

# Socrates and Alcibiades: Eros, Piety, and Politics\*

JACOB A. HOWLAND

*The University of Tulsa*

He [Plato] investigated the things that are good in the eyes of the multitude and the things that are gainful in the eyes of the multitude, whether they are truly good and gainful. He also investigated whether the things that are useful in the eyes of the multitude are truly as they believe them to be or not. He explained that they are not, and here he went through all the things that are good gains in the eyes of the multitude.

This is to be found in his book known as *Alcibiades Minor*.

Alfarabi (p. 58)

As its title announces, a recently published collection of translations and interpretive studies attempts to reintroduce Plato scholars and students of political philosophy to a part of the Platonic corpus which it is currently fashionable to overlook, on the grounds that the dialogues in question are supposed to be inauthentic, or second rate, or both. Thomas Pangle's Introduction to *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues* (Pangle) offers a cogent defense of the presumption that all thirty-five dialogues listed in the traditional canon of Thrasyllus are authentic, while the essays which follow each translation establish an equally favorable presumption regarding the significance of the selected dialogues. But one Socratic dialogue which is named in the traditional canon, *Alcibiades II*, especially qualifies as "forgotten"—so much so that it does not appear in the volume just mentioned. This is particularly unfortunate because *Alcibiades II* presents the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades in a very different light from that of *Alcibiades I*, which is included in Pangle's collection, and of which the former is the dramatic companion and sequel. *Alcibiades I* shows us Socrates' initial philosophical seduction of Alcibiades. Among other things, *Alcibiades II* contains Socrates' interpretation of the failure of his philosophic liaison with Alcibiades, and thus provides a critical counterweight to Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*.

As I hope to show here, *Alcibiades II* is a work of considerable philosophical interest. I will not be directly concerned with determining the dialogue's authenticity—virtually the only issue which has interested modern commentators.<sup>1</sup> This study may bear upon the question of authenticity if it provides rea-

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sons for challenging the common judgment that *Alcibiades II* is inferior (and so, “un-Platonic”) in style and content (see, e.g., Shorey, Taylor, the introductions to Plato [1927] and [1892], and Heidel, pp. 56–59). But I am primarily interested in exploring the dialogue’s presentation of the nature of Socratic philosophizing, a subject which was of interest to others besides Plato, most notably, Aristophanes and Xenophon. It is worth stressing that no final determination of authorship is required for such an inquiry, although the speeches and deeds of *Alcibiades II* are clearly situated within, and so should be interpreted in the light of, the dramatic constellation of the Platonic dialogues. Put broadly, *Alcibiades II* (the traditional subtitle of which was “On Prayer”) engages both Platonic and non-Platonic portraits of Socrates and Alcibiades in attempting to elucidate the philosophical and political implications of Socratic and Alcibiadian *erōs* and the nature of Socratic piety. Let us turn directly to the text to see how these issues frame the dialogue’s action.

## I.

*Alcibiades II* takes place in the immediate vicinity of a temple, as is clear from the opening exchange: “Why Alcibiades, are you on your way to offer a prayer to the god?” “I certainly am, Socrates” (*Alc. II* 138a1–3. References are to the Burnet edition, unless otherwise specified). This strikes Socrates as rather unusual, if we may judge by his tone. (His phrase, *ara ge* [*Alc. II* 138a1], suggests surprise; see Denniston, pp. 32–33, 43.) As in *Alcibiades I*, the dramatic time of which cannot be more than a very few years prior to the present conversation,<sup>2</sup> Socrates and Alcibiades are alone during their entire encounter. But on the occasion when Socrates spoke to Alcibiades for the very first time, he began by calling him “Son of Kleinias” (*Alc. I* 103a1). Socrates’ present mode of address suggests that Alcibiades has in the interim in some sense become his own man. In particular, it is clear that Alcibiades has not maintained the devotion to Socrates he promised at the end of the earlier dialogue (*Alc. I* 135d9–10). The hopeful enthusiasm he displayed there has given way to a dour aloofness: Alcibiades will not meet Socrates’ eyes or reveal to him his apparently weighty thoughts. “You seem sullen and look at the ground as though you were pondering something.” “And what might one ponder, Socrates?” (*Alc. II* 138a4–6). From Socrates’ perspective, Alcibiades could not fully know the answer to his own question. For in their first discussion Socrates and Alcibiades had agreed that souls, like eyes, are “mirrors” endowed with the power of “sight,” and that each of them could come to know his own soul, and so himself, only through the reciprocal attempt to “see” the soul of the other together with his own soul’s “image” (*eidōlon*) as “reflected” therein (*Alc. I* 132c7ff.). Alcibiades’ initial devotion to Socrates followed his Socratically-induced conviction that learning, practice, and diligent care for himself (*epi-*

*meleia*), and in particular a care for self-knowledge, were prerequisite for the fulfillment of his grand political ambition (*Alc. I* 123d4–124b6). But this conviction was not long-lived. In *Alcibiades II*, Socrates must bring Alcibiades to rededicate himself to Socrates.

An ancient editor classified both *Alcibiades I* and *II* as “maieutic,” implying that Socrates’ art of philosophic obstetrics is on display in both dialogues to the extent that Socrates leads Alcibiades to discover or rediscover his belief in the worth of Socratic education. But what is the pedagogic worth of this belief? Specifically, if Alcibiades’ initial commitment to Socrates did not take root or bear fruit, what can we expect of his renewed commitment? In considering this question, it is important to observe that whereas *Alcibiades I* concludes with a hopeful image of eros, birth, and mutual care (*Alc. I* 135e1–3; cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* 1353–57), *Alcibiades II* is filled with images of strife, death, and psychic disease. This is a strong indication that Alcibiades’ opportunity for philosophic conception and birth has been lost by the time the second dialogue occurs. Indeed, in *Alcibiades II* it is Socrates’ diagnosis of Alcibiades’ psychic condition that the philosophic communion represented in the metaphor of “seeing eye to eye”—an image of unanimity and reciprocity—is now out of the question. In *Alcibiades I*, on the other hand, Socrates emphasizes the potential reciprocity of his relationship with Alcibiades (see *Alc. I* 124b10ff. and Socrates’ use of the dual form *nō* [“we two”] at 124d3, together with 135e1–3). Like a patient going to the doctor for the treatment of ophthalmia, Alcibiades finally agrees to obey Socrates in the belief that Socrates will be able to remove the mist of folly (*aphrosunē*) from around his soul (*Alc. II* 150c6–e8, with 139e1–140b3). He does so only after Socrates convinces him that he otherwise runs the risk of doing himself great harm. But Socrates never actually claims that he will be able to heal Alcibiades, and in fact he indicates that his companionship cannot improve him until he has been cured of his sickness (*Alc. II* 150e1–5). What’s more, the stark contrast in tone between the two dialogues suggests a very bleak prognosis. While the drama of *Alcibiades I* is illuminated by Socrates’ speeches about the brilliance of Alcibiades’ beauty, family, wealth, and prospects for self-knowledge and political rule—prospects which gain a reflected brightness from the splendor of the royal Persian and Lacedaimonian lineages, riches, and virtues—Socrates gives *Alcibiades II* a dense and gloomy atmosphere by invoking such fateful figures as Oedipus, Archelaus, Orestes, Alcmaeon, and Creon, and the corresponding tragic themes of blindness, incest, parricide, regicide, madness, exile, and civil war.

In spite of Socrates’ indication that he himself is free of the psychic disease of folly, he surrounds himself as well as Alcibiades with an atmosphere of tragic expectation. At the very end of *Alcibiades II*, Socrates reiterates his perception that his fate is intertwined with Alcibiades’ (cf. *Alc. I* 135e6–8). At 151b9–10 Socrates quotes a passage from Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* (858–59) in which Creon takes Teiresias’ victory crown as a good omen for the city

of Thebes, which is currently besieged by Polyneices and his Argive forces. “I seem to myself to be no less wave-tossed than Creon,” Socrates tells Alcibiades, “and would like to come off with a noble victory [*kallinikos*] over your lovers” (*Alc. II* 151c1–2). But in Euripides’ play Creon is soon engulfed by misfortune, for in fact Teiresias brings the news that if Thebes is to be saved Creon’s son Menoecus must die in requital for Cadmus’ ancient crime against Ares. Seen in this context, Socrates’ reference to Euripides’ tragedy amounts to a prediction that he will fail to conquer Alcibiades’ other lovers, and that this failure will raise up a sea of troubles for him.

