the result of the wrong *type* of dynamism. Schlosser glosses over this crucial distinction and instead praises dynamism per se.

His second term, "complexity," is equally problematic. In almost all vital respects, the Anthropocene represents an alarming *decrease* in complexity, most notably in biodiversity. The web of life is being thinned out though the loss of species and the rapidly diminishing numbers of individuals within remaining species. This simplification threatens to become the Sixth Great Extinction event. One of the Anthropocene's few increases in complexity is the extraordinary rise in human-created minerals in the past half century or so. The more than 193,000 human-made "inorganic crystalline compounds" (as they are called) vastly outnumber Earth's ~5000 natural minerals. With respect to new minerals, the Anthropocene has no parallels on any other planet in the solar system—and perhaps with any planet in the cosmos, a complexity that endangers, rather than enhances, our well-being. (See P. J. Heaney, "Defining Minerals in the Age of Humans," *American Mineralogist* 102, no. 5 [2017]: 925–26.)

In other words, the "dynamic complexity" that confronted Herodotus is entirely different from the "dynamic complexity" we contend with in the Anthropocene. One was beneficial; the other hazardous. Can Herodotus still serve as a guide in our new, disorienting world? He could, but only once the nature of this new world is understood. Schlosser praises Herodotus's sense of wonder and his persistent inquiry into things, without applying these qualities in his own research. Such curiosity would entail a deep dive into contemporary science. It could also lead to asking how the new Earth System creates a different type of *nomoi*, different limits to our freedoms, and altered potentials for earthly flourishing. For these crucial questions of the Anthropocene, Herodotus might serve as an excellent guide, and it would be fascinating to follow his lead.

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Eli Friedland: *The Spartan Drama of Plato's "Laws."* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. Pp. xii, 193.)

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Modern scholars have neglected Plato's *Laws* for various reasons: it is inordinately long, and the dialogue's argument is said to wander from topic to topic.

Because the *Laws* reports a conversation among three elderly men, the discussion seems less brilliant than that of other Platonic dialogues, and there are few memorable passages. To be sure, it is said to be Plato's dialogue on practical politics, but its central, useful lesson appears to be the now impractical teaching that the best possible regime is a city ruled by a strict code of divine law. In recent decades, a few have challenged these claims, arguing that we cannot recognize what Plato means to teach us in the *Laws* unless we analyze the argument of the dialogue in the context of its dramatic action. By noticing the distinctive setting of the conversation and by considering the specific psychological makeup and concerns of each character in the dialogue, we can discern how each character's thinking subtly develops. By noting what each character learns or fails to learn in the course of the conversation, we uncover a most important dimension of Plato's thinking about the limits and possibilities of political education.

Eli Friedland's *The Spartan Drama of Plato's "Laws"* follows this recent approach, yet the author opens up an entirely new avenue for studying the dialogue by focusing intensely on the one character who has been generally overlooked, the Spartan Megillus. While a few other commentators have given considerable attention to Plato's philosophic Athenian Stranger and to the loquacious Cretan statesman Kleinias, Friedland breaks new ground by focusing intensely on the laconic Megillus. For the most part, even scholars who pay close attention to the drama of the dialogue have ignored Megillus's place in the dialogue, treating him as a mere representative of traditional, conservative thinking. By contrast, Friedland claims that Megillus is a philosopher, or a potential philosopher, and it is only by observing how the philosophic Athenian Stranger subtly tests and teaches Megillus that we can grasp the work's central teachings about philosophy, politics, and law.

Friedland begins the first chapter by focusing on Megillus's limited, terse remarks in book 1. In Friedland's view, Megillus answers the Athenian's questions in a way that signals that he does not think like his fellow Spartans. Nor does he think like Kleinias, who has remarkably conventional concerns and beliefs. If we look carefully enough, we will find that it is Megillus who quietly but masterfully leads Kleinias to acknowledge that the laws of Crete are defective (28). By the end of book 1, the Athenian Stranger and Megillus prove to be so like-minded that the Athenian does not make obvious points in his argument because he wants Megillus to make those points for him, and Megillus shows that he understands what the Athenian wants him to do by saying what the Athenian intentionally left out and by doing the same thing back to the Athenian (30).

After arguing that Megillus is far more thoughtful than has been recognized by any other modern readers, Friedland claims that Megillus turns out to be the key to understanding the *Laws* (33). Precisely what do we learn from scrutinizing what the surprisingly incisive and cagey Megillus says and does? Friedland's answer to this question is complex. In one respect, he argues that Megillus shows us the need to temper our expectations

of law. Early in the dialogue, Megillus is bothered by widespread sexual immoderation, and he thinks that it should be curbed by the correct kind of laws. The Athenian, however, shows him that human nature limits what law can do. Accordingly, the Athenian subtly shows that he does not expect laws establishing common meals for women to succeed by proposing them in the optative mood. He shows that he doubts the efficacy of laws prohibiting extramarital sex by supporting them with intentionally bad examples (118–19). Kleinias, however, does not notice this scaling back, and so he will endorse harsh, repressive laws, even though these laws cannot succeed.

Friedland draws two general lessons from Megillus's education in the *Laws*. The first is that there are two very different kinds of human responsibility. Kleinias takes moral responsibility very seriously, and he is prone to cast blame and to feel indignation when others fail to control themselves. Megillus, by contrast, adopts the philosophic insight that our lives are limited by nature, and, for this reason, he finds Kleinias's moral indignation to be incoherent and his blame, meaningless. When philosophic lawgivers, such as Megillus, recognize that people such as Kleinias will never overcome their misguided indignation, these philosophic lawgivers accept that they must make laws that accommodate their subjects' benighted beliefs about moral responsibility. By accepting this necessity, Megillus adopts a second, truer, higher form of responsibility: "The Stranger and Megillos illustrate in deed what it means to *take* responsibility, which entails accepting that Kleinias is unable to do so or even to imagine what such responsibility might be, and therefore also entails depending politically on the limits of Kleinias' imagination—honor and shame, reward and retribution, blame and evasion—if the notion of responsibility is to have any political bearing at all" (178).

In addition to this lesson about responsibility, Friedland finds a teaching about the relation between knowledge and law. Kleinias, like everyone who dwells on the "level of opinion," thinks that law must have "a single reasoning (*logos*) on any given subject—there can be only one, stable level of meaning." In the same way, "knowledge" is, for him, something attained and retained as a "known thing"—as something explained (33). For Megillus, however, "laws simply are in constant motion, as is the world and the activity of true thought." He grasps that the "single *logos* with which law is obliged to speak must contain within itself multiple *logoi*, only one of which engages the obedience that opinion simply is." Recognizing that the "restlessness" of thought always threatens the stability of opinion, Megillus conceals his insights into law and "effaces" himself to protect Kleinias and his traditionalist thinking (34).

Friedland has read widely and carefully through the existing scholarship on the *Laws*. Some parts of his book take an extremely close look at the text, making precise points on the basis of Plato's Greek. Other parts of the book speak synoptically and evocatively, raising broad issues and drawing from thinkers such as al-Farabi, Maimonides, and Nietzsche. The

persuasiveness of the book depends entirely on Friedland's ability to convince us that there is intense, subtle, intellectual activity lurking beneath the quiet surface of Megillus's remarks. It must be left to each reader to settle this question. Whether readers are fully persuaded or not, they will find that this original and thought-provoking work can help them appreciate the extraordinary subtlety and cogency that runs through Plato's longest dialogue.

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