

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.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670520000236

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

the instrumental, violent, and hegemonic nature of Enlightenment reason. The irrationality and savagery that found expression on an industrial scale during the twentieth century reveal the demonic dialectic of Enlightenment reason, its disenchanting nature, and its Gnostic pathology for power. At this end of the spectrum, modern secular reason is considered by some to be the empty, rotting husk of Christian thought, such that we must try to get behind Western civilization to recover pre-Socratic forms of being that move modern rationality beyond its vapid notions of good and evil. Others, however, see in the wisdom of classical philosophy and Christian thought, especially Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue, a prescription for the empty and fragmented forms of life afflicting humanity in the late modern period. Somewhere between these two intellectual postures there is a dialectical reading of modernity from a broadly Hegelian register. It discloses the modern project to be both boon and bane: Enlightenment reason is the emergence of freedom, reason, and rights, but also the source of barbarity in the twentieth century and the sociopolitical resentment, democratic despondency, and cultural ennui bedeviling the twenty-first century. Here one admits that secular reason, despite being parasitic on Christian thought, has taken an intractable toll on traditional forms of Christianity. What is more, the "immanent frame," the closed and self-sufficient system of modernity that brooks no discourse of the Transcendent Absolute, is here to stay, regardless of humanity's irrepressible desire for transcendence. Movements such as Idealism and Romanticism provide some relief to life lived within the claustrophobic confines of the immanent frame; they are prospective sources of self-correction to the insularity of Enlightenment reason, and even hold out the hope that humanity can survive the modern project and adapt to the late modern period.

But should humanity survive and adapt itself to the modern project? More specifically, now that humanity has commodified its existence (being), mastered nature, including its own, and created the conditions for and produced the means by which it can facilitate its own collective self-destruction (environmental degradation, weaponized atomic energy, and chemical contraception), is its existence better than its nonexistence? Upon what "ground," not "fact," can it justify its continued existence? Forgive the cliché, but why should it choose *to be* rather than *not to be*? These are the questions at the center of two works by French Catholic philosopher Rémi Brague, one, the last in a trilogy about the effects of the modern project on humanity, the other, a short collection of essays consisting primarily of unpublished lectures given in Europe and North America. In the former work, Brague's conceptual genealogy of modernity concentrates on Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and traces from an astonishing amount of material the modern project's desire for mastery over nature and emancipation from the divine, the "kingdom of man." Since the past is always sedimented within the present, Brague begins by unearthing layers of antiquity in search of prefigurations of modern models of mastery and emancipation. But classical anthropology in both its Greco-Roman and Semitic forms envisioned

human nature as participant of a nature that it did not produce but received. Self-formation and governance in antiquity was a process of perfecting what was already given by nature, not self-creation, succession, and domination. Although humanity was created in the image of God and charged by the divine to dominate and subdue the earth in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 1:28), most early Christian commentators did not interpret or preach humanity's privileged role within creation as a call to mastery and an occasion to dominate. Why? Because the Hebrew and early Christian traditions contained internal self-regulation in the form of restrictive ethical requirements and a conceptual framework in the form of a covenantal relationship between the divine and humanity that circumscribed their theological articulations of humanity's relationship to creation.

The developmental ruptures of modernity are fairly well known. In these two works Brague is not retelling that familiar story. What he is doing, perhaps as a result of his stunning erudition, is meticulously attending to subtle intellectual affinities within the ruptures between antiquity and modernity, describing how modern thought inherits premodern ideas and develops them within its self-destructive dialectic, and proposing without moralizing the existential implications they portend for our future. For example, Brague documents extensively that the project of technology understood as the application of scientific knowledge to the pursuit of the practical ends of humanity is present at least by the high Middle Ages, if not earlier in the early church fathers. The idea that technology ought to be used to mitigate the effects of the Fall on humanity is present, too. But in antiquity and the Middle Ages, "technology sought its legitimacy less in the dream of dominating nature than in the more modest concern to compensate for human weakness" (*Kingdom of Man*, 65). Francis Bacon is the first figure to put the new idea of humanity's domination over nature into practice. In order to do so, he reconfigured the ends of knowledge from the activity of contemplation, through which humanity is perfected, to "productive activity" (*poiēsis*), not to be confused or conflated with the Aristotelian notion of *praxis*. There are many long-term effects of this reconfiguration of the ends of knowledge, but the one Brague is interested in is the big one, the meta-effect that revolutionizes modernity's theological anthropology: "The true end of knowledge is 'to restore man and reinvest him (to a great extent) with the sovereignty and power that he had in the primitive state in which he had been created'" (69). Here we are at the gates of the modern project's "kingdom of man," entrance to which requires the true believer to hold to the conviction that the submission of nature to the will of humanity is an end in itself. Like his early church and medieval predecessors, Bacon believed that technology ought to be used to mitigate the effects of the Fall and to restore postlapsarian humanity. Unlike them, Bacon's emphasis on human power signifies a teleological shift away from the classical view of humanity's participation in nature and towards the modern view of humanity's domination of nature.

