXIX).

But this too is far from clear. It is true that some parts of Xenophon's argument seem to indicate that scenes like this must have occurred when the young man was no longer under Socrates' influence. Xenophon clearly distinguishes between the students' behaviour while guided by the philosopher and their conduct after they left him, denying that a teacher is responsible for the later misbehaviour of his students, much as Gorgias does in Plato's *Gorgias* (1.2.26–8; see *Gorgias*, 457b–c).⁴ He argues that virtue is an inherently fragile possession liable to degenerate when there is no adequate supervision (1.2.19–23; see also *Cyropaedia*, 3.1.27, 8.8.2). He adds that Socrates deserves credit for the good behaviour of the students while they

³ Kirk Sanders has recently argued that Alcibiades is displaying sophistic rather than Socratic skills, and hence that his behaviour does not reflect Socratic influence: see 'Don't Blame Socrates (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.40–46)', *CPh* 106 (2011), 349–56. But Xenophon would certainly have denied Socratic paternity of these skills in a clear fashion if he had wanted to. As I argue below, however, he does the reverse. In any case, Xenophon does not make a categorical distinction between Socrates and the sophists in the manner of Plato. In fact, an image of Socrates that he presents in *Cyropaedia* is referred to as a sophist (3.1.14; 3.1.38).

⁴ Plato defends Socrates by displacing the charge onto sophists such as Gorgias, and portraying Socrates as pressing the arguments of his prosecutors. Depending on the relative chronology of the two compositions, he may also be aiming a swipe at what he sees as Xenophon's inept manner of defending Socrates. It is difficult to imagine Xenophon publishing the second chapter of *Memorabilia* to an audience familiar with *Gorgias*.

were under his supervision (1.2.24–5). Thus Xenophon defends Socrates by dissociating him from Alcibiades to a certain extent.

If we knew that the conversation between Alcibiades and Pericles occurred after the association was over, this would reduce Socrates' culpability for it to some extent. But it would neither eliminate the damage nor explain Xenophon's purpose in including it in *Memorabilia*. As Dorion acknowledges, this scene would still create the impression that Socrates failed to insure that the students he taught were sufficiently reliable to be entrusted with a form of knowledge that could be so easily abused,⁵ just as his accusers charged (*Mem.* 1.2.17). However, not only does Xenophon fail to stress Socrates' absence, he actually presents the conversation as the kind that took place 'while they were together' (1.2.39), and, as we have seen, he emphasizes this again when he concludes the conversation by commenting that 'as soon as they thought themselves superior to the politicians, they abandoned Socrates' (1.2.47).⁶ This shows that conversations with political leaders, including the conversation with Pericles, took place while the students were associated with Socrates.⁷ The fact that Xenophon associates Socrates with this conversation rather than dissociating him strongly suggests that he does not take or encourage a purely negative attitude towards Alcibiades' behaviour here.

Aside from disapproving of the bad behaviour that Alcibiades displays here, Dorion argues that Xenophon also disagrees with Alcibiades' substantial position on law and justice, pointing out that his position contradicts the position set forth by Socrates in *Mem.* 4.4 (CLXII). While Socrates identifies justice with obedience to statutory law, Alcibiades raises difficulties with the legitimacy of the law. But it is hard to see how Xenophon's personal preference for the opinion of Socrates would affect our judgement of the poor behaviour and opinions of his student. Moreover, it is by no means clear that Dorion is right about Xenophon's preference. Since Alcibiades'

⁵ See Dorion (n. 2), i.95–96, nn. 109–11.

⁶ Sanders (n. 3), p. 56, n. 37, argues that the first of these quotations is not decisive since it is in his view a parenthetical statement and the conversation is designed not to illustrate the kind of conversation that Alcibiades had while associating with Socrates but the fact that, prior to spending time with the philosopher, Alcibiades had political ambitions. If this were right, Xenophon would be mildly at fault for including this misleading parenthetical statement. However, the fact that Xenophon closes the scene with a second reference to Alcibiades' connection with Socrates shows well enough that the conversation is to be understood as occurring while Alcibiades was associated with him.

⁷ Dorion (n. 2), i.103–4, n. 128, acknowledges this.

argument is, as Dorion acknowledges (CLXII), more philosophically cogent than is Socrates', it seems likely that Xenophon prefers it. Socrates' less cogent position in *Mem.* 4.4 has been interpreted as reflecting apologetic aims rather than his serious philosophical thought.⁸ Alternatively, Socrates may adopt his position there for dialectical purposes. It can also be argued that Socrates does not intend to identify justice with law literally, and that the *Cyropaedia* passage (1.3.17) that is often cited as substantiating this literal identification does not support it.⁹

To support his argument that Xenophon disapproves of Alcibiades' behaviour, Dorion argues at length that Xenophon did not approve of the use of the *elenchos* (the verbal refutation for which Socrates is famous), except in rare circumstances. As I intend to show in a future publication, this conclusion is not correct. But even if it were, it would not really help, since there is no reason why Xenophon's negative opinion or our awareness of it would reduce Socrates' culpability for providing an objectionable skill to unworthy students. Nor would Xenophon's disapproval help explain his reasons for including the scene in *Memorabilia*.