In *Alcibiades I* Socrates identified his main rival as the Athenian *dēmos* (132a1). Victory over the demos would have meant the birth in Alcibiades of a noble and winged eros; defeat means that Alcibiades will become a base “lover of the people” (*dēmerastēs*; *Alc. I* 132a3). Socrates foresees, however, that Athens will see *his* paternity in Alcibiades’ tyrannical ambition. (Cf. *Apology* 19b4–c1 with Aristophanes’ *Clouds* as a whole and Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.9ff.) In quoting Creon, Socrates also seems to anticipate the manner in which his fellow citizens will interpret his connection with Alcibiades. To the Athenians, the kinship between Socrates and Alcibiades was evidenced by their shared irreverence for the gods of the *polis*. Just as Socrates was convicted and executed for religious crimes, the Athenians’ suspicions about Alcibiades’ tyrannical *hubris* were confirmed by two criminal acts in which he was implicated: the desecration of the Hermae and the alleged profanation of the Eleusian mysteries. And just as Thebes could not survive unless Creon offered his own son’s life to appease the god of war, the Athenians sought to maintain the benevolence of their protecting gods by asking for the deaths of both Socrates and Alcibiades.<sup>3</sup>

To recapitulate, *Alcibiades II* begins and ends in ways that underscore the philosophically and politically problematic character of Socrates’ relationship with Alcibiades. We may take our bearings by the example of Creon. Socrates’ association with Creon, who loses his own child, anticipates the failure of his philosophic generativity in the case of Alcibiades. In the language of *Alcibiades I*, Socrates’ philosophic eros fails to reproduce itself in Alcibiades’ soul. In addition, however, the need for Menoecus to die brings to light an underlying conflict between Creon’s generativity and the requirements of his polis and its gods. Socrates’ association with Creon thus suggests that his philosophic eros, independently of its success or failure in regenerating itself in other souls, may be radically at odds with Athenian piety and politics. It was taken to be so by the Athenians, but they assimilated Socrates’ philosophic eros to Alcibiades’ political eros. According to Socrates, these two sorts of eros are fundamentally different. Hence it is crucial to determine why and in what specific respects each of these two sorts of eros may conflict with the reverence traditionally accorded the Olympian gods of the polis and the distinctive form of political life these gods protect. This is the central task of *Alcibiades II*.

II.

Within *Alcibiades II*, the tragic motifs of madness and sickness function as lenses through which we may view Socrates' and Alcibiades' erotic natures. Tragedy is suited to this role because of its complexity and profundity as well as its subject matter. The Athenians' tragic poetry was both informed by and largely constitutive of their traditional understanding of a citizen's responsibilities to his kin, his political community, and its gods. Socrates' use of tragic figures and motifs does not, however, constitute a full endorsement of either the tradition or conventional interpretations of the tradition. On the contrary, Socrates shows that the conventional understanding of madness obscures the natures of tragic protagonists like Oedipus and Ajax as well as Socrates' own philosophic nature. Thus, while tragic poetry reflects and sustains the traditions of political community, the insight of the poets is deeper than that of the many. On the other hand, their tragic insight does not extend to an understanding of the nature of the philosopher. (This point is developed along different lines in Howland [1986]). In *Alcibiades II*, Socrates draws on a rich fund of tragic representations in order to distinguish Alcibiades' characteristically tragic madness from his own nontragic philosophic madness, and to delineate the conventional perspective which was incapable of making this distinction.

Let us return to the text to see how the themes of madness and sickness are developed in the dialogue's opening pages. In response to Alcibiades' guarded question ("What might one ponder?"), Socrates tells Alcibiades that it would be proper for him to be preoccupied by "the greatest concern [*sunnoian*]," namely, how one can avoid praying for great ills (*kaka*) in the mistaken belief that they are goods (*agatha*), inasmuch as the gods are disposed to grant our prayers (*Alc. II* 138a7, b6–9). He cites the example of Oedipus, of whom "[the poets] say that he prayed for his sons to divide his patrimony by the sword" (*Alc. II* 138b9–c2. See Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* 709ff. and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* 421ff., 1370ff. Souilhé finds in the phrase an echo of *Phoenician Women* 64–67 [Plato, 1962, 21, n.1]).

Alcibiades rejects the relevance of Socrates' point: Oedipus was "mad," whereas Alcibiades evidently considers himself to be "healthy." "For who do you think could bring himself to pray for such things if he were healthy?" (*Alc. II* 138c6–8). At first glance, Socrates' example does indeed seem inappropriate, since he later asserts that Oedipus did not mistake ills for goods but knowingly prayed for ills (*Alc. II* 141a4–5; see below). And Socrates does not deny that Oedipus was mad when he cursed his sons; in fact, he confirms this point. Oedipus cursed his sons "in a fit of anger" (141a2), which was provoked by the humiliation he suffered when "[T]he two of them chose thrones at the price of their father" (*Oed. Col.* 448; cf. 1380). Oedipus uttered these words after he discovered that Eteocles and Polyneices were willing to let him languish in exile while they fought over the rule of Thebes. Although Socrates passes over

Oedipus' ascent to the throne at the price of his own father, the enormity of the anger he felt toward his sons was foreshadowed in the great rage which led him unknowingly to beat his father to death. In addition, Socrates singles out the tendency to violent rage as a characteristic of madmen: madmen are accustomed to strike and beat their fellow citizens (*Alc. II* 139c10–d2). Oedipus is thus an example, not of ignorance of the difference between ills and goods, but of a second sort of danger that must be avoided in prayer: praying in a mad rage for ills which one recognizes as such.

Socrates implies, however, that Alcibiades is particularly susceptible to this second sort of danger, since his remark about the behavior of madmen describes Alcibiades himself. Plutarch, for example, having mentioned in passing Thucydides' reference to Alcibiades' great and habitual "transgression of law and custom [*paranomia*] in respect to his own body," goes on to speak of two instances in which the young Alcibiades struck older men: one a teacher, the other his future father-in-law (Thucydides 6.15; Plutarch, *Alc.* 6–8). In the *Symposium*, Socrates, pretending that his attention to Agathon may provoke Alcibiades into a jealous rage, begs Agathon to "defend me, if he [Alcibiades] should attempt to use violent force, for I really dread his madness and erotic devotion" (213d5–6). Later in *Alcibiades II* Socrates supposes, for the sake of example, that Alcibiades wished to murder his guardian Pericles (143e8ff.). This example, in which parricide is invested with an immediate political significance, makes explicit one aspect of Alcibiades' youthful insolence: beating one's elders is an act of violence against the community which has nurtured one, and as such is a kind of political parricide.<sup>4</sup> Socrates' reference to Oedipus underscores the political dimension of Alcibiades' insolent behavior: Oedipus' murder of Laius and curse of his heirs Polyneices and Eteocles are on a political level both acts of parricide against the city of Thebes. In this connection, Socrates' hypothetical supposition that Alcibiades desires to murder Pericles suggests that Alcibiades' violent public behavior may be the manifestation of a kind of madness akin to that of Oedipus in its nature and significance.

In his subsequent exploration of the theme of madness, Socrates goes on to raise the question of his own relation to Oedipus. He begins with Alcibiades' distinction between being mad and being healthy. Alcibiades unequivocally affirms the view that being mad is the opposite of being of sound mind (*to phronein*). He is more guarded in response to Socrates' next question: "And are there some human beings who seem to you to be foolish [*aphrones*] and some sound in judgment [*phronimoi*]?" "There are some." Socrates and Alcibiades go on to agree that some men are healthy and others are sick and feeble, but no one is in neither state. Alcibiades admits under questioning that the same thing holds true of folly (*aphrosune*) and sound judgment (*phronēsis*); there is no third condition in between these. But if madness (*mania*) is the opposite of sound judgment, Socrates asks, must not folly and madness be the same thing? "It appears so," Alcibiades responds cautiously (*Alc. II* 138d1–139c2).

We must not overlook the contrast, evident in this passage and throughout the dialogue, between Alcibiades' relatively cautious reticence and Socrates' relatively daring frankness. Socrates goes on to declare explicitly what Alcibiades would not, and he presses him to agree with his assertion: "Some of your contemporaries happen to be foolish, and what's more, some of your elders. For come on, by Zeus: don't you think that of those in the city few are of sound judgment, and the many are foolish, whom indeed you call mad?" "Yes, I do," Alcibiades confesses (*Alc. II* 139c4–9). Socrates is doubly daring here because he condemns democracy, or the rule of the many, and encourages a presumption on the part of Alcibiades against his elders. Amusingly, in demanding an answer to this particular question he is acting rather like a jealous lover. Alcibiades' answer is philosophically worthless: Socrates may be in a position to verify the folly of the many on account of his regular practice of public dialogue, but Alcibiades certainly is not. All possible jealousy aside, Socrates may judge it pedagogically useful to stress the foolishness of the many. This view is supported below in Section IV

The preceding observations help to prepare us for Socrates' ironic references to himself (as well as Alcibiades) in his ensuing correction of the view that madness and folly are the same thing. That Socrates should proceed implicitly to raise questions about his own nature is not surprising, since the exclusion of "some third condition in between [*dia mesou*]" sound judgment and folly (*Alc. II* 139a14) amounts to a denial of the possibility of philosophy, which Socrates elsewhere characterizes as an ascent from aphrosune to phronesis (here in its highest sense: "wise insight") that resembles the improvement of vision and originates in the necessarily intermediate knowledge of one's own ignorance (*Rep.* 514a–517a). Alternatively, the unmediated opposition between madness and phronesis excludes all varieties of divinely given mania, including philosophy (*Phaedrus* 244a6ff.). This brings us to an important point: despite his apparently extreme behavior, we may expect that Socrates will associate his philosophic activity with the notions of the middle ground (*to meson*) and the mean.<sup>5</sup>

Socrates overturns the simple identification of madness and folly with the argument that if the many, foolish as they are, were also mad, "we [fellow citizens] would long ago have paid the penalty" by "being struck and beaten" by them, and "[suffering] all the things which madmen are accustomed to do." What, then, should we say about folly? Socrates has another way of considering this question. A sick man may have podagra (gout in the feet), a fever, ophthalmia, or some other illness; while every case of ophthalmia is a sickness, not every sickness is ophthalmia. Fever, podagra, and ophthalmia are all sicknesses, but each has its own "effect" (*apergasia*) and works according to its own "power" (*dunamis*). Similarly, cobblers, carpenters, and statuary are all craftsmen, but each embraces a different part of craftsmanship. In the same way, men are distinguished by the way in which they have divided up folly.

