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Author's Response

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David Johnson

Johnson faults me for failing to mention that classicists treat Straussians unfairly, not just because of "bad faith" and "loyalty to the … clan," (585) but also because they are progressives who suspect that many Straussians are politically conservative (if only in their personal lives, since Johnson does not try to establish any essential connection between their scholarship and political conservatism). As a rule, to which there are notable exceptions (including Johnson), classicists pan—if they do not simply ignore—what little Straussian work manages to slip through the cracks of their gatekeeping. To the best of my knowledge, however, no classicist ever based a negative review of any piece of Straussian scholarship on extracurricular reports to the effect that the author harbors politically conservative thoughts—not openly, at least. Politics is rarely, if ever, mentioned. So if Johnson is right, then, at least when it comes to Straussians, classicists are not so much scholars seeking knowledge without anger or zeal as they are political activists and partisans whose harsh words and hasty dismissals cannot be taken at face value.

Johnson also rightly says that classicists approach the classics as if their thought was "bounded by historical limits." (586) They "see Xenophon as engaged in conversation with his historical predecessors and contemporaries" (586) alone, so they cite only them and other classicists. For Straussians, however, the classics are engaged in "an ongoing conversation across time … a timeless conversation." (586) Indeed, I cite Rawls and the New Testament in connection with Xenophon, as if Xenophon's thought was not bounded by historical limits. In my defense, Xenophon never says that anyone's thought is bounded by historical limits, much less his own. Small wonder, since the "historical sense" only emerged over two millennia later. Xenophon does say that he expected his writings to remain "unrefuted forever," on account of really being and not merely appearing to be useful in making readers wise and good. He expected to make readers in all times

I am grateful for the readers' kind words. But I am even more grateful to them for giving me so much food for thought. So I focus on their criticisms, not their compliments.

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wise and good.[1] Because the New Testament (and even Rawls) purports to do this, too, the question arises whether Xenophon was right or wrong. The only way to find out is by reading his writings with an open mind. Classicists skip this step. From the beginning, their minds are closed to the possibility that Xenophon remains unrefuted. In this, they are rather like religious fundamentalists who start from the assumption that Xenophon's thought is obsolete because it is unenlightened by the New Testament. But whereas religious fundamentalists appeal to revelation to support their approach, which makes their position formidable indeed, classicists appeal to … what? Johnson alludes to historicism, also a formidable position. And yet when have classicists demonstrated their grasp of the critique of reason underlying it? Besides, if classicists are good progressives, they are bad historicists. So perhaps classicists start from the assumption that Xenophon's thought is obsolete, not so much because of their vague notions about "historical limits," as because of their politics? Especially since Johnson says that classicists worry that their field is "inherently reactionary," (585) I see no alternative. For them, their secular faith in progress gets in the way of an unbiased study, not only of their allegedly conservative peers, but also of the classics themselves; their *terminus ad quem* is not "the author's own day," it is theirs. It was for this reason that I began my book by questioning contemporary politics. For me, the unbiased study of the classics depends on and issues in a critique of contemporary, and not just contemporary, politics.

From Xenophon's critique of writing it follows that his superficial readers —those who are too confident in their opinions and too loath to seek knowledge—will not ask themselves the simple, Socratic questions that his writing can only ask them to ask themselves. They will not know his questions, except verbally, much less his answers. Starting from the assumption that Xenophon's thought is obsolete, classicists lack the incentive to read with extreme care. But that means, since the perfection of Xenophon's writing only reveals itself to readers willing to entertain the possibility that his writing is perfect, they never find the perfection they have never sought. It is the difference between a detective who casts a quick glance over the crime scene, makes a snap judgment, and then notices only such facts as corroborate his prejudgment, on the one hand, and a detective who suspends judgment, immerses himself in the facts of the case, and only then draws conclusions, on the other.

Eric Buzzetti

According to Buzzetti, the *Cyropaedia* confirms my analysis of self-knowledge. But he doubts whether *Memorabilia IV* contains "the whole course of a Socratic education, touching on everything relevant to the purpose,"

[1] *Kunegetikos* 13.7.

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partly on the grounds that the *Cyropaedia* "adumbrates a point not developed by the *Memorabilia* and therefore somewhat neglected by [me]," namely, "the Delphic exhortation 'Know Thyself' … does not mean at its core merely 'obey the laws,'" as I suggest, "it also means 'know your humble station,' 'know that you are radically inferior to the gods.'" (590) The Delphic exhortation, I agree, means all of this and more. But are the exhortation's many meanings beyond what it means "at its core" not contained in what it means at its core? For example, obedience to the laws is not in all cases evidently good (160–61). To obey them, notwithstanding this, is therefore to catch a glimpse in them of a wisdom superior to one's merely human wisdom, which is why Xenophon links both obedience to the laws and self-knowledge with obedience to divine masters (69, 82, cf. 28–29). Obedience to law implies piety (101, 137–38, 167–69). That said, although the religious connotations of the Delphic exhortation are not missing from *Memorabilia IV,* I think that the *Cyropaedia* puts flesh on the bone of the dialectical lessons learned from *Memorabilia IV*. The ultimate implications of the Socratic education for the rationality of merely human life (cf. 83–84, 137–38)—without which, it is fair to say, *Memorabilia IV*'s formulations of the truth are less than fully meaningful—are largely left to the *Cyropaedia* to spell out.