Dorion also argues on *a priori* grounds that Xenophon must be presenting Alcibiades in an unambiguously negative light since the scene would be more damaging if Xenophon approved of Alcibiades' behaviour: 'il serait plutôt maladroit et, pour tout dire, contradictoire de présenter ici Alcibiades sous un jour favorable' ('it would be rather awkward and, frankly, contradictory to present Alcibiades here in a favourable light'; CLXI). However, it seems to me that if the audience reacted positively to Alcibiades' behaviour here, this would actually represent an unambiguous apologetic achievement.

From the apologetic perspective, the important question is not 'What does Xenophon think?' but 'What effect does he hope to achieve with the audience?' Displaying a positive personal attitude towards Alcibiades might reflect badly on Xenophon himself, if he fails to

⁸ See for example T. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought* (London, 1951), 90; E. Marchant and O. Todd (eds.), *Xenophon: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology* (Cambridge, 1923), xix–xx.

⁹ A full comparison with *Mem.* 4.4 is impossible in this context. However, we should also note that the conflict is not as sharp as it seems. In both places Xenophon places a premium on consent: Alcibiades argues against coercion by rulers, and Socrates argues for obedience by citizens. As is well known, Xenophon's favourite political leaders rule primarily by consent rather than coercion. See V. Gray, *Xenophon's Mirror of Princes. Reading the Reflections* (Oxford, 2011), 15–18.

convince his audience to share that positive attitude. Indeed, Xenophon does not indicate any personal admiration for Alcibiades. But it is hard to see how a display of a positive attitude would make a difference to the reader's judgement of Socrates, other than by possibly influencing it for the better.

Displaying a positive attitude towards Alcibiades' behaviour could do damage to the apologetic effort for Socrates only if, first, Xenophon's approval is taken as implying that Socrates also approved this behaviour (and hence that he also encouraged it) and, second, the judgement of the audience on Alcibiades' behaviour is unalterably negative. The latter assumption is doubtful to say the least. Alcibiades' behaviour in this scene is not extremely bad, and Xenophon has ways of justifying it, as we will see. Xenophon does not of course defend Alcibiades, but he also refrains from offering an explicit condemnation of his behaviour in this scene. He allows his readers to reach a positive judgement without committing himself to the defence of behaviour that might seem offensive to some of them. If readers did come to a similarly positive judgement, Xenophon would have achieved a great victory; for if Alcibiades' 'bad' behaviour – the kind of behaviour for the encouragement of which Socrates was condemned – is not really bad, what can one possibly say against Socrates?

There is one passage that is often cited as evidence that Xenophon unambiguously condemns both Critias and Alcibiades:

ἄλλ' ἔφη γε ὁ κατήγορος, Σωκράτει ὀμιλητὰ γενομένω Κριτίας τε καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης πλεῖστα κακὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐποίησάντην. Κριτίας μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐν τῇ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ πάντων πλεονεκτίστατός τε καὶ βιαιότατος καὶ φονικώτατος ἐγένετο, Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ αὖ τῶν ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ πάντων ἀκρατέστατός τε καὶ ὑβριστότατος καὶ βιαιότατος.

But the accuser said that Critias and Alcibiades were associates of Socrates and that they did the greatest harm to the city. For Critias was the most greedy, violent, and murderous of all in the time of the oligarchy, and Alcibiades was the most unrestrained, insulting, and violent of all in the time of the democracy. (1.2.12)

Vivienne Gray argues that here Xenophon 'even exaggerates their violence by adding thieving and murder to Critias' superlative violence, and insolence and lack of control to Alcibiades'.¹⁰ She also argues that

¹⁰ V.J. Gray, *The Framing of Socrates. The Literary Interpretation of Xenophon's Memorabilia* (Stuttgart, 1998), 46.

Xenophon refuses to defend Critias or Alcibiades because more could be said in favour of Socrates by emphasizing their corruption than by denying it. The worse he proves their mature corruption, the greater the achievement of Socrates in controlling them in their youth when they were most intractable.¹¹

But such a line of defence would be fraught with danger, since not everyone would believe that Socrates restrained his students or that he had no hand in their corruption. Moreover, this argument completely contradicts the presentation of Alcibiades as behaving insolently while still associating with Socrates. From an apologetic perspective, Xenophon would certainly have done better to minimize rather than exaggerate the crimes of Socrates' students.

Indeed, in the next sentence, when Xenophon refers clearly to such crimes, he does so in a manner that reduces rather than exaggerates their culpability. He begins his defence of Socrates on this count with the following words: ἐγὼ δ', εἰ μὲν τι κακὸν ἐκείνω τὴν πόλιν ἐποησάτην, οὐκ ἀπολογήσομαι ('But, for my part, if these two did some harm to the city, I will not defend them'; 1.2.13). Although the context of the comment implies that Xenophon acknowledges that Critias and Alcibiades caused damage to the city, he actually speaks of that damage as hypothetical (εἰ). Moreover, his use of the words τι κακὸν implies crimes on a much lower scale than those recorded in *Hellenica*. This *meiosis* may reflect merely Xenophon's lack of interest in entering into a discussion of the topic at this point. But gliding over the crimes in this way also contributes to softening negative public opinion concerning Socrates' infamous students.

