Aristophanes' Critique of Philosophic Wisdom in *Clouds, Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Frogs*

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This dissertation seeks to understand Aristophanes' critique of philosophic wisdom in three of his comedies: *Clouds* (423 BC), *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411 BC) and *Frogs* (405 BC). Written over the politically turbulent period of the Peloponnesian war (434-404 BC), these comedies navigate a generational conflict between conservative defenders of Athens's customs, laws and gods and the younger generation influenced by the atheistic teachings of the sophists. This dissertation seeks to contribute to our understanding of Aristophanes' critique by comparing his presentation of Socrates with that of Euripides, a tragedian who ingenuously fuses poetry with the new sophistic teaching.

The first chapter considers Aristophanes' representation of Socrates in *Clouds* as the sophist *par excellence* who replaces the gods of the city with natural causes, and respect for the city's laws with rhetoric. Although the comedy looks like a conservative defense of traditional morality against the corrupting effects of philosophic novelty, the grounds of Aristophanes' attack on Socrates are anything but clear. As Aristophanes' depiction of the Clouds (strange airy deities worshipped by poets and sophists alike) shows, Socrates' destruction at the end of the play occurs not because what Socrates teaches is false, but because his political isolation blinds him to the city's demands and makes him vulnerable to persecution.

Socrates' failure in *Clouds* establishes the basis for considering Euripides' (partially) successful confrontation with the city in *Women at the Thesmophoria.* The second chapter assesses the extent to which this hybrid of tragedian and sophist can be harmonized with the needs of the city without compromising his own integrity as a poet whose power lies in his psychologically accurate depictions of human nature. Aristophanes thus points to the superiority of Euripides the poet over Socrates the philosopher, at the same time as he exposes Euripides' limitations.

In *Frogs*, Aristophanes raises the stakes by pitting Euripides against another giant of tragedy, Aeschylus, in the Thunderdome of Hades with the god of the theatre, Dionysus, as judge. The comedy thus compares the two greatest poetic representatives of the generational conflict between conservative and sophist, old and new, common good and individual good, deciding at the last second in favor of Aeschylus. The chapter argues that Euripides fails because he cannot provide a sufficient political defense of his tragedy at the moment in which Athens faces imminent destruction at the hands of the Spartans.

The conclusion reflects on Aristophanes' implicit claim to teach justice and the good through comedy's capacity to mediate between the demands of the city, on the one hand, and the insights on human nature afforded by philosophy, on the other.

Contents

Introduction iv
Chapter 1: Clouds 1
Strepsiades' Familial Woes. 2
Strepsiades' Encounter with Socrates 5
The Rhetorical Education of Pheidippides 26
The Radicalization of Strepsiades 39
The Clouds' Apology 48
Chapter 2: *Women at the Thesmophoria* 55
The Kinsman 71
The Punishment of Euripides 83
The Kinsman's Speech 86
The Persecution of the Kinsman 91
Parabasis 94
The Rescue of the Kinsman 97
Euripides' Treaty with the Thesmophorian Women 104
Chapter 3: Frogs (Part I) 108
Dionysus and Herakles 111
Frogs and Initiates 120
Pluto's House 125
Dionysus' Declaration 130
Chapter 4: Frogs (Part II) 132
Parabasis 133
The Slaves 136
Euripides' Arrival in Hades 140
Dionysus the Judge 142
Prayers and Insults 144
Aeschylus 151
Round Two 157
Dionysus Equivocates 160

Political Advice 162
Final Judgment 168
Conclusion 176
Bibliography 188

Nearly every age and stage of culture has at some time or other sought with profound irritation to free itself from the Greeks, because in their presence everything one has achieved oneself, though apparently quite original and sincerely admired, suddenly seemed to lose life and color and shriveled into a poor copy, even a caricature. And so time after time cordial anger erupts against this presumptuous little people that made bold for all time to designate everything not native as “barbaric”. Who are they, one asks, who though they display only an ephemeral historical splendor, ridiculously restricted institutions, a dubious excellence in their mores, and are marked by ugly vices, yet lay claim to that dignity and pre-eminence among people which characterize genius among the masses? Unfortunately, one was not lucky enough to find the cup of hemlock with which one could simply dispose of such a character; for all the poison that envy, calumny, and rancor created did not suffice to destroy that self-sufficient splendour. And so one feels ashamed and afraid in the presence of the Greeks, unless one prizes truth above all things and dares acknowledge even this truth: that the Greeks, as charioteers, hold in their hands the reins of our own and every other culture, but that almost always chariot and horses are of inferior quality and not up to the glory of their leaders who consider it sport to run such a team into an abyss which they themselves clear with the leap of Achilles.