Those who possess the greatest share of it are called “mad;” those who possess a smaller part, “foolish” or “stupid,” or most euphemistically “big-hearted” (*megalopsuchos*: literally “great-souled”), “silly,” “innocent,” “inexperienced,” or “senseless.” The varieties of folly differ from one another, as do the kinds of art and sickness (*Alc. II* 139c10–140d4).

This passage is complex and deserves careful consideration. To begin with, Socrates makes it clear that conventional opinion cannot give us an adequate understanding of madness. The list of names commonly applied to the foolish is a conventional one; as such, it expresses the opinion of the many. But Socrates and Alcibiades have agreed that the many are themselves foolish. From the perspective of the many, folly is the lack of prudence in a narrow, self-serving sense. The “big-hearted,” “inexperienced,” or “innocent” man does not appreciate the way of the world; he is insufficiently calculative and clever regarding his own self-interest. By convention, folly (*a-phrosune*) is the privation of calculative prudence (*phronesis*). But this view does not square with Socrates’ account, wherein folly is not the absence of prudence nor sickness the absence of health. Instead, Socrates represents sickness and folly as distinct wholes, like craftsmanship, of which men may possess a part or in which they may share. Each sickness (and obviously, every sort of art or *technē*) is characterized by its own power and effect. Socrates does not speak of the powers and effects of folly, but he does assert that the kinds of folly differ from one another “just as art is manifest to us [as differing] from art and sickness from sickness” (*Alc. II* 140d1–3). Yet while the various arts and sicknesses differ from one another because they share in different parts of their respective wholes, Socrates explains the difference between madness and folly in terms of the different degrees of participation in the whole of folly. From this perspective, the madman would have the greatest share of folly. Again, however, Socrates makes this distinction in the course of reciting the names commonly applied to the foolish, which indicates that the conception of madness as the extreme degree of folly is also a conventional one.

Conventional opinion holds that prudence is knowing what one ought to do and say, whereas folly is the ignorance of both of these things (*Alc. II* 140e1–5). But madness cannot be understood as extreme ignorance in these matters. Thus, Socrates adduces Oedipus as an example of one of those who unknowingly say and do what they ought not, but he immediately contradicts himself when he adds that Oedipus neither prayed for good things nor believed that he was doing so (*Alc. II* 140e7–141a4). In other words, Oedipus, who was mad with rage, knowingly prayed for ills. In sum: if folly is ignorance, madness is not folly, for madness evidently does not differ from prudence in a crucial respect—the knowledge of goods and ills.

Madness does, however, differ markedly from prudent self-interest in its power and effects, in such a way as to seem to the many to be extreme folly. To be more precise, we should not speak of *the* power or *the* effect of madness. From the perspective of prudent self-interest all madness appears to be one and

the same thing, but Socrates suggests that there are different kinds of madness, just as there are different kinds of sicknesses and arts. Nonetheless, the present passage does not illuminate the varieties of madness. On the contrary, it poses the problem of how Socrates' madness is to be distinguished from Alcibiades'. In particular, it is striking that Socrates presents himself as a close ally of Alcibiades by adapting the words Homer had Diomedes utter in the *Iliad* when he requested a partner to join him in spying upon the Trojan camp: at one point Socrates assures Alcibiades that if he pays attention "we two inquiring together [*sun te duo skeptomenō*] will perhaps discover [what we seek]" (*Alc. II* 140a1–2; cf. *Iliad* 10.224: *sun te du'erchomenō*, "we two going together"). Socrates and Alcibiades, this Homeric reference suggests, are a pair of combatants (the dual verbal form *skeptomeno* suggests a special intimacy) who are joining forces against a common enemy. But who is the enemy? Socrates has already helped to prepare us for a battle by implicitly identifying Alcibiades with those madmen who strike and beat their fellow citizens. But have we not just witnessed Socrates himself doing the same sort of deeds—boldly using words to strike blows against the fathers of Athens, the many, and so the democratic regime itself?

Socrates' fellow citizens will become well acquainted with his tendency to beat them up in discourse; this is the clearest public manifestation of *his* madness. The opinion of Theodorus in the *Theaetetus* is highly instructive on this point. When pressed by Socrates to engage in dialogue, Theodorus compares him to Sciron, a savage criminal who would force travellers passing along the road where he sat to wash his feet, and then kick them into the sea, and to Antaeus, a monstrous son of Poseidon who would force strangers to wrestle with him until they were exhausted, and then kill them (*Theaetetus* 169a9–b4). To Theodorus and others, Socrates' behavior is mad insofar as it resembles criminal violence, especially since Socrates is no Antaeus and his "victims" are collectively far more powerful than he is (cf. *Apol.* 30e4ff., *Rep.* 493a6ff.).

Socrates responds to Theodorus by telling him, "You have made a most excellent likeness of my sickness," which he describes as a "terrible love of naked exercise" in speeches (*Theaet.* 169b5–c1). In the passage *Alcibiades II* now at hand, Socrates mentions three sorts of sickness: fever, ophthalmia, and podagra. Given Socrates' analogy between sickness and madness, this may be a playful way of referring to his own feverish eros for exercise in speeches, Alcibiades' psychic ophthalmia and Oedipus' literal and metaphorical blindness, and Oedipus' damaged feet. We must in any case take seriously the challenge of discerning the powers and effects of the sorts of mania these three men exemplify.

### III.

In *Alcibiades II*, the tragic figure of Oedipus stands as a third in the light of which we may compare Alcibiades and Socrates. In the first place, we have

already noticed that Socrates alludes very early in the dialogue to the stories told about Oedipus' experiences when he was in exile from Thebes. These stories are pertinent to *Alcibiades II* in part because Oedipus' relationship with Thebes parallels Athens' ambivalence toward Alcibiades and Socrates and the responses of these men to Athens' treatment of them.

Oedipus could not live within the walls of Thebes once his crimes had come to light, but at the same time Thebes could not live without him. The oracles indicated that Thebes' strength depended upon him, so that Creon, as Thebes' emissary, sought to keep him just outside the city, but not within it, lest his tomb proved to be unlucky (*Oed. Col.* 389ff.). Athens treated Alcibiades in a similar manner after he left Sparta. Many Athenians feared his presence in the city because of his tyrannical impulses and the potential disfavor of the gods toward him, yet appreciated the importance of his military leadership for Athens' well-being. Athens needed Alcibiades, but for the sake of its integrity as a political community desired to keep him engaged in battle beyond its walls (see Plutarch, *Alc.* 25ff.). Along these same lines, Athens' ambivalence toward Socrates was manifested in the closeness of the vote to convict him, a point emphasized by Socrates (*Apol.* 35e1–36b2). Like Oedipus, Socrates was, in effect, an exile: his death sentence amounted to a public certification of his political homelessness.

Socrates' response to Athens' final judgment closely resembled the prayer Oedipus uttered when he discovered that his sons had acquiesced in his enforced exile to the border of Thebes. For Socrates in effect cursed Athens with a prophecy which he set forth at the time "when human beings most of all deliver oracles—when they are about to die." He predicted—and in doing so in the presence of his supporters did his best to encourage—a kind of internecine strife in Athens: men younger and harsher than he would come forth to vex the fathers of Athens by testing and refuting them (*Apol.* 39c2–d3). Similarly, as soon as Alcibiades was recalled to Athens to stand trial, he began to aid her enemies. He immediately spoiled Athens' plans to take the Sicilian city of Messina and went on to give the Spartans invaluable aid; later, having fled Sparta, he advised the Persian satrap Tissaphernes to play Sparta and Athens off against each other (Thucydides 6.74ff.; Plutarch, *Alc.* 22–23, 25.1).

Oedipus' exile from Thebes came about as a result of his hubristic transgression of the sacred laws which bind human beings together in political community. The points of resemblance noted above sharpen the question of the relation between Socrates' and Alcibiades' erotic dispositions and Oedipus' peculiar sort of hubris or characteristic madness.

Setting aside *Alcibiades II*, there are only two references to Oedipus in the Platonic corpus (Brandwood, p. 614). Significantly, both occur in the Platonic dialogue devoted to the search for the best laws: Oedipus is of interest to Plato especially because of the fundamental political significance of his crimes. At *Laws* 838c5, the name of Oedipus comes up in connection with the topic of

incest. Later, during a discussion of the neglect of parents by their children, the Athenian Stranger notes that when Oedipus was dishonored he “invoked upon his own children things which, everyone sings, came to be hearkened to and brought to completion by the gods” (*Laws* 931b5–7). The Stranger’s earlier reference reminds us that Oedipus became the father of his children, who are also his brothers, by killing his own father and sleeping with his mother. Oedipus’ crimes of patricide and incest, which in themselves strike directly at the integrity of the political community as well as the family, reappear on the level of traditional myth and serve as emblems of his political hubris. By legend, the Thebans are autochthonous: they are the descendants of Cadmus’ sown men. In the terms of this legend, Oedipus is the brother of his fellow citizens, for all share the earth as a common mother. But Oedipus usurps his mythical mother’s role in treating the Thebans as though they were *his children* (*Oed. Tyr.* 1, 6, 58, 142). His vision of himself as the father of his mythical brothers is proof of a tyrannical hubris which is, in political as well as purely mythical terms, both parricidal and incestuous. As an image of his hubris, Oedipus’ incest signifies his failure to acknowledge his human, and specifically political, origins. Oedipus takes himself to be a radically self-made man. Far from being a son of Corinth or Thebes, Oedipus—a stranger to both cities and a “know-nothing” guided only by his wits—claims to have become Thebes’ savior and the source of its life (*Oed. Tyr.* 37–39, 220, 222, 396–98).