Why then did Xenophon attribute so many criminal superlatives to Critias and Alcibiades a moment before when speaking in his own voice? The answer is that he did not. Although often taken as Xenophon's own, the statement in which Xenophon refers to the crimes of Critias and Alcibiades is ambiguous in its attribution. Grammatically, it may represent either the words of the accuser or those of the narrator. To my mind it seems more reasonable to assume that it represents the words of the accuser, Polycrates, who would have had an interest in using these superlatives to refer to Socrates' students. After concluding this sentence, Xenophon writes in his own voice the sentence quoted above beginning with the word ἐγὼ ('But, for my part'; 1.2.13). When Xenophon opens a response to an accusation

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

with this word he generally places it immediately after the words of accusation (see 1.2.10; 1.2.17; 1.2.19; 1.2.53). This seems to indicate that the previous words, including the sentence with the superlatives, are to be understood as those of the accuser.

On the other hand, the use of γάρ ('for') is very natural in a parenthetical statement, so the superlative sentence does not have to be read as a statement of the accuser. Perhaps the most balanced conclusion is that Xenophon leaves the attribution of this statement in the air. He has to mention the charges against Socrates' students, but he does not want either to affirm them unambiguously in his own voice, since this would be to Socrates' detriment, or to appear to be denying them, since this would lose him credibility in the eyes of some members of his audience. Instead he mentions the charges in such a way that they can be understood either as his own admission or merely as a report of what was said, depending on the reader's bias. In this way he allows sympathetic readers to reach mild conclusions about Alcibiades without offending those who would not agree. This neutral authorial stance has an advantage over a more openly partisan approach: not only does it protect the author from possible hostile reactions, but it also allows the audience to believe that it has reached its conclusions on its own. This neutral pose characterizes Xenophon's treatment of some of the more difficult apologetic issues.¹²

There is one more subject that needs to be considered before we look at the passage in detail. One reason why the scene has seemed so bad is that commentators on Xenophon tend to assume that his aim is to portray Socrates in as innocent a light as possible. This is a misleading assumption. While Xenophon does deny some of the charges against Socrates, his general method of responding to accusations against the philosopher is to admit that he did or said the things in question and to justify his doing so. Rather than denying that Socrates made fun of the use of a bean to choose political leaders in Athens, for example, Xenophon acknowledges this behaviour and himself describes the lot in a ludicrous fashion (1.2.9).¹³ Given this tendency, we should not be surprised to observe that the conversation with Pericles confirms and justifies some of the problematic behaviour attributed to Socrates

¹² This neutrality can be seen, for example, in the important statement in 1.4.1 on Socrates' use of the *elenchos*, as I plan to show in a future publication.

¹³ This mode of apologetics is not discussed in detail by Gray (n. 10), ch. 3, in her treatment of Xenophon's apologetic rhetoric, although she does mention it.

rather than denying it. This becomes particularly clear when we compare this scene with Xenophon's explicit defence of Socrates from the relevant charges of the accuser. Xenophon never insists that Socrates was guilty as charged, and he always allows for a relatively innocuous interpretation of his words, but at the same time his discussion consistently offers material that justifies rather than denies Socrates' wrongdoing.

Disrespect for the law

The main subject of the conversation is the law, and the conclusion to which Alcibiades drives Pericles is that all law, including democratic law, is based on violence and hence is unlawful. If Socrates taught these ideas to Alcibiades and others, he undoubtedly taught them to hold the law in low regard. The fact that his students Plato and Xenophon both exhibit problematic attitudes towards the law suggests strongly that these attitudes do derive in some way from their admired teacher. But, while acknowledging that Socrates himself was the source of such attitudes, Xenophon finds ways to justify and defend him.

Alcibiades begins the conversation by asking Pericles if he knows what law is, explaining that one reason he asks is that some people are praised for being *nomimoi* ('law-abiding'), and that such praise is misplaced if they do not know what law is (1.2.41). Pericles' failure to explain what law is therefore implies that he does not deserve praise as *nomimos*. It also implies that other people who share Pericles' incoherent opinions about law do not deserve praise as *nomimoi*. This would include the vast majority of citizens in Athens, among them those who voted for Socrates' condemnation. Given this, criticism of Socrates for his alleged lack of respect for the law is misplaced: at worst he was not very different from the other ignorant citizens of Athens; at best he might have been the only real *nomimos* in Athens. Not knowing what law is, the majority of citizens in Athens were certainly not in any position to cast judgement on Socrates and his attitude towards the law.

Pericles responds to Alcibiades' request for a definition of law by offering a realist, democratic description of laws, saying that they are the rules enacted by the majority (*plethos*) in assembly declaring what ought to be done and avoided. Alcibiades challenges this view by asking whether the majority declare that one must do the good or the bad, and Pericles replies that they declare that one must do the good, thereby

acknowledging a second and potentially contradictory idealist criterion for determining what is law. Xenophon does not pursue this line of reasoning any further,¹⁴ as Plato undoubtedly would have done; by raising the issue, however, he reminds readers that the laws enacted by the majority in Athens were not necessarily good, that goodness could be considered an essential characteristic of law, and hence that Athenian law was not necessarily valid law. This would justify the kind of critique of Athenian law that Socrates made, for example, when he criticized the foolishness of the lot.¹⁵