-Nietzsche

The Birth of Tragedy

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to deepen our understanding of Aristophanes' critique of philosophic wisdom by exploring the comic poet's portrayals of Socrates and Euripides in three of his comedies. It will first establish the basis of this critique through a detailed examination of *Clouds*, the play that features the defeat of Socrates at the hands of an old rustic called Strepsiades. It will then pivot to a discussion of Euripides by considering two comedies that offer different perspectives on the tragedian: *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Frogs*. In the former, Euripides succeeds in escaping persecution at the hands of the Thesmophorian women; in the latter, Euripides is defeated by his opponent, Aeschylus, in a vicious contest over who shall be delivered from Hades and restored to the tragic stage of Athens. A consideration of these three plays as a group presents a fertile set of interpretive problems: for example, Socrates is defeated by an old mediocrity on the grounds that he denies the gods of the city while the atheist Euripides, who is attacked by the Thesmophorian women, manages to escape punishment. Nevertheless, Euripides' triumph over the Thesmophorian women is counterbalanced by Aeschylus's victory over him, the reasons for which are by no means clear. The difficulties that are raised through these comparisons permit us a broader perspective on Aristophanes' critique of philosophy by including within it a consideration of tragedy and comedy. As this thesis will argue, tragedy and comedy are not merely genres of dramatic representation, but can claim to offer a comprehensive understanding of human life that challenges that presented by philosophy.

Clouds is the best starting point for considering the challenge that philosophic wisdom poses to Aristophanes. The story runs as follows: Strepsiades, an old rustic from the countryside, is worried to death about paying off debts that his son, Pheidippides, has accrued through his obsession with horses. The old man hits on the idea of taking the boy to the Thinkery so that he

can learn the Unjust logos, permitting him to argue his way out of any lawsuit. When the recalcitrant boy refuses to go along with the plan, Strepsiades decides to enroll as a student himself and acquire the education he needs to escape his crushing debts. Notwithstanding the old man's obvious incapacity for understanding even the rudimentary elements of a philosophic education, he is nevertheless introduced to the Clouds (the chorus of the play) by Socrates and taught the shocking notion that Zeus does not exist. The Clouds are instead the real deities responsible for thunder and lightning and for exciting intellectual notions in the brains of their devotees. Although Strepsiades is soon expelled from the school for being a dimwit, he musters enough resolve to compel his son to enroll as a student. After an interlude consisting of a spectacular combat between Just and Unjust logos, in which the latter gains a complete victory over the former, Pheidippides receives his Socratic education. However, Strepsiades' plan quickly unravels when the father and son (now educated by Socrates) have a falling out over whether Aeschylus or Euripides is the superior poet. Although the father comes to accept as justified a beating from his son (father-beating usually being regarded as an intolerable transgression), the father is outraged when Pheidippides justifies mother-beating. Blaming Socrates for these ills, the enraged old man burns down the Thinkery.

It is clear even from this brief summary that the *Clouds* constitutes an attack on Socrates and the philosophy he represents. Aristophanes appears as a conservative who defends traditional Athenian morality against the vices of intellectual novelty. The play seems to vindicate the accusation, paraphrased by Socrates in the opening of Plato's *Apology*, that the philosopher "does injustice and is meddlesome, by investigating the things under the earth and the heavenly things, and by making the weaker speech the stronger, and by teaching others these same things"

(*Apology*, 19b-c).[1] Aristophanes shows, moreover, that such meddlesome philosophical activities have at their core the denial of the existence of the traditional Greek gods, and that such hubris will be punished. At the end of the play, Strepsiades is transformed from a small-time crook into a zealous champion of the city's gods, burning Socrates' Thinkery to the ground and almost taking the life of the philosopher himself. Such a climax – which includes a cameo appearance of Hermes – suggests that Aristophanes' conservatism consists in his defense of the integrity of the Greek pantheon against a newfangled Socratic wisdom determined to debunk it.[2]