Oedipus’ self-assertion as the father of the Thebans, his “earth-born” brothers, imitates the incest of Uranus, the son and later the husband of Earth. This association with the pre-Olympian gods, which Oedipus strengthens when he identifies himself as a son of Chance (*Tuchē*) and “kin to the moons,” with which he waxes and wanes (*Oed. Tyr.* 1082–83; cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 371–74), points toward the ultimate implications of Oedipus’ hubris. In denying his political origins, Oedipus rejects the authority of the Olympian gods of the polis and so, implicitly, of the civilizing laws first established by them—laws “whose only father is Olympus, and which the mortal nature of man did not give birth to,” especially those prohibiting incest and patricide (*Oed. Tyr.* 865–70). Just as important, by aspiring to replace the Olympians with himself as with a cosmic god, Oedipus does away with the political liberty which the Olympians sustained and defended and which set the free citizens of the polis apart from the subjects of barbarian empires. Paul Rahe notes that the polis provided its citizens “with a middle ground (*to meson*) in which to display those qualities that distinguished them from animals,” or, in a subsequent formulation, “to do or say something of note,” and he provides evidence in support of the claim that “*to meson* came to be identified with political community itself” (Rahe, p. 282 with n. 52 and p. 284). Oedipus, who likens himself to a nonanthropomorphic or barbarian god (see Herodotus 1.131), resembles a barbarian despot in that he does away with this middle or common ground.

To sum up: Oedipus is marked by a hubristic madness which is politically

incestuous and parricidal insofar as it leads him to usurp the roles of the gods, and in particular, to attempt to replace the Olympian gods as the *archē*—the beginning, sustaining source, and ruling element—of political community. What of Socrates and Alcibiades? To begin with, we should note that Oedipus seems an erotic compared to these men. Benardete, in fact, speaks of “the absence of all desires in Oedipus” (1964, p. 7). Socrates’ madness, as we have seen, must be identified with his “terrible love of naked exercise” in speeches, his philosophic eros. As for Alcibiades, Socrates tells him that his desire for renown is greater than any eros anyone else ever had for anything (*Alc. I* 124b5–6; cf. 105b7–c4). The strength of Alcibiades’ eros is emphasized by the fact that, as Rosen notes, Alcibiades is the only character in the *Symposium* to whom Socrates attributes madness (p. 290; *Symp.* 213d5–6). This difference aside, *Alcibiades II* shows that Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ distinct sorts of erotic madnnesses compel them both to challenge the authority of the Olympians.

The dialogue’s plot ought to arouse suspicion: Socrates encounters Alcibiades on his way to a temple and convinces him not to pray. As we will see in Section V, Socrates’ advice to Alcibiades implies that it is irrelevant to our welfare whether or not we worship the gods through prayers and sacrifices. For now, we may observe that Socrates prepares us in the first lines of the dialogue for what is to come. Immediately after swearing “by Zeus,” he insists upon the need for “much forethought” (*pollēs promētheias*) when praying, in case the gods should be disposed to grant an ignorant request for a great ill, thereby virtually invoking the rebellious god Prometheus or “Forethought” to protect us against the ill will of the Father and King of the Olympians (*Alc. II* 138b1, b6). These words, however, also anticipate the fundamental difference between Alcibiades’ extreme political eros and Socrates’ self-moderating philosophic eros: whereas Socrates stands for the (partial) neglect or “starvation” of the gods and so their (qualified) replacement by philosophic forethought, Alcibiades desires to replace Zeus and the Olympians with himself as the sole arche of a world-wide empire.

#### IV.

We now return to the text and Socrates’ characterization of Alcibiades. Socrates uses the example of Oedipus to reiterate his first and main point: one ought to be very careful not to pray for ills in the belief that they are goods. For example, Socrates supposes, and Alcibiades confirms, that Alcibiades would be delighted if the god to whom he now intends to pray were to offer him rule over all of Europe, and were to promise “that all men will perceive that Alcibiades, son of Kleinias, is tyrant” (*Alc. II* 141b4–5). It would, however, be unsafe to accept such an offer haphazardly or to pray for such a thing, as the fate of the tyrant Archelaus and his lover confirms.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, many Athenians

who have desired and obtained military command have been exiled, or killed, or have been besieged by accusers upon returning home. Finally, some of those who have prayed for children have fallen into great misfortune as a result of their prayers having been granted. As a remedy for our presumptuous folly, Socrates recommends the prayer of an anonymous poet of sound judgment (*phronimos*): “King Zeus, give to us good things whether we pray or do not pray, but ward off terrible things even if we pray for them” (*Alc. II*143a1–2, reading *deina* for Burnet’s *deila*).

In the center of this passage we find clear anticipations of the fates of Socrates and Alcibiades. Alcibiades is the prime example of an Athenian general who suffered exile and was harassed by accusers, and in reflecting upon the anachronism noted above, we cannot fail to observe that 399, the year of Archelaus’ death, was also the year of Socrates’ execution. In this respect, and indeed as a whole, the passage at hand is reminiscent of the beginning of *Alcibiades I*, in which Socrates also links Alcibiades’ lot with his own. At *Alcibiades I* 103a–106a, Socrates describes Alcibiades’ erotic nature in a way that makes clear the connection between praying for tyrannical rule and praying for children: Socrates presents himself as indispensable for Alcibiades’ ambition of being able to rule Asia as well as Europe, and so being able “to fill with your *name* and your *power* all men, so to speak” (*Alc. I* 105c3–4, my emphasis; cf. *Alc. I*, 124b3–6). Just as Alcibiades, “dear son of Kleinias and Deinomache” (105d2), bears the name of his parents and feels himself to be filled with the power of their families and particularly of his uncle Pericles (104a6–b9), he hopes in turn to produce as a vessel of *his* name and power, not a biological child, but a global empire.

Alcibiades identifies superior renown with superior honor: he hopes “within a very few days” to prove that he is “more worthy of honor than Pericles or anyone else who ever lived” (105b1–3). His impatient ambition must inevitably bring him into conflict with his guardian, his fatherland, and its gods, for his heroes are not democrats, not Athenians, not even Greeks, but barbarian despots: he does not contradict Socrates’ supposition that, “apart from Cyrus and Xerxes,” he believes “no one worthy of mention has ever come to be” (105c4–6). When we return to *Alcibiades II*, we are thus not surprised that immediately after Socrates has raised the subject of Alcibiades’ global ambition he goes on to introduce the theme of parricide. Alcibiades passionately rejects the notion that, like Orestes and Alcmaeon, he wishes to kill his own mother (“No unlucky words, by Zeus, Socrates!”), but he raises no objection to the alternative supposition, for the sake of example, that he wishes to murder Pericles (*Alc. II* 143c8–144a8).

Socrates uses the latter example to illustrate a situation in which ignorance would be better than knowledge: Alcibiades would never actually knife Pericles if he always failed to recognize him when he was about to do so (144a9–b10). Alcibiades finds Socrates’ second example unobjectionable presumably because

the link it implicitly establishes between violence and the love of honor is already quite familiar to him. Oedipus becomes violently angry only when he is signally dishonored, but Alcibiades is evidently accustomed to angrily asserting the justice of his claims to superiority and to using violence, when necessary, to secure his preeminence in any contest (see *Alc. I* 110b1–c2, *Protag.* 336e1–2, and Plutarch, *Alc.* 2.1–3).

Socrates' example is in its general form familiar from the works of the poets, and brings to mind the deeds of two different men whose sense of their own superiority and corresponding love of honor moved them to engage in extraordinary acts of violence. The first is Telamonian Ajax. Alcibiades claims Eurysakes and Zeus, hence also Ajax, the father of Eurysakes, as ancestors; this is the line from which he believes he has inherited his well-born nature (*Alc. I* 121a1–2, with 120d12–e2). It is thus pertinent to consider in what respects Alcibiades may resemble his putative ancestors. It is also pertinent to inquire into Socrates' possible resemblance to Daedalus and Hephaestus, whom he claims in the same passage as his own progenitors (*Alc. I* 121a3–4; cf. *Euthyphro* 11c–d). Like Prometheus, Hephaestus is a rebellious god. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates supposes that father-beating is dear to Hephaestus, presumably because Zeus once threw him down from heaven when he took his mother's side in a quarrel (*Euth.*, 8b3–4; *Iliad* 1.586–94). Socrates underscores the political significance of the conflict between Zeus and Hephaestus when he refuses to allow the story of their quarrel to be told in the just city (*Rep.* 378d3–7).

When Odysseus visits Hades in the *Odyssey*, the shade of Ajax refuses to approach or address him because of the anger he still feels on account of Odysseus' having been awarded Achilles' armor in the contests after his death (*Od.* 11.541–64). The rage Ajax feels against the Hellenes, the iron conviction of his own superior worth from which this rage springs, and the heroic resolution to die nobly through which he proves this worth, are the subjects of Sophocles' *Ajax*. In Sophocles' tragic drama Ajax resolves to murder Agamemnon and Menelaus because he feels they contrived to cheat him of the prize he deserved for supreme valor, Achilles' armor, but when he is at the point of slaying the two commanders, Athena diverts him with madness—a punishment, she warns Odysseus, for Ajax' arrogance (*Ajax* 127–30, cf. 756–77). Intent upon killing his fellow warriors, Ajax butchers whole herds of captured livestock in their place. Thinking that he is slaughtering the Hellenes, Ajax takes animals for men and fails to recognize his companions. Thus, Odysseus—whom Ajax plans to torture and then kill—is able safely to observe him in his madness (*Ajax*, 83). When Ajax' wits return, he chooses autarchy (*autarkeia*), and therefore suicide, over a life of yielding to the gods and showing deference to other men.