Alcibiades' main argument, however, concerns not the non-idealist character of statutory law but rather its non-consensual character. After drawing Pericles to acknowledge that even non-democratic laws, such as oligarchic and despotic laws, are legitimate forms of law, Alcibiades raises an objection based on the principle of consent. Relying on the common equation of violence and lawlessness (*bia kai anomia*: see Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.17, Pl. *Phd.* 82a), he asks Pericles to define them,¹⁶ suggesting to him that they occur when the stronger compels the weaker to do whatever seems best to him (ὁ τι ἄν ἀντὶ δόκῆ; 1.2.44), using force rather than persuasion. When Pericles agrees to this, he is forced to retract his opinion that the laws of despots are laws.¹⁷ Alcibiades extends this principle to oligarchies, and then to democracies, asking whether laws that are enacted

¹⁴ O. Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien* (Basle, 1953), 67–70, saw this as a sign that Xenophon is relying on another composition in which the discussion of the good played a larger role and that he has summarized it in an incompetent fashion. We have suggested an apologetic aim for raising this critique, but it is also easy to explain why Xenophon does not allow Alcibiades to pursue it further: an idealist conception of the law would provide a basis for approving laws that are based on violence and hence undermine his main argument against democratic law.

¹⁵ The very fact that Alcibiades raises this question shows, incidentally, that Xenophon recognized the possibility of bad laws, and hence that Socrates' apparent equation of law and justice in *Mem.* 4.4.12 (τὸ αὐτὸ νόμιόν τε καὶ δίκαιον εἶναι; 'the law-abiding and the just are the same thing') cannot be taken literally. David Johnson has recently pointed out that Xenophon uses identical language to claim that fire and sun are the same ('Strauss on Xenophon', in Fiona Hobden and Christopher Tuplin (eds.), *Xenophon. Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry* [Leiden and Boston, MA, 2012], 143–4). He argues that this language cannot be taken literally, since there are examples of fire which are not sun. However, this example does not save Xenophon from the charge that he has no standard from which to criticize unjust laws. Xenophon's equation of fire and sun seems to imply that the sun is a subset of fire. If law-abiding behaviour is a subset of justice, then Xenophon will remain unable to argue for the existence of unjust laws. Better grounds for the critique of statutory law can be found in the unwritten law (*Mem.* 4.4).

¹⁶ Dorion (n. 2), i.105–6, n. 134, argues that the identification of lawlessness with violence is an unfair step (see also i.106–7, n. 139). But that does not affect the argument significantly, since law will be shown to be violent in any case.

¹⁷ Notice that no claim is made that there is any difference between the use of force by a government and its use by anyone else. To the best of my knowledge, that artificial distinction was not formulated by Greek thinkers.

by a majority against the will of a minority are not violent and unlawful. Pericles cannot deny that the majority uses compulsion, but while he was willing to draw the conclusion that despotic and oligarchic laws are not laws when they rest on compulsion, he is unwilling to draw a similar conclusion about democratic laws.

This attack on what seems an essential feature of all statutory law is difficult for modern readers to take seriously. It is hard to believe that Xenophon sincerely denies the legitimacy of all regimes that use coercion. Given his oligarchic sympathies (see *Mem.* 2.6), he may intend to justify oligarchy by pointing out that even democracy is not free from coercive measures. But there are grounds for arguing that Xenophon really accepts Alcibiades' critique of law and rejects the use of coercion, even by the majority, in any well-run political organization. He has serious reservations about the use of law to control a community, stemming not from any theory of individual rights but from his experience as the leader of a small military community, where he learned the value of willing obedience as opposed to compulsion and law. His dislike for coercive legislation can be found throughout his work. Xenophon's Cyrus does not make use of law in establishing his empire but rather aims to win willing obedience from his followers. In the introduction to *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon reflects on the insufficiency of all known constitutions – monarchic, oligarchic, and democratic – and, rather than suggesting an alternative one or a mixed regime, he describes the non-constitutional rule of the best man (*Cyr.* 1.1). Similarly, in defending Socrates against the charge of fomenting violence, he argues that the wise prefer persuasion over force because it is more useful (*Mem.* 1.2.10–11). On this score, Xenophon shows some signs of agreement with Plato, whose *Republic* contains a lengthy argument showing that law is an ineffective tool and that the good character of the citizens is the preferred solution (423d–427b). For Xenophon, persuasion and consent, together with utilitarian insight, replace violence and law as the ruling principles of the political community, just as for Plato philosophical and ethical knowledge replaces them.

For these reasons, it seems that Xenophon would agree with Alcibiades' critique of the law as violent, and that this critique plays an important role in explaining his dislike of law. But while this line of argument denies the legitimacy of non-consensual legislation, we should note that it does not in itself require that the citizen ignore or disobey the law. Xenophon does not say that Socrates encouraged disobedience; but his arguments do imply that any obedience on their part would have the

character of voluntary submission to the law despite its illegitimacy. In *Mem.* 4.4 Socrates praises obedience to the law not on the grounds of obligation (as in Plato's *Críto*) but as a contribution to the successful functioning of the social organism.¹⁸ Such obedience would in itself, incidentally, transform illegitimate coercive law into legitimate consensual directives, thus eliminating Alcibiades' chief objection to the law. At the same time, his anti-nomian argument removes the sting from any charges of disrespect or disobedience to the law that Socrates or his students may have shown: violent measures do not deserve respect. Moreover, by showing that democratic law is based on violence, Xenophon effectively turns the tables on Socrates' accusers: it was not Socrates who encouraged violence but the state which used it against him and other minorities.