Accordingly, scholars have read *Clouds* fundamentally as a conservative attack on philosophy. As Peter J. Euben has put it, the "dominant view of the *Clouds* is that it sides with Old Education because, as a conservative by class, choice, and institutional position, Aristophanes thought (or could not help believe) that the sophists were corrupting Athenian education and politics."[3] Thus, Aristophanes was an admirer of "olden days, of the old way of life, in politics as in culture. Militiades, Cimon and Myronides were his military heroes, Marathon and Salamis the

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[1] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between *Clouds* and Plato's *Apology*, see Michael Zuckert, "Rationalism and Political Responsibility: Just Speech and Just Deed in the 'Clouds'" in *Polity*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1984, 271-297. Zuckert makes the striking claim that *Apology* is modelled on the structure of *Clouds*. Cf. "Apology of Socrates" in *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 63-89.

[2] *Clouds*, 1508-1509. It is contested whether Hermes is the speaker (see note 222 of "Clouds" in *Four Texts on Socrates*, 176.

[3] J. Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 135.

great battles…Phrynichus and Aeschylus his favourite poets."[4] Kenneth Dover has posited the view that *Clouds* represents an unequivocal attack on sophistic teaching in that Aristophanes' Socrates is indistinguishable from any other sophist: philosophy and sophistry amount to the same thing in the eyes of the poet.[5] Cedric Whitman, another influential critic, put the argument even more strongly, saying that *Clouds* "is almost universally accepted as a manifesto of Aristophanes' educational beliefs, his hatred of sophistic teaching, and his belief in the old, conservative way; and indeed, as the play stands scarcely any other interpretation is possible."[6]

Other critics have placed different emphases on exactly what Aristophanes wished to target in the comedy. David Morales Troncoso has described the comedy generally as "un ataque satírico contra las modernas formas de educación que emergen en la Epoca de la ilustración ateniense," since this modern education exerts "un peligroso efecto disolvente sobre los ideales tradicionales de la *paideiai* y la piedad cívica."[7] David Konstans emphasizes Strepsiades' own educational transformation: "The theme of Aristophanes' *Clouds* can be described from one point of view as the education of Strepsiades…in the value of conventional morality, to which he implicitly

[4] A. W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics", in *The Classical Review*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1938, 99.

[5] Kenneth Dover, *Clouds, Acharnians, Lysistrata*: *A Companion to the Penguin Translation of Alan H. Sommerstein* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xii.

[6] Cedric H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1965), 119.

[7] David Morales Troncoso, "El Socrates de Aristofanes en la Parodia de Las Nubes" in *Diodoche*, Vol. 1-2, 2001, 36.

subscribes even as he seeks to get round it by mastering rhetoric in order to renege on his debts."[8] Critics who disagree with Dover's assimilation of Socrates with the sophists and who see some aspect of the Platonic Socrates in Aristophanes' portrayal, nevertheless agree with the generally conservative tenor of the play. Martha Nussbaum, for example, sees Socrates as "the most dangerous opponent of this Old Education," whose "questions subvert the authority of tradition, who recognizes no authority but that of reason, asking even the gods to give a reasoned account of their preferences and commands."[9] Khalil M. Habib emphasizes the challenge that the Socratic education poses to the family, since it "erodes the bonds of the family and culminates in father and mother beating."[10] Michael Zuckert, more sympathetic to the philosophic view, nevertheless concludes that Aristophanes shows philosophy as being "incompatible with the requirements of

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[8] David Konstans, "Socrates in Aristophanes' Clouds" in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (London and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 81.

[9] Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 15. Nussbaum suggests that *Clouds* reflects a "widespread fear…that critical scrutiny of one's own traditions will automatically entail a form of cultural relativism that holds all ways of life to be equally good for human beings and thereby weakens allegiance to one's own" – an argument that Allan Bloom also made in *Closing of the American Mind*! Cf. Martha Nussbaum, "*Cultivating Humanity*", 33.