Buzzetti wonders what role my account of *Memorabilia IV* leaves for the *Oeconomicus* to play. I take the *Oeconomicus* to be Xenophon's account of the Socratic turn; yet, Buzzetti points out, "there are no refutations in the *Oeconomicus*." (590) But while it is true to say that Socrates does he not establish the possibility or necessity of a refutation of him (cf. 155)? Perhaps, since Socrates refuted good as well as bad natures, *Memorabilia IV* lays emphasis on what Socrates taught good natures about the human things, and the *Oeconomicus* on what Socrates taught them about the refusal of others to learn such things from him. When speaking of the Socratic education of others, I mean the former, partly because Socrates did not have to teach good natures about the refusal on the part of others to learn from him (for the sake of his own continuing education). However, while I hesitate to agree with Buzzetti that each of Xenophon's texts "must be read in light of the rest of his corpus," (590) I am open to the suggestion that the Socratic education can be defined broadly or narrowly and, either way, *Memorabilia IV* does not tell the whole story, it only makes the essential points.

As for Buzzetti's suggestion that the *Oeconomicus* "takes up the question of what a god is" because it "takes up the question of what a gentleman is," (591) it depends on how the relationship between the questions is understood. The *Oeconomicus* draws an analogy between a gentleman's providence over his household and god's providence over the world. But the assumption that god conforms to our idea of a gentleman discounts the view, implied by the Delphic exhortation, that god's perfection exceeds human understanding (119–21). And does the analogy between the gentleman's household and divine providence not go to show that precisely this is Ischomachus's view? He is a member of his (divine) master's household, just as his household

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servants are members of his. At the same time, if self-knowledge influences the experience of the divine attributes, there is little need for Socrates to raise the question of what a god is directly. Buzzetti says that "it must be going too far to say," as I do, "that Socrates's self-knowledge is 'absolutely certain and beyond dispute,'" for "Socrates's self-knowledge … cannot be more certain than his knowledge of the gods, and that knowledge cannot be absolutely certain." (592) But it is one thing to say that Socrates's knowledge of his natural limits can be more certain than his less than absolutely certain knowledge of the gods and another to say that his knowledge of himself as a self can be. Socrates's knowledge of his natural limits, especially of his mortality, is less than absolutely certain (90, 179–80; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 229c–30a); his knowledge of himself as a self is not.

Whether Buzzetti and I disagree about this, I am not sure. On the closely related question of the compatibility of self-knowledge with the political life, however, he attributes to me the view that the Socratic education "destroys" the appeal of a political life "completely," to which he replies: it "might not." (591) Adducing the example of Xenophon, who "obviously 'did' politics," he says that a Socratic education might only "reduce profoundly … the appeal of a political life." (591) If Buzzetti's scare quotes are any indication, Xenophon's deeds are not enough to go on. I agree, deeds alone never are (124). The question is: why do politics? Doing politics under duress is a far cry from doing politics voluntarily. The place to look for an answer to the question of Xenophon's deeds is, of course, the *Anabasis.* Considerations of space—to say nothing of the fact that Buzzetti has already plumbed its depths in his magnificent *Xenophon the Socratic Prince*—prevent me from scratching its surface. Still, maybe Buzzetti and I disagree, if not about Xenophon's deeds, then about the essential compatibility of a Socratic education with doing politics. On my view, at least, a Socratic education destroys completely the peculiar appeal of the political life, reducing its desirability in the process to the point where no Socratic would willingly choose (despite being uniquely able to live) such a life. Apart from that, since self-knowledge reins in the naturally occurring excessive, imaginary need for the good things, the appeal of the honor, riches, and bodily pleasures from which the political life is inseparable would (only) be profoundly reduced (81).

Richard Ruderman

Ruderman ends with an important request for clarification: "Why could there not be a politics, shorn of impossible expectations that could meet (some of) our needs?"(595) Is it reasonable, that is, to expect human beings to have reasonable expectations of politics? A politics shorn of unreasonable expectations is not going to be long for this world, nor is it going to be entirely shorn of unreasonable expectations, unless it is. Although I cannot hope to answer this question here, I can point in the general direction of Xenophon's fully

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elaborated answer. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates founds a city ruled by reason or knowledge in response to Glaucon's request that he prove Thrasymachus wrong about the harmfulness of justice for the just. In Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Cyrus founds a (universal) city ruled by (his) knowledge in response to the fact that in Persia justice does the just precious little good. Now, Socrates founds the rational city in speech, whereas Cyrus founds one like it in deed. But perhaps Cyrus's inability to give uniform or enduring form to the human material with which he works—a lack of consistency and stability reflected in the depths of his own soul, too—lays bare the obstacles to the coming-into-being of a rational politics lurking deep within the hearts and minds of human beings *in deed*, no less than Socrates's give and take with his non-philosophic "cofounders," Glaucon and Adeimantus, lays them bare *in speech*? For example, Cyrus was unable to teach Tanaoxares to choose the private rather than the political life.

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