These conclusions are confirmed by Xenophon's explicit defence of Socrates from this charge (*Mem.* 1.2.9–11). While raising the accusation at length, Xenophon never denies that Socrates taught his students to treat the law with disrespect. Instead, he argues that he did not encourage violence. This seems to confirm the suggestion that Socrates was the source not only of Alcibiades' manner of disputation but also of his substantial arguments against the law. In fact, given the dependence of law on coercion or violence, Socrates' opposition to violence actually implies his opposition to law as well.

Xenophon argues that the use of violence is fitting to those who have power without wisdom (*gnōmēs*) and to those who possess many allies, but not to those who can persuade (1.2.10–11). Socrates would not have used violence. But who would use it? While this statement may refer to small groups of bullies, it applies equally well to the Athenian democracy itself, which used violence, as Alcibiades shows, in imposing the law.¹⁹ It was not Socrates who encouraged violence but the democracy that executed him that made use of the violence inherent in its coercive legislation.

¹⁸ Similarly, while Plato's Socrates accepts an unjust death because of his deep moral obligation to the law, Xenophon's Socrates accepts death simply because he stands to gain from it (*Xen. Ap.* 1).

¹⁹ Socrates' students seem to agree that the democracy was a form of compulsion. Plato's contrast of the violence of the majority with the persuasion of the single individual (*Pl. Resp.* 327c) is a clear image of the philosopher's relations with the democracy.

Teaching political skills to irresponsible students

As I noted above, one of the chief charges against Socrates was teaching political skills to irresponsible students who might use these skills in offensive ways (1.2.17). The interrogation of Pericles has been judged misguided largely because it tends to support this charge. Xenophon has already responded to the charge in part, as we have seen, by arguing that Socrates himself was a model of good behaviour and that he restrained his students as long as they were under his influence. Since Alcibiades' conversation with Pericles took place while he was still under Socrates' influence, it stands to reason that it does not exemplify bad behaviour. In other words, Xenophon's main point is not that Socrates did not encourage this kind of behaviour, but rather, as usual, that he was justified in doing so. Pericles deserved the treatment he received at Alcibiades' hands, since as leader of the government he ought to have had some understanding of law.

Xenophon has another aim in mind as well. His general intention in *Memorabilia* is not merely to defend Socrates but also to arouse admiration for his myriad virtues, including competitive virtues and skills. In presenting a literary defence rather than a narrow judicial one, Xenophon naturally wishes to retain as much as possible of the credit that is due to Socrates' political skills and virtues. As Arthur Adkins has reminded us, the Greeks – from Homer to Plato – were more impressed by stark competitive virtues than they were by innocence, just as many are today.²⁰ Nowhere is Socrates' ability to transmit dialectical skill made more apparent than in this scene, which demonstrates that Alcibiades acquired the skills he sought.²¹ The scene aims not to show how badly Socrates' students behaved but rather to demonstrate the rhetorical skills and even philosophical insight that Socrates was capable of transmitting.

This aim is reflected in the manner in which Xenophon presents the scene. He does not introduce it to illustrate the vicious use of the *elenchos* but rather to support the assertion that Alcibiades and Critias attempted to hold discussions (*dialegesthai*) with those involved in

²⁰ A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960). While some have contested Adkins' formulation of the contrast between competitive and cooperative values, few would deny the pervasiveness of competitive values in ancient Greece. See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, CA, 1971); M. Gagarin, 'Morality in Homer', *CPh* 82 (1987), 285–306, with responses by A. Adkins and H. Lloyd-Jones.

²¹ Xenophon usually credits the teacher for the performance of the student (e.g. *Symp.* 2.15–16).

politics. This in turn is part of an argument that even from the beginning of their association with Socrates Alcibiades and Critias were not attracted to him, but aimed instead to become leaders of the city (1.2.39–40). As we have seen, one of the main things they wished to acquire was the ability to handle others in argument as one wishes (1.2.14–15). The interrogation of Pericles is designed to show that they did just that: it illustrates Socrates' ability to transmit raw dialectic skills.

For Xenophon, unlike Plato, Socrates was a competent political actor in an almost conventional sense. Xenophon shows his interest in Socrates' political abilities throughout his writings. In the *Symposium*, Socrates claims that his greatest skill is procuring, which he explains as the ability to teach skills of self-presentation in the city (*Symp.* 3.10, 4.56–64). In response to Antiphon's charge that the philosopher is not capable of teaching political subjects Xenophon's Socrates does not denigrate political skill, as Plato's Socrates might have done (see *Gorgias* and *The Republic*), but defends his abilities (*Mem.* 1.6.15; see also *Mem.* 2.1 *et alia*). This emphasis is natural for an author who himself was a political leader and who treated political leadership in all his writings.