[10] Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates' Asceticism in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", in *The Political Theory of Aristophanes: Explorations in Poetic Wisdom* (Albany: New York State University, 2014), 35.

political and social life, even when practiced by a man dedicated to truth, like his Socrates, rather than by men dedicated to gain like so many of the Athenian sophists."[11]

That *Clouds* constitutes a conservative attack against philosophy (however one might precisely construe it) is undeniable. However, the difficulty arises when the details of such an attack are considered. Even if we set aside the question of whether Aristophanes' Socrates bears some resemblance to the Platonic Socrates or whether he merely stands as a stereotype of the sophist, Aristophanes' position vis-a-vis the old education is far from obvious. Had *Clouds* been a straightforward condemnation of Socrates, we might have expected a line of argument similar to that which Meletus, one of Socrates' accusers, makes in the *Apology*: the city's laws are always just and all Athenians (except Socrates) make the young noble and good (*Apology*, 25a-b). Yet Aristophanes exposes the injustice and hypocrisy of the city he purportedly defends at the same time as he presents Socrates as a threat to it. Strepsiades, who ends up burning down the Thinkery at the end of the play, conceives his wicked plan to defraud his creditors without any assistance from Socrates. The action of the play is, consequently, put into motion by a set of problems that are unrelated to the threat philosophy poses to the morality of the city. Moreover, at the end of the play, it is not clear that Strepsiades has fared any better than Socrates, since the former is left exposed to the loan sharks and now has an estranged son in addition. Finally, in the central contest of the play between Just and Unjust logos, the Just logos - supposed to be the "stronger" – is not merely defeated, but actually defects to the other side. In this way, Aristophanes shows behind his attack on Socrates that something is already rotten in the city of Athens. As James Redfield puts

[11] Michael Zuckert, "Rationalism and Political Responsibility: Just Speech and Just Deeds in the "Clouds"", 278.

it, while it is very difficult to suggest that the play was in favor of Socrates, "as an attack on philosophy, the play…is rather oblique."[12] The play offers not one, but two parallel critiques: one of Socrates' amoral philosophy; the other of the hypocritical morality of the city.

The presence of a dual rather than a single critique in *Clouds* raises the question of how we should understand Aristophanean comedy more generally: do we have any reason to expect a positive lesson that can be ascertained from the play, or is Aristophanean comedy solely destructive, dissolving all objects it ridicules in its comic gaze without discrimination? In this latter view, while *Clouds* might constitute an attack on Socrates from the point of view of the city, the city itself is also subject to ridicule. Thus, if *Clouds* defends the old generation that espoused the virtues of courage and moderation, in *Acharnians* he attacks this same old generation as being waspish warmongers; and in *Wasps* he shows them up to be peevish old men obsessed with jury duty: any supposedly positive teaching in one play can be nullified by evidence from another.[13] This view, that comedy is merely negative, has been favored particularly by scholars who see comedy in terms of the "carnivalesque," that is, a ritualistic institution that permits criticism of the

[12] James Redfield, "Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*" in *Literary Imagination, Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of David Greene*, ed. Todd Breyfogle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 54.

[13] A. W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics," 99.

established order within defined limits.[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, writing on Rabelais, epitomized the theory of the carnivalesque as follows:

> As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of the hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibition. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and reversal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete.[15]

It is not difficult to see how such a theory might be used profitably for understanding the nature of Aristophanean comedy, particularly given that there is strong evidence that Aristophanes himself uses the mystery rites as an analogue for comedy in *Frogs*.[16] The Chorus leader excludes from mystery rites all those who are initiated in the "Bacchic rites of bull-eating Cratinus' language," that is, the language of comedy, Cratinus having been the leading comic poet before Aristophanes (*Frogs*, 357). Understood in this way, comedy serves as a "criticism both of the established order and of novelty" and, in its capacity for inversion, for fantasy and the grotesque, it functions in a

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[14] Simon Goldhill provides a useful account of the scholarly literature on the carnivalesque (see *The Poet's Voice: Essays on Poetics and Greek Literature* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 176-188).

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 11-12.

[16] See particularly Coryphaeus' speech to the initiates at 353-371. In the chapter on *Frogs*, I will discuss the significance of this analogy.