When Socrates first approached Alcibiades, he began by commenting on the boy's unsurpassed high-mindedness and claims to self-sufficiency (*Alc. I*

103b4ff.). Socrates says of Alcibiades' lovers: "although they were many and thought highly of themselves [*megalophronōn*], there was not one who, being outstripped by your pride, didn't flee from under you" (103b4–5; cf. 119d1–2. Note the ambiguity of *megalophrosune* and *megalopsuchia*, which may connote either greatness of soul or mind, or arrogance.). And in a manner reminiscent of Oedipus, Alcibiades asserted that he was "in need of no other human being for anything"; by comparison, Ajax boasted that, unlike other men, he needed no help from the gods to win fame through his prowess in battle (*Alc. I* 104a1–2; *Ajax* 766–75). But both of these boasts prove hollow: Socrates shows that Alcibiades' pride is in fact rooted in the reputation, influence, and wealth of his family, and above all in the power of Pericles (*Alc. I* 104a6–b9), and the fame of Ajax finally depends upon the decision of Agamemnon and Menelaus in awarding the prize of valor. Ajax' attempt to murder the sons of Atreus is a futile and self-destructive rejection of his dependence on the other men and his allegiance to their gods; its unavoidable result is infamy and the hatred of gods and men alike (*Ajax* 457–59). The murder of Pericles would be a similarly self-defeating assertion of self-sufficiency on the part of Alcibiades.

As far as we know, Alcibiades never attempted to murder Pericles, but he was implicated in the desecration of the Hermae, an act which in certain respects resembled Ajax' slaughter of the herds. In both cases, a profound contempt for gods and men was expressed through the widespread and violent destruction of some other objects, in one case domesticated animals, in the other, sacred statues. In addition, there is a striking similarity between the mutilation of these statues, whose "characteristic features were knocked off or levelled, so that nothing was left except a mass of stone with no resemblance to humanity or deity," and Ajax' unsparing treatment of the herd animals, which he mutilated in various ways (*Ajax* 231–44. The quotation is from Grote [n.d.], 7:169).

Socrates' example of Alcibiades' failure to recognize Pericles also recalls the deeds of Diomedes. In the *Iliad*, Diomedes is aided by Athena after he has been shot by the archer Pandarus. Athena gives him his father Tydeus' great might, and also removes the mist from his eyes "so that [he] may well recognize both god and man" on the battlefield. Athena warns him not to engage any of the immortals in battle, except for the feeble Aphrodite. But Diomedes disregards this warning. The son of "great-spirited" Tydeus, he himself becomes "over-spirited" (*huperthumos*), "overweening" (*huperphialon*), and "equal to a *daimōn*" after Athena enables him to penetrate the disguises of the gods. He attacks not only Aphrodite, but Apollo as well, who echoes Aphrodite's complaint that Diomedes "would now fight even Father Zeus." Emboldened and protected by Athena, who is angry with Ares for supporting the Trojans, Diomedes goes on to strike the god of war himself. Ares subsequently complains that Athena egged on Diomedes "to rage furiously against immortal gods" (*Iliad* 5.121ff.).

Seen in the light of these legendary characters, Socrates' example helps to fill out our understanding of the problematic condition of Alcibiades' psyche. Socrates indicates that the young Alcibiades' sense of his own preeminence, like that of Oedipus and Ajax, rests upon his conviction of autarchy or self-sufficiency. His conception of self-sufficiency requires some explanation. In *Alcibiades I*, Socrates proceeds to discuss Alcibiades' desire for honor only after he justifies his observation that Alcibiades takes himself to be superior to all other men. The order of Socrates' exposition reflects Alcibiades' attitude toward honor. Alcibiades' desire for honor is deeply rooted in his certainty of his own superior intrinsic worth; he regards preeminent honor as his due. In Alcibiades' view, his nature alone—"beginning with the body and ending with the soul" (*Alc. I* 104a3–4)—makes him superior to all other men; he needs no one else because he already possesses in himself everything that is fundamentally worth having. But there is more to say about Alcibiades' conviction of self-sufficiency: above all else, he passionately desires honor on a global scale. I take this to be not only a measure of his eros, but also an indication of his belief that his preeminence is absolute in the sense that it is not relative to the scales of appraisal peculiar to specific political communities, be they Athenian, Spartan, or Persian. Alcibiades' desire to be first in any and every undertaking reflects his conviction that he deserves to be recognized as being quite simply best, independently of all particular human contexts. As Aristophanes' comparison of Alcibiades to a lion suggests, the bonds of political community cannot constrain him because who he is is not a function of the particular polis which has nurtured him. He thus regards himself as equal to a god in the fundamental sense that his deepest origins, unlike those of all other men, are apolitical.

Unfortunately, Alcibiades' overwhelming desire for superior honors implies that he does need other men, and for the same deep reason Ajax does: like a god who craves worship, his satisfaction lies in seeing others acknowledge his absolute superiority. Thus, prior to his being honored above all men, Alcibiades' need for honor must confront him as a token of his merely human worth. Of course, unsurpassed honor among men might confirm Alcibiades' superiority in his own eyes, but only if it were uncoerced; Alcibiades' need to be recognized as divinely self-sufficient requires that honor be freely given to him by other men. Even so, it is very doubtful that Alcibiades would be satisfied with anything less than the esteem of the gods as well. Like Ajax and Diomedes, Alcibiades passionately believes that the gods are no more worthy of honor than he is. The universal esteem of men alone, however, would help to confirm only that he is the best human being; it would not establish that his nature is divine, or superior to human being as such.

Apart from the likely inadequacy of all merely human honors, there are two profound obstacles to the satisfaction of Alcibiades' eros. In the first place, men freely confer superior honors only upon those whom they spontaneously recognize to be of superior worth. Yet Alcibiades' desire for honor is not sub-

ordinated, as it ought to be, to the attainment of that which alone makes a man *in himself* worthy of honor, i.e., excellence or virtue (*aretē*). Thus, Aristotle calls honor the prize of virtue, and megalopsuchia an ornament (*kosmos*) of the virtues (*Nic. Eth.* 1123b35–1124a2). In accepting great honors, the megalopsuchos, “the man who, deeming himself worthy of great things, really is worthy of them” (*Nic. Eth.* 1123b1–2), receives just what he already deserves (cf. Aristotle’s discussion of those who lack virtue but imitate the megalopsuchos [*Nic. Eth.* 1124a26–1124b6]). In *Alcibiades I*, Socrates attempts to teach Alcibiades this lesson by exposing his dependence upon his family, and then advising him that he can hope to compete for renown with the Persian and Lacedaemonian rulers only through diligent care (*epimeleia*) and wisdom (*sophia*) or art (*techne*; 123d3–4, 124b2–3; see also his boast and Socrates’ lament at 119b5–c5). In *Alcibiades II*, Socrates insists that the polis or soul that intends to live correctly needs the knowledge of the best (*tou beltistou epistēmē*), without which the other *epistēmai* are very likely to be harmful to their possessor (146d7–147b1). One could say that Socrates attempts to replace Alcibiades’ unfounded conviction of self-sufficiency with a philosophically directed quest for such. But there is still another problem: the achievement of superior intrinsic worth does not guarantee that one will spontaneously be accorded superior honors. This is true quite apart from whatever measure of self-sufficiency one may attain through arete, and whatever sort of arete this may turn out to be. Socrates’ relationship with Alcibiades is a case in point. At the end of *Alcibiades I*, Alcibiades vows to devote himself to Socrates. Coming from Alcibiades, this is a signal honor. But before Socrates began to educate Alcibiades about the worth of philosophy, the young man was blind to his virtues and regarded him as very strange—more colloquially, as something of a weirdo (*Alc. I* 106a2–3).

Socrates’ interest in Alcibiades is partly intelligible in light of the nature of the young man’s eros. For Alcibiades’ love of honor manifests, albeit incoherently, an underlying desire to regard his own worth in the light of standards which are prior to, more authoritative, and more universal than, those sanctioned and sustained by indigenous custom (*nomos*). Alcibiades’ unexamined or prephilosophic desire to exempt himself from the hegemony of *nomos* is admittedly hubristic, but this aspect of his hubris is shared by Socrates. What Socrates says of the wise holds true of lovers of wisdom as well: “For all the wise assert in harmony, therein really exalting themselves, that mind (*nous*) is the king for us of heaven and earth” (*Philebus* 27c6–8).