Far from denigrating Alcibiades, the conversation between him and Pericles provides a clear contrast between the arrogant but ignorant leader of democratic Athens and the sharp-witted young man who has studied with Socrates. Pericles' belief that it is easy to explain what law is (1.2.42) shows his lack of thought about the subject and his vain belief in his own wisdom. By the end of the conversation, he is shown to be incapable of justifying the democratic law to which he has dedicated his career and by means of which the people of Athens executed Socrates, but equally incapable of admitting that he can find no justification for it. His unthinking attachment to democratic law is reflected in the asymmetry of his answers. At first he proves capable of changing his opinion frequently in the discussion, quickly dropping the opinion that only the *plethos* grants legitimacy to the law, embracing non-democratic laws, and reversing his opinion, when pressed, that despotic and oligarchic laws are laws. But he is not able to accept the implications of the argument when Alcibiades demonstrates that democratic laws are also unlawful. By showing the irrationality of Pericles' attachment to democratic law, Xenophon not only justifies any disrespect for the law that Socrates and his students may have shown but also contributes himself to the Socratic task of

undermining blind respect for the law. By indicting the chief representative of the democracy, Xenophon's Alcibiades provides an indictment of the democracy itself, accusing it of an irrational attachment to existing laws. Unable to refute the young man's logic, and unable to accept its conclusion, Pericles attempts to portray the interrogation as a game, claiming that he, too, was capable of such sophistries when he was young.²² But Alcibiades does not see the argument as light-hearted sophistry, and he replies that he wishes that he had met Pericles when he was cleverer.

If Pericles comes off badly, Alcibiades comes off rather well. He both defeats the elder statesman with a few simple moves and also displays considerable philosophic insight. As Dorion comments, 'le questionnement d'Alcibiades est plus philosophique et plus profond que celui de Socrate' ('Alcibiades' questioning is more philosophic and more profound than that of Socrates') in *Mem.* 4.4 (CLXII). The conversation records not merely the triumph of Socratic dialectic ability, therefore, but also the triumph of Socratic political thought over the most distinguished political leader of his time. It is hard to imagine that Xenophon, the author of this conversation, was unaware of the quality of the argument that he puts in Alcibiades' mouth or the effect that it would have on readers.²³ If he wished to present a conversation in which the young man looked wrong, he could certainly have done better than this.

This critique of Pericles is characteristic of Xenophon and Xenophon's Socrates' critiques of political leaders. Xenophon always says that leadership should be based on knowledge (*Cyr.* 1.1.3; *Mem.* 3.1–7), a quality which Pericles is shown to lack. Xenophon generally sides with the younger more competent man against the older less competent (see both *Cyruses*; also *Mem.* 2.2, 2.3), and in this, too, the young Alcibiades resembles a Xenophontic hero better than does

²² Sanders (n. 3) argues that this claim should be taken seriously, and that it indicates that Alcibiades' methods are not Socratic in character but resemble those of the sophists who were active in Pericles' youth. I am less inclined to see Pericles as an impartial witness on this issue, since his comment is designed primarily to extricate himself from a humiliating situation by denigrating his humiliator. He may simply mean that he made clever arguments when he was young, without meaning to imply that he used the techniques that Alcibiades displays, which include the characteristically Socratic feigning of ignorance in order to entrap an opponent.

²³ Contrast Gray (n. 10), 50, 41, who believes that Xenophon prefers the democratic ideals that Pericles represents, and therefore judges Alcibiades as making false arguments. She continues to stress Xenophon's democratic sympathies in her most recent book (n. 9), esp. 5–24. However, Xenophon is much more sympathetic to oligarchic values. See *Mem.* 2.6.24–7, for example, where Socrates offers a plan for political dominance by a small oligarchic elite.

Pericles. If anyone doubts that Xenophon would have criticized the great Pericles, they should consult Socrates' conversation with Pericles' younger namesake in *Memorabilia* 3.5. This exchange is undoubtedly meant to offer implicit criticism of the elder Pericles as well: aside from the use of someone with an identical name, Socrates says explicitly that the son holds the same principles as the father (3.5.22).

Disrespect for fathers

One might object that Xenophon compounds the crime here by portraying a young man who treats with disrespect a man who was not only a political leader but also a parental one. This indeed was another of the main charges against Socrates (1.2.49–55), and Xenophon's allusion to Pericles being Alcibiades' legal guardian (1.2.40) shows that the issue was on his mind in composing this scene. The fact that Pericles is not Alcibiades' biological father probably serves to minimize the offensiveness of his behaviour to some extent, but that cannot be the whole explanation. In order to judge Alcibiades, one needs to understand Xenophon's general opinion about the respect that is due, or not due, to fathers and other relatives. It is no coincidence that Xenophon addresses this question immediately after recording the conversation between Alcibiades and Pericles (1.2.49–55), and, indeed, the later passage provides a valuable perspective on the earlier scene.

In discussing the charge of disrespect for fathers Xenophon makes it clear that, in Socrates' opinion, ignorant and useless fathers and relatives do not deserve much respect. In this surprising passage, Xenophon makes it clear that Socrates did exactly what the accuser said:²⁴

ἐγὼ δ' αὐτὸν οἶδα μὲν καὶ περὶ πατέρων τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων συγγενῶν τε καὶ περὶ φίλων ταῦτα λέγοντα: καὶ πρὸς τοῦτοις γε δὴ, ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς ἐξεληθούσης, ἐν ἧ μόνῃ γίγνεται φρόνησις, τὸ σῶμα τοῦ οικειοτάτου ἀνθρώπου τὴν ταχίστην ἐξενέγκαντες ἀφανίζουσιν.

²⁴ In commenting on this passage, Dorion (n. 10), i.118, n. 164, says, 'Xénophon évite de se prononcer clairement et son esquive ressemble à une forme de reconnaissance tacite' (Xenophon avoids any clear pronouncement, and his evasion seems like a form of tacit admission').