The real, physical discovery of the new world was accompanied by a new metaphysical picture of the world and of the human being who inhabits it. When Descartes reduced Aristotle's expansive notion of substance by dividing all reality into mental (mind) and physical substances (matter), he created the conditions for the possibility of modern self-creation and self-determination by eliminating from the medieval metaphysical picture of the world the hierarchical order of rational beings (e.g., angels and *longaevi*, or "longlivers") against which humanity measured and constrained itself. With the disappearance of its most direct rival, humanity rose to the top of a drastically reduced hierarchy. But it was unable to content itself with its privilege, lacking the "indolent haughtiness of the aristocrat," and began exerting its preeminence over all other living things in a way that reflects the "feverish activity of the emancipated" (*Kingdom of Man*, 68).

The modern project has failed. It was, as Brague's genealogy unveils, dialectically destined to do so from its inception because of a fundamental flaw at the heart of the project, what Brague calls the "paradox of the good": the modern project is good at providing and producing material, cultural, and moral goods, but "it seems to be incapable of explaining why it is *good* that there are human beings to enjoy the goods that are thus put at their disposal" (*Kingdom of Man*, 214). So, does humanity have the "will to survive"? Perhaps. It can continue to run on the fumes of the modern project's secularized version of faith in providence, the "myth of progress," but only for so long. This harrowing question confronting humanity is, for Brague, the existential implication of the modern project's repudiation of the two sources from which it emerged, "Athens" (natural) and "Jerusalem" (divine), its severed connection to any external transcendent referent, and its determination that it is the ground of its being. The modern project's aim was to bring genuine goods such as health, knowledge, freedom, peace, and prosperity. But, ironically and tragically, the project "that flatters itself with the sovereignty of sober reason can't find reasons for its continued existence" (*Curing Mad Truths*, 4). Sadly, even what remains of our humanism exists only as a reaction, an "anti-antihumanism" that lacks conviction directly affirming the goodness of the human.

Brague's project is to salvage the virtues, ideas, and truths that the modern project has driven to insanity by retrieving the premodern form of those good things, a bit of medieval wisdom for the modern age. It comes from necessity, not some antiquarian fetish for the past: "I do it because I surmise that the premodern form of some basic ideas might prove more stable than their modern perversion, hence more fraught with future, more capable of nurturing hope" (*Curing Mad Truths*, 6). What mad modern truths could be cured by medieval wisdom, you might ask? Well, humanity's late modern longing for total self-determination, self-creation, and radical autonomy, even in the face of its biological limitations, its "natality," as Hannah Arendt once put it, seems to reflect a yearning to transcend its corporeality and become some sort of quasi-angelic being. This angelic aspiration has a pedigree that is older

than we think. In his collection of essays, Brague observes that medieval thinkers such as Dante and Aquinas understood every angel, including the fallen, as creatures of God who make themselves what they are through a free act of turning either thankfully toward God in acceptance of his creative love or away from the source of its existence toward the dream of independence. Now, in the late stages of modernity, humanity is coming to terms with the nightmarish reality of having turned toward the latter. There may be some wisdom in (re)turning to the former.

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Katrina Forrester: *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 432.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670520000327

Katrina Forrester's eagerly anticipated book on the Rawlsian renaissance of political philosophy does not disappoint. It is fascinating, and it meets the high expectations that were aroused by her 2014 article "Citizenship, War, and the Origins of International Ethics in American Political Philosophy, 1960–1975," a careful exploration of the catalyzing effect the Vietnam War had on theorizing whose initial focus was an idealized, self-sufficient, independent society, at peace and in conditions of near consensus. There, she focused on two thinkers, John Rawls and Michael Walzer, and her thesis was that "philosophers of the nation-state unwittingly opened the door to international theories that dethroned the state—the cosmopolitan theories of justice, rights, and citizenship that have multiplied exponentially since the 1970s" (*Historical Journal* 57, no. 3 [2014]: 774). The book that developed from this study is equally meticulous while covering a greatly expanded canvas. The range of topics includes not only civil disobedience, global justice, and war, but also the proliferation of egalitarianisms, intergenerational justice, and the limits of philosophy itself. The dramatis personae are still restricted chiefly to anglophone analytical philosophers active between the end of the Second World War and today. But the list is a long one: helpful thumbnails remind the reader of contributions major and minor, from Ackerman, Anderson, and Arneson to Wright, Young, and Zinn.