"spirit of ludic release."[17] This understanding of "ludic release" offers the key to the paradox that comedy could be (as Carriere observes) "à la fois aggressivement critique et puissamment conformiste," since it offers a safety valve for impulses normally repressed by the demands of ordinary social life.[18]

While it is undeniable that almost everything, including the gods themselves, are the legitimate objects of ridicule on Aristophanes' comic stage, it is also true that Aristophanes explicitly claims that comedy – and his comedy in particular – teaches justice to the city. The carnivalesque view, while helpful in accounting for the origins of comedy in psychological and anthropological terms, nevertheless founders on the problem that Aristophanic comedy contains a conscious intention underpinning it. Aristophanes himself is explicit that his comedy not only teaches justice, but is the best teacher of justice in the city. In *Acharnians*, the hero Dicaeopolis, whose name means "just city," makes a private alliance with the Spartans when the city proves

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[17] Simon Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice*, 182. Goldhill himself offers a more moderate version of the Bakhtin view, acknowledging that "the nature of the literary representations of the social group of participants, and the nature of the literary representations of Old Comedy, provide different constraints and possibilities for the carnivalesque" (Simon Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice*, 188).

[18] J. Peter Euben also asks this question: "did comedy challenge powerful figures, policies, and cultural norms, or were its anarchic, transgressive, and radical impulses generally domesticated by the desire of the playwright to please the audience and judges of the play, by the need to 'reassert and reaffirm' the 'traditional norms of society tragedy put at risk,' and by the 'controlled environment' of 'state sponsored religious rituals…" (*Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture and Political Theory*, 113.

insensible to the benefits of peace. As he is attempting to convince his fellow Athenians from the district of Acharnae that the Spartans are not wholly to blame for the war he addresses them in the capacity as the poet writing on the comedy:

> Don't hold a grudge, spectator men,
>
> If, being a beggar, I nonetheless, in the presence of Athenians,
>
> Am going to speak about the city, while writing a comedy.
>
> For it knows what's just (δίκαιον οἶδε) —comedy does. (496-500).

And soon after the chorus declares in the parabasis, referring to Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes:

> But now don't you ever let him go, since he'll make a comedy of the just things! (ὡς κωμῳδήσει τὰ δίκαια)
>
> And he affirms that he'll teach you many good things, (φησὶν δ' ὑμᾶς πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθ') so you'll be happy,
>
> Not flattering, or setting out the prospect of pay, or fooling you through and through,
>
> Nor acting nastily nor sprinkling with praise, but teaching the things that are best.
>
> Given these things, let Cleon skillfully manage
>
> And contrive everything against me.
>
> For what's good and what's just, here with me,
>
> Will be my ally, and there's no way I'll ever be caught

Being such as he is when it comes to the city:

A coward and a bugger supreme! (655-664)

Dicaeopolis makes a strong claim here: not only does comedy teach justice, but it is far superior to the politicians in knowing what justice and the good are. While his humor might be vulgar, his comedy nevertheless claims a high moral ground by eschewing the sordid variety of rhetorical tactics commonly practiced by demagogues and flatterers of the demos. Aristophanean comedy, unlike the rhetoricians, knows what is just and good and possesses the boldness to say it: it claims the virtues of justice and courage.

Nevertheless, even if we take Aristophanes at his word that comedy teaches justice, we are still left with the question of exactly what he means by justice. Does he mean, as Whitman suggests, that comedy is "a constructive and morally salubrious vehicle [to] effect without rancor or pain the most desirable reforms," on the supposition that Aristophanes had a definite set of policies that could be translated into laws?[19] If such is the case, we are left with the difficulty that Aristophanes, with one possible exception in *Frogs*, does not give any clear indication of what such reforms might be, nor is there external evidence that Aristophanean comedy exerted any decisive effect in the Athenian political arena.[20] Dover seems correct in cautioning against

[19] Cedric H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero,* 8.

[20] The important exception concerns *Frogs*, for it is said that Aristophanes was rewarded for his line that they should enfranchise the slaves (692). Cf. Robert Bartlett, *Against Demagogues*, 4. Redfield argues that if Aristophanes had a specific political message to give, he could have delivered it himself in the assembly, since he was both a citizen and a member of the class of citizens accustomed to be heard in the assembly. Thus "The comedy, although it claims to be

attributing to Aristophanes a political program: "nor is it easy to give a concise answer to the question which the modern reader most often asks: did the poet seriously intend, using ridicule and absurdity as a means to an end, to affect the behavior of his fellow-citizens and cause them to take particular political decisions?"[21] Apart from the scanty evidence for any clear political program, we encounter the problem, mentioned earlier in relation to the dual critiques, that Aristophanes subjects to ridicule not only the unjust things, but also the just things of the city.