ἔλεγε δ' ὅτι καὶ ζῶν ἕκαστος ἑαυτοῦ, ὃ πάντων μάλιστα φιλεῖ, τοῦ σώματος ὃ τι ἂν ἄχρειον ἢ καὶ ἀνωφελές, αὐτός τε ἀφαιρεῖ καὶ ἄλλω παρέχει. αὐτοὶ τέ γε αὐτῶν ὄνυχάς τε καὶ τρίχας καὶ τύλους ἀφαιροῦσι καὶ τοῖς ἰατροῖς παρέχουσι μετὰ πόνων τε καὶ ἀλλαγῶν καὶ ἀποτέμνειν καὶ ἀποκάειν, καὶ τούτων χάριν οἴονται δεῖν αὐτοῖς καὶ μισθὸν τίνειν: καὶ τὸ σίαλον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἀποπτύουσιν ὡς δύνανται πορρωτάτω, διότι ὠφελεῖ μὲν οὐδὲν αὐτοῦς ἐνόν, βλάπτει δὲ πολὺ μᾶλλον.

For my part, I know that he said these things about fathers and relatives and friends. And in addition he said that with the departure of the soul, the only place of intelligence, we carry out the body of the dearest person as quickly as possible and bury it. And he said that while alive everyone removes from his body, which he loves above all other things, whatever part is useless and not beneficial, or lets someone else remove it. People remove their nails, hair and corns and allow doctors to cut and burn them, despite the suffering and pain, and think they should thank them for it and pay them besides. They spit saliva from their mouths as far as they can, since it is of no benefit to have it inside, but is actually harmful. (1.2.53–4)

Not only does Xenophon acknowledge the behaviour that the accuser attributes to Socrates, but he adds oil to the flame by recording even more extreme statements that he claims to have heard from Socrates himself. Socrates did not say these things in his capacity as a health expert, but was referring to the proper treatment of useless parents, relatives, and friends. Xenophon argues that Socrates' purpose was to encourage children to make themselves useful to others (1.2.55), but, as Dorion has pointed out, these statements show clearly enough that Socrates did deny the value of obeying useless relatives.²⁵ This lends support to the impression that Socrates was responsible for the kind of behaviour that Alcibiades displayed, and that Xenophon is willing to admit it: again, his strategy is not to deny the charge but rather to acknowledge and justify the behaviour.

One might imagine that Alcibiades' behaviour would have been more offensive to the ancient Greek reader than it is to us, accustomed as we are to insolent treatment by young people. But we are not really in a position to make such a sweeping generalization about ancient Greek attitudes.²⁶ If Greek fathers were offended by the insolent words of their sons, there must have been some sons who took pleasure in speaking

²⁵ L.-A. Dorion, 'Socrate et l'utilité de l'amitié', *Revue du MAUSS* 27 (2006), 269–88, esp. 270–1. See also F. Bevilacqua, *Memorabili di Senofonte* (Turin, 2010), 156–7.

²⁶ For a detailed and nuanced study of the question of attitudes towards the treatment of fathers up to the death of Socrates, see B. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens* (Princeton, NJ, 1993). My account implies that a revival of sympathy for youthful rebellion occurred by the time of the publication of *Memorabilia*. Indeed, a new generation of youth would have arisen for whom the disasters of Sicily were a distant rumour.

insolently. Indeed, Plato's Socrates says that young men enjoyed hearing him refute the arguments of leading know-it-alls (see *Apologia*, 23c, 33c, 39c–d). Xenophon's readers undoubtedly included some of those very same formerly young people, as well as a new generation of the young. Assuming that some of these would also have had such attitudes, Xenophon could well have expected a positive reaction. Dorion acknowledges that readers today do tend to enjoy the victory, but he argues that this results from our familiarity with the more combative Socrates presented by Plato. If we paid better attention to Xenophon's portrait, we would know that disapproval is called for (CLX–CLXI). I find this argument unconvincing, since Xenophon's audience was also familiar with Plato and therefore should have had reactions similar to ours.

The use of Alcibiades in this context was not accidental. Although he may have misbehaved at times, he was widely admired by Athenians, much more so than Critias, from whom Xenophon dissociates Socrates much more clearly (*Mem.* 1.2.29–38). Isocrates reports that it was a mistake for Polycrates to attack Socrates for his connection with Alcibiades, since that connection did more to improve Socrates' reputation than to harm it (*Busiris*, 4–5). If so, Xenophon did well to illustrate Socrates' abilities as a teacher by providing a portrait of his valuable influence on Alcibiades.²⁷

Conclusion

If Xenophon's aim was to show how badly Alcibiades behaved when he was not with Socrates, he did not do a very good job. There is no sign in the text of any negative judgement on the young man's behaviour. The final words, and hence the victory, are given to him; the narrator offers no judgement; and Pericles himself, the victim of the interrogation, never expresses outrage, anger, or even harsh criticism of Alcibiades. He is obviously embarrassed by the outcome; but the worst he does is to belittle Alcibiades for being overly clever, and Alcibiades outdoes

²⁷ For a parallel to the non-educational, humiliating, political use of the *elenchos*, see Cyrus' interrogation of the king of Armenia (*Cyr.* 3.1), an interrogation of which Xenophon clearly approves. The skills that Alcibiades has acquired from Socrates are comparable to the skills that enabled Cyrus to gain pre-eminence over the entire world. As the teacher of Xenophon, it is of course Socrates who is responsible for transmitting the skills that enabled our author to portray both of these striking conversations.