Socrates certainly does not discourage Alcibiades’ hubris. Instead, he attempts to open Alcibiades’ eyes to the necessarily philosophic nature of the highest self-exaltation, in the hope, however slim, that his excessive eros for honor may be moderated by an ensuing philosophic quest for self-sufficiency. (This is the proper context in which to understand Socrates’ demand in *Alcibiades II* that Alcibiades acknowledge the folly of the many. See *Alc. II* 146a–

147b and Socrates' criticism of the many as teachers of justice *Alc. I* 110e2ff.). Socrates is only partially successful in this venture. In a crucial respect he does open Alcibiades' eyes, but in the end Alcibiades' eros overpowers him. Socrates feared that this might happen, and it is easy to see why. Alcibiades lacks natural defenses against his own eros; his laziness and impatience make him unsuited for the labor of philosophic epimeleia (*Alc. I* 105b1, 106b5–6). Socrates' implicit warning to him against knowingly praying in a mad rage for ills proves prophetic: in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades admits that "I am fully conscious and cannot deny that I ought not do what this man [Socrates] orders me not to, but whenever I leave him I am defeated by the honor of the many" (216b3–5). Alcibiades is defeated in his own terms because in assimilating himself to the many in order to gain the immediate gratification of their esteem—a thing which for him requires very little effort (see Plutarch, *Alc.* 23.3–6)—he proves the all-too-human dependence of his own worth upon nomos. Alcibiades' recognition of his own self-defeating character gives rise in him to rage directed just as much against himself as against those of whom he is deeply jealous: gods and men who appear godlike in their self-sufficiency. Socrates asks Agathon for protection against Alcibiades' jealous rage (*Symp.* 213c6–d6); Alcibiades goes on to charge Socrates with a hubristic indifference toward all things human (219c2–5; cf. 216d–e and 217e5, where Alcibiades introduces Socrates' rejection of his favors as an "arrogant deed [*huperēphanon*]"). In the *Republic*, Socrates states that "the city comes into being because each of us happens not to be self-sufficient, but in need of many [men and things]" (369b6–7); in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades portrays Socrates as an exception to this rule. In a manner akin to Diomedes, Alcibiades discerns the divine nature hidden beneath Socrates' ironic exterior. Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates to a statue with a god hidden inside (*Symp.* 215a6–b3) strengthens one's suspicion that the desecration (including castration) of the statues of Hermes, the messenger who links gods and men, symbolizes Alcibiades' jealous rage against Socrates' philosophic eros. In sum, Alcibiades is a philosophic casualty: he sees enough to feel acutely his need for philosophy, but remains blind in the sense that his eros prevents him from advancing toward philosophic insight into the divinity accessible to humans.<sup>7</sup>

Alcibiades, like Oedipus, is inclined to forget his political origins. Both, in turn, possess certain natural endowments which enable them to imitate the origins of political community: Oedipus his wits, Alcibiades his chameleon-like ability to assume the looks of other men, and so to imitate the different virtues upon which different polities are founded. Unlike Oedipus, however, Alcibiades knows himself to be generating sophistical images of self-sufficient originality. Like Ajax, the recognition of his neediness leads him madly to attempt to destroy the political origins from which he cannot free himself. Alcibiades' erotic madness is tragic insofar as his experiences confirm the poets' perception that it is impossible for men to become gods, and that the attempt to do so is inevitably self-destructive.

V.

As we have seen, the figures of Ajax and Diomedes represent great hubris which manifests itself as violence against men and gods. Significantly, over the course of their relationship both Alcibiades and Socrates are in various ways associated with these two characters. While Alcibiades connects himself in birth and nature with Ajax in *Alcibiades I*, Socrates links him with Diomedes at the end of *Alcibiades II* when he suggests that he might be able to help remove the mist from around Alcibiades' soul "just as Homer asserts that Athena removed the mist for Diomedes from his eyes, 'so that he might well recognize both god and man'" (*Alc. II* 150d6–9, cf. *Iliad* 5.127). We saw earlier that in *Alcibiades II* Socrates associates himself with Diomedes by adapting a phrase from the *Iliad*; in the *Symposium*, in which Socrates again borrows the same phrase, Alcibiades compares Socrates to Ajax (*Symp.* 174d2, 219e2). Alcibiades also reports in the *Symposium* that Socrates once compared him to Diomedes (cf. 219a1 with *Iliad* 6.236). These multiple associations prepare us well for Socrates' hubristic attack in speech upon the Olympians.

Since the gods may grant whatever we pray for, Socrates suggested to Alcibiades that we should follow the anonymous poet in praying for them simply to give us good things, and to withhold ills even if we should ask for them. But Socrates goes on to state that the gods may nonetheless reject our prayers and give us the opposite of what we pray for (*Alc. II* 148d1–2). Thus, for example, it was useless for the Trojans to make lavish sacrifices, since they were hated by the gods (*Alc. II* 149d1–e3). The Trojans in any case made a mistake by trying to bribe the gods; the gods care more about whether we are pious and just than about our gifts and sacrifices (*Alc. II* 149e6–150a1). Socrates illustrates this point with an anecdote about a quarrel between the Lacedaimonians and Athenians. The Athenians, having lost every battle against the Lacedaimonians even though their offerings to the gods were far greater and finer than those of their rivals, decided to inquire of Ammon (an Egyptian god whom the Greeks identified with Zeus) why this was so. Ammon allowed his prophet to say only that he would prefer the reverent silence of the Lacedaimonians to all the offerings of the Hellenes (*Alc. II* 148d3–149b5). According to Socrates, the Lacedaimonians, perhaps having been influenced by the anonymous poet, customarily pray only that the gods may give them good and beautiful things. Owing to their prudent reserve in prayer, the Lacedaimonians "have been no less fortunate than any other human beings" (*Alc. II* 148b9–c6).

We may summarize the preceding account of the gods as follows. No matter what one prays for, it is irreverent to offer the gods lavish sacrifices and gifts, since to do so is to treat them as if they were susceptible to bribery and hence to debase them (cf. *Alc. II* 149e4–5). Beyond this, it is irreverent to pray for unjust and foolish things even in a nonlavish manner, since this debases the gods by implying that they don't esteem justice and wisdom (cf. *Alc. II* 149c1–4). And even if we ask quite generally for good things in a nonlavish manner,

the gods may still send us ills, as has happened even to the Lacedaimonians (*Alc. II* 148c6–7); if they have been no less fortunate than other people, Socrates implies, they have been no more fortunate either. Because the gods are inscrutable, Socrates insists that in the matter of prayer “there is need of much precaution and inquiry, concerning what ought to be said and what not” (*Alc. II* 149c6–7. Cf. *Mem.* 1.3.2, where Xenophon writes of Socrates: “He prayed to the gods simply to give him good things, since, as he believed, the gods know best what sorts of things are good.”). To say too much would be to assume, perhaps rashly, that one is equal to the gods in wisdom. In any case, the anecdote about Ammon makes it clear that the gods demand reverent silence as their due. It is therefore most reverent, most prudent, and most just to the gods to make use of the simple prayers of the anonymous poet and the Lacedaimonians.

Several features of Socrates’ account are noteworthy. In the first place, Socrates illustrates his argument about prayer by using a barbarian god as an example, albeit one who was not entirely unfamiliar to the Greeks. The Greeks’ identification of Ammon with Zeus allows Socrates to talk about the divine without respect to the differences in *nomos* between cities, or even between the polis and barbarian empires. Socrates’ main point concerns the concealed or hidden nature of the gods’ intentions. Ammon, a god who was named for his love of disguises, provides him with an especially suitable example. According to Herodotus, Ammon is represented by a ram’s head, in which disguise Zeus was said to have once revealed himself to Heracles (*Histories* 2.42.3–4). Bernardete notes that the name Ammon “was (and is) thought to mean ‘Concealed’ or ‘Hidden’ (1984, III.71 and n. 6, III. 155). Strikingly, however, Socrates proceeds in this passage to *unmask* the gods. Having said that the gods care most about whether we are pious and just, Socrates almost immediately substitutes “wise” for “pious”: “For it is probable that both justice and wise insight [phronesis] are especially esteemed by gods and men possessing intellect [nous], and the wise and just are none other than those who know what it is necessary to do and say regarding gods and men” (*Alc. II* 150a6–b3). Whereas Ammon exemplifies the tendency of the gods to take on many shapes, Socrates indicates that the enduring nature of the gods is accessible to us in the natures of men who possess phronesis and nous. Thus, the Greeks, and in particular the Athenians, are wrong to believe (as in Hesiod’s Prometheus legend) that the gods resent paltry sacrifices, or that they can be moved by splendid ones (cf. *Rep.* 364d–e), since they, like men of nous—the nearest equivalent of whom are philosophers—love the noble and esteem above all justice and wisdom. Socrates’ speech equates civic piety with reverence for the true objects of philosophic piety.

Socrates’ virtual identification of the gods with philosophers sharply limits the gods’ capacity to transform themselves, for their disguises conceal a stable interior nature (cf. Socrates’ assimilation of the gods to the Ideas at *Rep.* 377a–383a). In the course of advocating reverent silence, Socrates seems to practice

impious speech. One could say that Socrates here offers us a Promethean reinterpretation of the quarrel between Prometheus and Zeus. This reinterpretation is completed by Socrates' recommendation to Alcibiades that he not pray at all. Socrates tells Alcibiades that it is unsafe for him to go ahead and pray (namely for tyrannical rule) as he had initially planned, since when the god hears him speaking irreverently (literally, "blaspheming") he may reject his sacrifice and send him some other thing as well (*Alc. II* 150c3–6). He goes on to give him some surprising advice: "It seems to me to be best to keep silence. For I do not think that you would wish to use the Lacedaimonian prayer on account of your high-mindedness [megalopsuchia]—for this is the most beautiful of the names of folly" (*Alc. II* 150c6–9). Socrates thereby indicates that it makes little difference whether one offers the gods of the polis modest sacrifices and reverent prayers—the practice specifically sanctioned by Ammon—or pridefully chooses not to pray or make any sacrifices or offerings at all. The Olympians, he implies, are impotent to affect our welfare when they are not engaged by prayer, which is tantamount to saying that they are impotent to affect our welfare under any circumstances. While the Olympians are sustained by human worship, Socrates specifically approves the neglect or "starvation" of the gods which springs from human arrogance.

