

less prepossessing moments: Marx's orientalist views on classical Indian society (118), his probable marital infidelity (103–4), his falling out with benefactors (including his deprecation of Lassalle that is dripping with both racist and anti-Judaic slurs [126]).

Avineri's interpretations of Marx's works are brief and accessible. He gives surprisingly scant attention to *Capital*—little attempt is made to enter into Marx's economic analysis (we do, however, see Marx worry about marketing the book [145–46]). Much more space is given to Marx's engagement with ongoing political events. Here, there are some interesting insights. Avineri's reading of *The Civil War in France*, which compares the text with unpublished drafts, suggests that Marx was much more ambivalent about the Paris Commune than his written text would indicate. We also learn just how ambivalent Marx was late in his life about the possibilities of revolution in Russia, and how wary he was of his historical views being read as some sort of closed determinism. Avineri concludes with some brief, global assessments of Marx's legacy that will likely win few friends among the devotees of Marx given that he tends to see Marx's lasting importance less in his direct political influence than in his contribution to the humanities (191), and his most lasting contributions his noncanonical pieces (192–93).

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Ariel Hefler: *Socrates and Alcibiades: Plato's Drama of Political Ambition and Philosophy*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. Pp. 219.)

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The question of the relationship of philosophy to politics is bedrock for Plato, and nothing in his dialogues seems more likely to suggest answers than the friendship between Socrates and Alcibiades. In *Socrates and Alcibiades*, Ariel Hefler investigates their three main conversations, which appear in the *Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, and *Symposium*. The frame of Hefler's account is political ambition.

In the introduction and conclusion of his book, Hefler offers views of Alcibiades from a broad range of ancient sources, including Thucydides and Xenophon, and he schematizes ambition through five central characteristics: desire for renown, love of power, love of honor, desire to be a

benefactor, and desire for the greatest goods. In the four chapters that constitute the body of the book, Helfer focuses on Plato's texts and organizes his account as a series of close readings of each of the dialogues he engages. There are two chapters on the *Alcibiades*, and one each on the *Second Alcibiades* (with two pages on the *Protagoras*) and *Symposium*.

Helfer's account begins with the question, Why does Socrates spend so much time and energy on Alcibiades? He argues that Socrates needs Alcibiades as a test of his wisdom. Just as one becomes visible to oneself by seeing oneself reflected in someone else's eyes, one becomes known to oneself by seeing oneself reflected in someone else's knowledge. So, Socrates needs Alcibiades, according to Helfer, in order to know himself.

Socrates's main educational ambition in the *Alcibiades* is to weaken Alcibiades's regard for the demos. As Helfer presents it, Alcibiades begins with a simple plan: he will show himself to the demos at his very first opportunity, and they will love him. Just by appearing before them, and regardless of what he may or may not say, Alcibiades believes he will immediately garner democratic political power, which he will then use to benefit the city and himself. But Socrates does not let Alcibiades rest in this conventional ambition. Instead, he shows Alcibiades that the demos is ignorant and fickle. Their approbation is the last thing Alcibiades should seek, and his ambition to lead them is a goal beneath his promise.

Besides, Alcibiades wonders, if all Athenian statesmen (including Pericles) are successful without a philosophical education, and if he has all of the benefits of disposition and situation that anyone could hope for, why would he need Socratic education? Socrates counters Alcibiades's argument by raising his sights. His role models should be not Athenian statesmen but the kings of Sparta and Persia. This gets young Alcibiades's attention. By the end of their first conversation, Socrates seems successfully to have altered Alcibiades's ambition by elevating it. But, Helfer argues, Socrates's intentions for Alcibiades remain ambiguous throughout the dialogue and, in the end, Socrates fails. The "key ambiguity" of the dialogue, in fact, is that Socrates may or may not intend to "guide Alcibiades through a full philosophical investigation of the question of justice" (85).

The *Second Alcibiades* opens with its titular character gloomily headed to prayer and entirely disillusioned with the demos. We are never clearly told what Alcibiades plans to pray for, but whatever it is that he wants, he thinks he needs the gods' help to get it. As the dialogue unfolds, self-sufficiency, piety, and the temptations to tyranny develop as central themes. Helfer presents Alcibiades as a man who no longer has any regard for the demos, but who still recognizes the authority of the gods, at least to the extent that any mention of matricide makes him deeply uncomfortable. By the end of the *Second Alcibiades*, however, Socrates undermines Alcibiades's religious beliefs, as well. Collectively, the *Alcibiades* and *Second Alcibiades* show Socrates releasing Alcibiades from the only two authorities he recognized: the demos and the gods.