him on that point too. On the contrary, the conversation arouses admiration for Alcibiades by providing a portrait of his easy victory over Pericles.²⁸ It illustrates the skills that could be acquired by students of Socrates, reminds readers that very gifted men such as Alcibiades gained much by their association with Socrates, and gives us, the readers, a taste of Socrates' razor-sharp tongue, displaced conveniently onto his student. The conversation contains numerous replies to charges against Socrates. It exhibits and justifies the philosopher's attitude towards the law and towards political and familial authorities. It turns some of the charges against those who voted against Socrates, accusing the democracy of violence and denying the title of 'law-abiding' to its citizens. Given the manifold ways in which this scene responds to charges against Socrates, it is difficult to conclude that it was put together hastily without considering its apologetic effects.

I would like to mention one more sign that Xenophon encourages the reader to look positively on Alcibiades' refutation of Pericles. In introducing the conversation, Xenophon remarks that Alcibiades was younger than twenty years old at the time (1.2.40). This might merely be a comment for the historians in the crowd; but Xenophon does not make a general practice of recording the ages (or near-ages) of his characters. It might represent a mild apologetic effort on Alcibiades' behalf – on the grounds that one can excuse the excesses of youth. Yet there is little evidence that Xenophon was interested in apologizing for Alcibiades *per se*.²⁹ Why then does he mention the youth's age? Dorion suggests that it is an allusion to Plato's *Alcibiades 1*, where Alcibiades is also represented as being under twenty (CLXVI; see *Alcibiades 1*, 123d). But what is the purpose of such an allusion? Kirk Sanders argues that it indicates that Alcibiades was not yet a companion of Socrates, since it would have been well known that he began to associate with Socrates at around the age of twenty.³⁰ However, one may doubt that such biographical facts were indeed well known, particularly given that Isocrates claims that Alcibiades was not known to have been a student of Socrates at all prior to Polycrates' pamphlet (*Busiris*, 4–5). In any case, as we have seen, Xenophon clearly says

²⁸ One may compare Socrates' victories over Antiphon (*Mem.* 1.6) and Aristippus (*Mem.* 3.8).

²⁹ The only other place where Xenophon arguably displays some concern for the reputation of Alcibiades is when he softens the claim that he and Critias caused damage to the city (1.2.13). Unlike the excuse of youth, however, that effort also serves to deflect criticism from Socrates.

³⁰ Sanders (n. 3).

that Alcibiades held this conversation while he was associating with Socrates. I suggest another reason for the mention of Alcibiades' youth: to indicate the power of Socrates' teaching. His student was capable of out-thinking one of the most respected leaders of the Athenian political community before he reached the age of twenty!³¹

If *Memorabilia* was published after dialogues such as *Alcibiades 1* and *Symposium*, or other writings with a similar portrait of Socrates' relations with Alcibiades, there is a further point to the discussion. In those dialogues, Alcibiades is shown to be vastly inferior and deferentially subordinate to Socrates. If this inferior young man was nevertheless vastly superior to Pericles in his understanding of politics, one can only imagine how far superior Socrates must have been. The relationship can be sketched in the following ratio:

Socrates : Alcibiades :: Alcibiades : Pericles

A similar effort has been detected in Socrates' conversation with Theodote.³² In that exchange, Socrates seduces but remains indifferent to the woman with whom Alcibiades fell in love. We may therefore sketch the following ratio:

Socrates : Theodote :: Theodote : Alcibiades

Combining these ratios, we reach the following:

Socrates : Theodote :: Theodote : Alcibiades :: Alcibiades : Pericles

The result of this comparison is to show how far superior Socrates was to Pericles, and how far inferior Pericles was, not only to Socrates, but even to a simple courtesan. This fits the general aim of attributing the greatest ascendancy to Socrates while denigrating others. It also fits the more specific aim of contrasting Socrates' political knowledge and ability with the best representative of the regime by which he was executed.

In sum, Xenophon included this discussion in a chapter devoted to the defence of Socrates because it contains valuable implications mitigating the charges against the philosopher and demonstrating Socrates'

³¹ See the similar use of the phrase '*sou neou ontos*' ('from your youth') with regard to Agathon in Pl. *Symp.* 175e5. Gray (n. 10), 50, offers a similar observation on the effect of mentioning Alcibiades' age, even though she does not believe that Xenophon expects a positive reaction to Alcibiades' behaviour in this scene.

³² See M. Narcy, 'La meilleure amie de Socrate: Xenophon *Mémorables* III, 11', *EPh* (2004), 213–33.

ability to transmit dialectical skills and political insights. Lauding these skills does not necessarily imply approving the use that Alcibiades made of them in this instance. But by refraining from indicating any disapproval, and by including several positive markers, Xenophon encourages members of his audience to gain a positive impression from the scene. Some may be so impressed by the skills and knowledge that Alcibiades displays that they forgive his violations of propriety; others may be offended by his behaviour even less than Pericles was. One thing is certain: if audience members had a positive reaction, this was a great apologetic achievement for Xenophon.

GABRIEL DANZIG

Gabriel.Danzig@biu.ac.il