Socrates tells Alcibiades that he should hold off from praying until he learns how one should be disposed toward gods and human beings (*Alc. II* 150d1–2, 151a3–4). In addition, he indicates that he himself possesses this knowledge, thereby identifying himself as a wise and just man (*Alc. II* 150d6 and 151a1–2 with 150a6–b3). Just as Athena lifted the mist from around Diomedes' eyes, Socrates tells Alcibiades that he must have the mist removed from around his soul "in order only then to employ the means through which you will recognize both the base and the noble. For at present it does not seem to me that you would be able to do so" (*Alc. II* 150d6–e3). The gods have now dropped out of the picture; Socrates' substitution of "both the base and the noble" (*ēmen kakon ēde kai esthlon*) for Homer's "both god and man" (*ēmen theon ēde kai andra*: 150d9; cf. 150d1–2: *pros theous kai pros anthrōpous*) indicates that Alcibiades must look to standards which are more fundamental than the distinction between the mortal and the divine, particularly insofar as the latter distinction is interpreted by the poets. By identifying himself with the wise Athena, however, Socrates comes to occupy the place vacated by the gods. This becomes abundantly clear when Alcibiades places upon him the crown or chaplet (*stephanos*) he had evidently brought to the temple as a votive offering (*Alc. II* 151a7–b2; cf. *Symp.* 213e1–6). Pauly tells us that crowns were "a favorite votive offering to the divinity, that the poor as well as the rich could bring [to the temple]" (1953–73, 11.2:1601). Socrates here again associates himself with the objects of philosophic reverence or piety, which suggests that the recognition of Socrates' nobility is, as it were, prerequisite for the recognition of the noble itself.

Although he has just criticized the Athenian practice of bribing the gods

with excessive gifts, Socrates does not object to Alcibiades' plan to present the gods with all of the customary offerings after his condition has improved (*Alc. II* 150b1–3). Socrates also does not seem to fear the gods' jealousy; he accepts the crown with pleasure, along with whatever else Alcibiades may wish to give him (*Alc. II* 151b4–5).

And so the dialogue ends, on a note which resonates to the indictments brought against Socrates and Alcibiades. The last word of the dialogue is “lovers” (*erastōn*), as if to suggest that eros supplants piety in *Alcibiades II*. From the perspective of traditional piety, there is something rather profane in the picture of Alcibiades crowning Socrates, perhaps on the steps of the temple.<sup>8</sup>

## VI.

At the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates tells his young look-alike that he wants to converse with him “so that I too may examine myself as to what sort of face I have” (144d8–9). As with *Theaetetus*, Socrates' extraordinary interest in Alcibiades is presumably also rooted in his tremendous desire for self-knowledge, a desire which leaves him little time for the pursuit of any other aims (*Phaedrus* 230a1–6, *Apol.* 23b7–c1). For reasons I have already set forth, it is unlikely that Socrates expected he would succeed in bringing to birth in Alcibiades an image of his own philosophic eros. But Socrates stands to learn something about himself even from the failure of this attempt. In particular, Socrates may gain insight into the *difference* between himself and Alcibiades by reflecting upon the reasons for this failure. This knowledge is especially important because Alcibiades “looks” so much like Socrates in important respects. While *Alcibiades II* completes the characterization of Alcibiades begun in its companion dialogue, however, it leaves to its readers the task of trying to draw an essential distinction between Socrates and Alcibiades. This strikes me as an entirely appropriate way of dealing with the deepest issue raised by the dialogue's tragic characterization of Alcibiades: whether Socratic philosophizing, in its quest for origins which are prior to, more authoritative, and more universal than *nomos*, can itself do anything more than generate sophistical images of self-sufficiency. In quite pointedly leaving this issue open, *Alcibiades II* remains faithful both in style and substance to Socrates' judgment that it can be meaningfully investigated only by assessing the responses of others—be they Socrates' interlocutors or, where we are directly concerned, readers of Socratic dialogues—to the philosopher's erotic madness.

This very openness gives us a way to approach the problem at hand. For Socrates' judgment about the importance of community to philosophic self-knowledge itself points toward a basic difference between himself and Alcibiades. Alcibiades' “political” eros for renown is fundamentally apolitical, and even antipolitical, in that it is exclusive and nonreproductive. Alcibiades' eros precludes the participation of others in that which he deems most choiceworthy,

whereas political community is founded upon such participation (cf. Aristotle's account of the polis as a *koinōnia* [community] of perceptions, *Pol.* 1253a7–18). For this reason as well, Alcibiades is beloved by others but is not himself a lover: he does not seek out others who share or might be brought to share in his guiding eros. Socrates' philosophical eros, on the other hand, is political in just these respects. While Alcibiades falls short of self-sufficiency in assimilating himself to the many, Socrates tests the legitimacy of his own quest for self-sufficiency by attempting to assimilate others to himself. In particular, he seeks out others in whom he might midwife philosophic eros because this objectification of his own erotic pursuit would help to confirm its validity. This is why Socrates tells Alcibiades that his own eros will be “tended” or nurtured by its offspring (*Alc. I* 135e1–3).

Socratic philosophizing—the quest for wisdom, rather than its actual possession—requires human community because of the necessity of dialogue for self-knowledge. We may add that philosophic self-knowledge, or the attempt to distinguish philosophy from sophistry, requires a community larger than that consisting of one's disciples. Alexander Kojève makes this point in discussing the importance of “recognition” for the philosopher: “The philosopher who shuns prejudices would, then, have to try to live in the outside world (in the ‘market place’ or ‘in the street’ like Socrates) rather than in a ‘sect’ or ‘cloister,’ whether ‘republican’ or ‘aristocratic’” (Kojève, p. 164; cf. pp. 168–69). For this reason, Socratic philosophizing could not flourish under the “philosophical” regime set forth in the *Republic*, or any other regime which discourages the formulation, much less the reasoned public discussion, of competing conceptions of the noble, the good, the just, and the advantageous, and so of the most choiceworthy or exalted life. The free polis is the best environment for Socratic philosophic discourse.

This is by no means to say that Socratic discourse helps to sustain its most favorable environment. Perhaps its relationship to political community is like that of an infectious disease to its host organism: while it needs political community, it flourishes only at its expense. Up to this point, we have merely sharpened the question raised by Socrates' hubristic assimilation of himself to a barbarian god: Is Socrates' erotic madness inherently at odds with the life of the polis? In fact, there is a crucial respect in which what has been said implies as much. Socrates uses the maieutic art for the sake of self-knowledge. While his art attempts to bring others to share his eros, his aim is essentially apolitical. He does not seek fulfillment—and could not pursue self-knowledge—in a community of friends bound together by philosophy, even though such a community might well be generated as a byproduct of Socratic discourse. The same thing would hold true of anyone in whom Socrates might succeed in reproducing his own eros. To paraphrase Kojève's (1968) point about Socrates, a philosopher ceases to be concerned about the difference between philosophy and sophistry, and so ceases to be a philosopher, when he no longer feels any need

to venture beyond the company of those with whom he already agrees. Socrates, however, always regards the problem of the distinction between philosophy and sophistry as an open question. Here we find a significant resemblance between Alcibiades and Socrates: Socrates pursues self-knowledge through the attempt to “conquer” other psyches with his philosophic eros, and not through communion with those whom he has already won over. And Socrates’ philosophic ambition is as extensive as Alcibiades’ “barbarian” tyrannical ambition; it is limited only by the number of potential interlocutors and the length of his life. On the other hand, Socrates’ eros must be sharply distinguished from Alcibiades’ love of victory. Socratic dialogue does not aim at victory for its own sake; Socrates’ terrible love of stripping and going to the mat in speeches is precisely as great as his terrible love of self-knowledge. (Note Alcibiades’ stress upon Socrates’ capacity for victory in speech at *Symp.* 213e3–5 and cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.2.14–15. While Socrates tests his psychic beauty for the sake of self-knowledge, Alcibiades decides to use his bodily beauty to try to conquer Socrates. His subsequent naked physical contact with Socrates is a humorous image of Socrates’ naked exercise in speeches [*Symp.* 217a2–4, 219b4–c2]).

One could sum up the preceding point as follows: Socrates is an extremist in that he values self-knowledge more than friendship, and so more than those friendships which bind together the political fabric. At the same time, we would expect Socrates’ self-knowledge to moderate his philosophic eros, since the philosophic transcendence of political community depends upon the possibility of dialogue and so is itself rooted in political community. Unlike Alcibiades, Socrates may have remembered his political origins after all: in spite of his advice to Alcibiades, his presence at the temple suggests that he has perhaps just prayed, or may be about to do so. (Xenophon writes that Socrates made conspicuous and frequent sacrifices, both at home and at the common altars of the city. [*Mem.*1.1.2].) Socrates’ eros is not tragic, partly because it is well informed on the most crucial point: his intercourse with Alcibiades has confirmed his intuitions about the conditions under which the desire to become a god destroys itself. In part, too, Socrates seems to stand apart from his own life and observe it as an experiment, in much the same way Homer’s gods regarded the great war at Troy as an interesting spectacle. Socrates’ peculiar self-detachment is suggested by his statement that “I would gladly see myself accepting” gifts from Alcibiades (151b5)—a phrase which more than one commentator has labelled “unplatonian” in style. Socrates goes on immediately to compare himself to *both* Creon and Teiresias at once: he is simultaneously involved in and aloof from the human drama. He therefore seeks a measure of divine self-sufficiency which may be accessible to human beings, provided that the middle ground of political community can be maintained. One would have to say that his public devotion to the Olympian gods of the polis is both ironic and sincere. Of course, Plato’s production of written dialogues which (he claims) are not

his, but are “of a Socrates grown beautiful and young” or “noble and new” (*kalou kai neou*; *Second Letter*, 314c1–4) suggests that Socrates’ peculiar combination of irony and sincerity is unable to save both political community and philosophy, or at least unable to do so in a noble and beautiful way. In this connection, we must not overlook the potential cruelty of Socrates’ experimental detachment; this is an underlying theme of Alcibiades’ “indictment” of Socrates in the *Symposium*. An ignoble and ugly Socrates would ultimately be guilty of philosophic impiety. But that is another, quite complex matter.