When Helfer turns to the *Symposium*, he says that he struggles to find “the least similarities between the character we have been studying so far [in the *Alcibiades* and *Second Alcibiades*] and the drunken boisterous figure whose entrance signals the beginning of the end of the *Symposium*” (147–48). Alcibiades’s dissipation seems to surprise Helfer mainly because he understands those dialogues to describe Socratic failures. If Alcibiades was impervious to Socratic critique, and also unleashed from conventional and religious constraints on his political ambition, why would he have come to this? But Helfer suggests an answer to his own question in his depiction of Alcibiades as a tragic figure of sorts: “At the core of Socrates’ failure to turn Alcibiades fully toward philosophy is the fact that Alcibiades could not ultimately tear himself away from the city and political life, even though he had become convinced of philosophy’s superiority and the worthlessness of the opinion of the many” (174).

Socrates, I would argue, succeeded in both the *Alcibiades* and the *Second Alcibiades* insofar as he moved Alcibiades toward philosophy and released him from two of the main obstacles to his philosophical education: deference to convention and a simplistic understanding of piety. Helfer is right, of course, that Socrates did not ultimately succeed in turning Alcibiades toward philosophy, but this is not because the phases of his education displayed in those dialogues were failures. It may not be possible to say exactly why Alcibiades could not become philosophical, but by Helfer’s own formulation, it seems to be more an issue of something like *akrasia* than a failure to agree with Socrates. In fact, perhaps what makes Alcibiades so interesting is that he does seem to understand Socrates so much of the time, and yet he cannot seem to temper himself at all.

There are two things, one structural and one formal, that seem problematic to me in this very good book. Structurally, Helfer has composed an introduction and conclusion that present the idea of political ambition systematically and contextualize Plato’s portrayal of Alcibiades in relation to that of other ancient authors, but the body of the book is organized as a commentary. This makes the introduction and conclusion feel less well integrated than perhaps they should be.

Interpreting Plato is a speculative endeavor, and I would be the last to criticize a scholar for trying to work out interpretations that seem to follow from a synoptic look at the dramatic and argumentative elements of the dialogues. But one must take care to present speculation as speculation and argument as argument, and I think those lines get blurred a few times in Helfer’s account. One important example of this is the conclusion he draws early in the book about Alcibiades’s failure to understand Socrates’s arguments in the *Alcibiades* and *Second Alcibiades*, which I mention above. Rather than presenting this as a speculative possibility, Helfer claims that it is clear and, in fact, that Socrates sees it and may be adjusting his hopes for Alcibiades (58). But as the argument of his book progresses, evidence mounts that Alcibiades did understand and was, in a sense, persuaded by Socrates in those early

conversations, even though he continued to pursue his extraordinarily ambitious political aims. Keeping that possibility open, reconsidering it in light of the action of the *Symposium*, and perhaps bringing in evidence from other ancient sources could have made this good book even better.

All in all, *Socrates and Alcibiades* is a helpful and interesting book written by an excellent reader of Plato. The close readings of *Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, and *Symposium* are careful and insightful. Socrates and Alcibiades are two of the most colorful characters in Athenian history, and understanding their friendship is central to understanding Plato's political philosophy as well as Athens itself, the city that could not help but kill a philosopher. Helfer's book deftly moves readers deeper into those dynamics, and for that I am appreciative.

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Rémi Brague: *The Kingdom of Man: Genesis and Failure of the Modern Project*. Translated by Paul Seaton. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. Pp. vii, 330.)

Rémi Brague: *Curing Mad Truths: Medieval Wisdom for the Modern Age*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. Pp. vii, 142.)

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At the risk of simplifying matters greatly, there seem to be two main positions on the spectrum of intellectual postures toward modernity these days. One end of the spectrum extols the value of Enlightenment reason, celebrates its emergence and liberation from authoritarian forms of medieval Christianity, and promotes its undeveloped potential, despite its real-life ideological and social challenges. The rise of science, the tremendous advances in technology in reducing violence and manual labor, wealth creation, various and new forms of communication, advances in medicine such as the reduction of infant mortality and increase in lifespan, the freedom of expression, the freedom from coercion, and the emergence of “rights” are, for the less philosophically sophisticated apologists of modernity, indisputable evidence of the modern project's success and the “progress” Enlightenment reason has bequeathed to humanity. The other end of the ideological spectrum decries