

Shlomo Avineri: *Karl Marx: Philosophy and Revolution*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. xi, 217.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670520000273

Published in Yale's Jewish Lives series, Shlomo Avineri's new biography of Marx pays particular attention to Marx's complicated Jewish heritage. Marx's father had enjoyed civic emancipation when Trier was under French rule and was thus able to practice law as a Jew in 1814, but he was subsequently compelled to convert to Christianity in order to practice under Prussian law. Karl Marx, born in 1818, was raised in a rationalist, nonreligious home, but both Jewish religious practice and Jewish identity were all around him. Both of his grandfathers were rabbis, his uncle Samuel Marx was chief rabbi of Trier (12), and his mother did not convert until 1825 (12). Yet Karl himself did not identify as Jewish, and, notoriously, traded in anti-Judaic tropes in some of his most famous writings. Who better to explore this complicated history than Avineri, a lifelong student both of Marx (his 1968 *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* is a classic) and of Jewish political thought? Avineri treats this matter cogently without overstating the centrality of Judaism to Marx's thought. The result is a readable account of Marx's life and thought which gives a significant amount of space to the vexed question of Marx's relationship to Jewish identity.

It is a propitious moment for an accessible biography of Marx. Recent years have seen numerous scholarly biographies (Stedman Jones, Sperber, McLellan, Heinrich), and some excellent interpretive work on Marx's political philosophy (Harvey, Heinrich, Roberts, to name a few), but the nonspecialist can feel somewhat intimidated by the bulk of these works. Avineri's biography is brief and has a more popular audience in mind. Indeed, it is perhaps in search of such a general audience that Yale University Press has seen fit to omit proper scholarly citation. In spite of this irritating editorial decision, Avineri's biography is a delight. He touches on the key moments in Marx's life, briefly exploring issues that have been central to Avineri's previous engagement with him (Marx's treatment of Hegel, his concepts of alienation, the relationship between his youthful and mature writings). Interpretive arguments are made with great concision. Little of this material will be new to scholars of Marx, and Avineri presents his interpretation without any engagement with debates in the secondary literature, but this leads to an accessible book that one would happily recommend to the lay reader. Avineri presents Marx with the confidence of one who has spent a lifetime engaged with his thought, and he does so with the critical distance permitted by our current historical conjuncture.

Any treatment of Marx that aims to examine his relationship to Judaism must come to terms with his infamous "Zur Judenfrage." Avineri offers a chapter on the subject that begins with a brief interpretation of the essay's first part, which he treats as a straightforward defense of Jewish civic

emancipation (only touching briefly on Marx's more important argument about wider "human emancipation" and the limits of the "rights of man and the citizen"). He then turns to Marx's revolting second part, which treats Judaism as a symbol for avarice and money making. While Avineri considers the rhetorical move "inexcusable," he proceeds to suggest that Marx was denouncing capitalism in a coded way perhaps in order to avoid censorship (47). Marx was certainly employing "Judaism" as a cipher for capitalism, but given the undisguisedly anticapitalistic tenor of the piece, one might doubt that his motive was prudential. Avineri does not dwell on this unconvincing speculation, however; he places greater weight on the claim that the tension within the article's two sections represents an inner tension that Marx himself felt about his family's conversion. "It would be wrong," he asserts, "to divorce the complexity of Marx's arguments in his essay from his own family history" (49). This is doubtless true, but it merely restates the puzzle that has always surrounded Marx's identity. Avineri proceeds to point out Marx's many other, more forthright, calls for Jewish civic emancipation in *The Holy Family* and in his journalism. He gives a clear picture of Marx's view: Jewish civic emancipation was absolutely necessary, but insufficient. Ultimately, true emancipation would require emancipation from oppressive social conditions more generally (religion itself will be overcome once one removes the conditions that cause the suffering for which religion is a salve). If it is clear, then, that Marx was unambiguously calling for Jewish emancipation, we are still left with the question of why he had recourse to such harmful anti-Judaic tropes both in the second part of "On the Jewish Question" and peppered throughout his writings and correspondence. Avineri's view that the two dimensions of Marx's thought reflect his inner *Zerrissenheit* is certainly plausible, but it is inconclusive. It has the virtue, however, of being presented with modesty: Avineri avoids overindulging in psychological speculation in the absence of evidence.

If the book gives a sizable amount of space to Marx's complicated relationship to Judaism, the bulk of the work is a standard history of Marx's life and intellectual development in which Judaism is tangential. Avineri proceeds through the various stages of Marx's life—Trier, Berlin, Paris, Brussels, London; we learn of children, legitimate and illegitimate, surviving and deceased; of Marx's intellectual friendships and enmities; of his penury and his subsequent financial arrangements. The focus, however, remains largely philosophical and political. Marx's family life is painted in broad strokes, and those seeking insight into his inner life will be disappointed. The biography follows him through his shifting views as he worked through the implications of his revolutionary historical thought: his reading of Hegel, the *Manifesto*, the failure of 1848, his journalism, his study of political economy, his (at first marginal) role in the founding of the International Workingmen's Association, *Das Kapital*, and his late thoughts, particularly on the Paris Commune and the Gotha program. Avineri clearly admires Marx, but he is not interested in hagiography; he offers glimpses of Marx's

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

doi:10.1017/S0034670520000297

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 Helfer investigates their three main conversations, which appear in the *Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, and *Symposium*. The frame of Helfer's account is political ambition.

In the introduction and conclusion of his book, Helfer 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