## NOTES

1. Among nineteenth-century Plato scholars, Schleiermacher, Ast, Socher, Hermann, Stallbaum, Steinhart, Susemihl, Munk, and Ueberweg all either assert that the dialogue is spurious, or, without settling this question, feel it most prudent to omit it from their arrangements of the Platonic canon (Grote, 1865, vol. 1, ch. 5; see also ch. 10, 348–51). Joseph Souilhé, the editor and translator of *Alcibiades II* for the Budé edition of Plato’s works, notes that during the nineteenth century the tendency to reject dialogues as spurious “a été exagérée jusqu’à l’absurdité,” but goes on to observe that practically all of the more moderate critics would now classify *Alcibiades II* (among other works) as a dialogue of doubtful authenticity (Plato, 1962, p. viii). Representative twentieth-century assessments of the dialogue may be found in A.E. Taylor (pp. 526–29) and Paul Shorey (pp. 419–21). By modern standards, Grote’s view that it is safest and most philosophical to accept the authenticity of the entire Thrasyllan canon seems decidedly extreme. Hence the virtual nonexistence of philosophical studies of the dialogue. Grote limits himself to a summary and brief discussion of its authenticity and major themes (ch. 10), while Souilhé provides a general introduction and useful notes. English translations of *Alcibiades II* are also hard to come by. The Loeb Classical Library edition of Plato’s works contains a translation by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), and another is included in the third edition of *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: MacMillan, 1892), vol. II.

2. Alcibiades is not yet twenty in *Alcibiades I*, the dramatic date of which Steven Forde places at 433 B.C. (Forde, p. 222, n. 2). Pericles, who died in 429 B.C., is still alive when *Alcibiades II* takes place. Pericles became Alcibiades’ guardian after Alcibiades’ father Kleinias died at the battle of Coronea in 447 B.C. (*Alc. I* 104b4–6, 112c2–4). Wesley E. Thompson (1970) argues that Pericles was probably the first cousin of Alcibiades’ mother Deinomache.

3. The charges against Socrates apparently read as follows: “Socrates does injustice by not acknowledging the gods which the city acknowledges, and by bringing in new and strange divinities; he also does injustice by corrupting the young” (Xenophon, *Mem.* I.1.1; Diogenes Laertius 2.40). In the *Apology*, Socrates places the corruption charge first and alters the phrasing of the second impiety charge (24b8–c1). The impiety and corruption charges are intimately connected; see below, note 4. The events in which Alcibiades was implicated and the subsequent actions against him are related in Thucydides, 6.27ff.; Plutarch quotes the official indictment of Alcibiades on the charge of profaning the mysteries at *Alcibiades* 22.3.

Grote paints a sensitive picture of the impact upon the Athenians of the desecration of the Hermae in his *History of Greece*, VII, ch. 53, 166–71, where he suggests as a “very inadequate” parallel “the excitement of a Spanish or Italian town, on finding that all the images of the Virgin had been defaced during the same night” (169). Alcibiades was of course recalled to Athens some four years after he was sentenced to death in absentia (Plutarch, *Alc.* 27.1). I discuss below the ambivalence of the Athenians toward both Alcibiades and Socrates; see Section III.

4. See especially the *Clouds*, in which Socrates’ demonstration of the superiority of the Weaker or Unjust Speech over the Stronger or Just Speech leads Pheidippides to beat his father Strepsiades. Beating one’s elders constituted a radical attack upon the foundations of political community, for to

do so was to challenge not only the authority of the generation of fathers, but also of those traditionally acknowledged gods who defended the claim of the city's fathers to be the principal bearers and teachers of the stronger, more just speech (i.e., the traditional speech). Thus, Strepsiades appeals to *patrōion Dia*, "Zeus, the protector of father," when he is challenged by Pheidippides in the *Clouds* (1468); Fustel de Coulanges notes that when Cleisthenes replaced the old religious tribes of Athens with new tribes and demes, the demes "uniformly adopted as their protecting gods *Zeus, the guardian of the walls, and the paternal Apollo*" (1901, p. 377. Fustel's emphasis). The corruption charge against Socrates, which grew out of his practice of reducing to silence the fathers of Athens in the presence of their sons—whereby he became hateful to the older generation but gave pleasure to the young (*Apol.* 21e4, 23a1, c3)—may be understood in its intimate connection with the impiety charges when one appreciates the relationship of mutual support linking paternal authority with the authority of the religious tradition.

5. A similar paradox is found in the *Statesman*, in which the Eleatic Stranger indicates that the highest manifestation of pronesis is its public self-suppression. (This point is most explicit in the Stranger's advocacy of the second-best regime at 292e–300c.) According to the Eleatic Stranger, philosophy is both moderate and extreme, for philosophy is obliged to moderate itself when, in the light of its insight into the nature of political community, it recognizes its own extreme character. One should consider in this connection the essential role played in the search for the nature of the statesman by "the mean and the fitting and the opportune and the needful, and all things that dwell in the middle ground and away from the extremes" (*States.* 284e6–8).

6. Socrates' unusual form of address (the appellation "son of Kleinias" occurs nowhere else in *Alcibiades II*) anticipates his implicit comparison in this passage between praying to become a tyrant and praying to have children. It also serves as a reminder of the futility of Alcibiades' quest for self-sufficiency; whatever Alcibiades may do, he remains a son (cf. *Alc. I* 103a1, 105d2, 113b9, 131e2).

Socrates explains that Archelaus, a Macedonian tyrant who ruled from 413 to 399, was murdered by his beloved, who was in turn assassinated by others after a few days. Souilhé notes alternative accounts of his death (Plato, 1962, 27 n. 2). This example prepares us for Socrates' introduction of the topic of Alcibiades' attitude toward Pericles, for Archelaus was a bastard child of Perdiccas II who gained power by murdering his uncle (Perdiccas' brother), his cousin, and his own brother. (See *Gorgias* 470d–471d, where Polus argues that Archelaus is the happiest of all Macedonians in spite of his horrible crimes.) Socrates' anachronistic reference to Archelaus' death is sometimes cited as an indication of the dialogue's inauthenticity. But Grote, noting that Aristophanes makes an anachronistic reference to the *διοικισμος* or dispersion of the Mantineans by the Spartans (which took place in 384 B.C.) at *Symp.* 193a2, observes that "No one has ever made this glaring anachronism a ground for disallowing the *Symposium*" (1865, I:350 n. x).

7. Steven Forde offers a very different interpretation of Alcibiades' nature. He distinguishes between the love of victory and the love of renown, and argues that Socrates is responsible for the latter in Alcibiades: "He has been transformed by Socrates' speech [about the virtues of the royal Persians and Lacedaimonians in *Alc. I*] into an erotic man. There is a difference between erotic love of renown and the contentious love of victory we saw in the first part of the dialogue. The latter is reminiscent of a man like Coriolanus, who indignantly insists on the honor he has merited according to the rules, so to speak" (Forde, p. 232). If Alcibiades had been such a relatively common sort of man, however, it is difficult to see why Socrates would have been attracted to him at all. Yet Socrates' interest in Alcibiades is unparalleled in the Platonic dialogues: he describes himself as Alcibiades' first lover, and has been observing him night and day since he was a child, always taking the greatest care (*epimelestata*) to be present wherever Alcibiades may be (*Alc. I* 103a1, a4, 104d3, 106e4–9, 110b1). Furthermore, Socrates insists from the outset that his description of Alcibiades' eros for worldwide renown is no mere conjecture (*ouk eikadzō. Alc. I* 105c7).

8. As Helen Bacon shows in "Socrates Crowned" (1959), Alcibiades' crowning of Socrates in the *Symposium* (213e1–6) is one of many dramatic indications that Socrates "wins the crown of tragedy and comedy from Agathon and Aristophanes" (430; cf. *Symp.* 175e7–9 with Aristophanes, *Frogs* 871ff.). Viewed in the light of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades' crowning of Socrates in *Alcibiades II* represents a tragicomic "victory" of Socrates' tragicomic art (cf. *Symp.* 223d3–6).

Socrates' speech appears to win out over the poets' traditional tales about the gods, but this "victory" is laughable: Socrates pretends to interpret Alcibiades' gesture as if he were an infatuated lover, and he makes it clear that he has failed genuinely to persuade Alcibiades. Socrates' assimilation of his lot to Creon's points toward a tragic depth beneath this comic surface, but as his identification of himself with Prometheus, Hephaestus, and Athena suggests, he maintains a detached or godlike perspective from which the depths of human tragedy appear, once again, as comic surfaces.

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