If Aristophanes does not obviously recommend a definite political program, perhaps he teaches justice in the sense that Simon Goldhill means when he describes comedy as having "an ethical and normative thrust designed to inform, improve and exhort the citizens, as well as to give pleasure."[22] This understanding, while vaguer than the argument that Aristophanes had a definite political stance, is amply supported by historical evidence concerning the context of the performance of comedy. Comedy and tragedy were performed in Athens at two important religious festivals, the Great Dionysia and the Lenaea, where poets competed with each other for the prize

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making a political case, is something different from a speech in a debate; in it, the poet establishes a specific relation to his audience, a relation proper to a dramatic performance in the frame of a ritual contest" (James Redfield, "Drama and Community: Aristophanes and Some of his Rivals", 329-330).

[21] Kenneth Dover, *Clouds, Acharnians, Lysistrata*, viii. Dover also mentions the problem of pleasing the audience. A. W. Gomme puts the case even more strongly against attempting to attribute to Aristophanes a rigid political program: A. W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics", 97-109.

[22] Simon Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice*, 168.

of the best tragedy and best comedy of the festival. These festivals were not merely "cultural" events but formed an integral part of the moral, religious, and political life of the Athenians. Marc-Antoine Gavray, considering the parallel between Athenian politics and drama, observes that

> ...si l'espace comporte des gradins, tous les spectateurs présents assistent au meme spectacle: tout le monde y participe en droit, de la même façon que tous les citoyens prennent part à l'Assemblée. En outre, le jury du concours est constitué de juges tirés au sort parmi les citoyens, comme au tribunal de *l'Hélié*. Bref, les conditions matérielles manifestent une liasion pratique entre la comédie et la vie politique. Il ne devait pas être possible pour le spectateur d'oublier qu'il était en meme temps un citoyen.[23]

This "liasion pratique entre la comédie et la vie politique" can be understood in different ways: in terms of the manner in which comedy was judged; in the agon or contest between characters within the drama; the competition between poets for first prize; and the competition between politicians for the vote of the citizens in the assembly.[24] Thus theater "stood alongside other public forums as

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[23]Marc-Antoine Gavray, "Le Juste, La Comédie Connaît Ça Aussi: Le Regard Politique d'Aristophane" in Les Études Philosophiques: Recherches de Philosophie Ancienne: Parménide, Aristophane, Aristote, Épicure, Damascius, No. 4, October 2013, 495. Gavray also states that "En tant que mise en scène de la démocratie, la comédie l'interroge dès lors sur les conditions de ses agissements. Elle participe à la prise de conscience par les citoyens du fonctionnement des dérives de la démocratie athénienne elle-même, en rendant manifeste chacun l'aspect risible de certaines actions" («Le Juste, La Comédie Connaît Ça Aussi», 496.

[24] Cf. James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' 'Frogs'" in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1962, 109.

a place to confront matters of important and moment," or as Goldhill puts it, a "festival in which the polis represents itself to itself and the outside world."[25]

These insights are helpful in anchoring the claim of Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes that comedy teaches justice in a definite historical situation. Nevertheless, understanding the manner in which Aristophanean comedy participates in the moral and political life of Athens requires more precision and clarity. For, if it is true on historical grounds that comedy occupied a definite function in the moral and political life of the city, it is still necessary to understand what Aristophanes means by justice in the precise sense. Again just as Aristophanes is explicit that his comedy consciously intends to instruct and benefit his fellow citizens, so he is explicit that his comedy is wise. Speaking in the first-person singular in the parabasis of *Clouds,* Aristophanes takes his audience to task for awarding the original performance of the comedy last place when it was in fact the "wisest of my comedies" (σοφώτατ'… τῶν ἐμῶν κωμῳδιῶν) (518-519).[26] The problem was not that his comedy was a failure, technically speaking, but that his audience was not sufficiently clever to appreciate its quality; they instead rewarded the productions of "vulgar men" (ἀνδρῶν φορτικῶν) (524-525). Nevertheless, since his other comedies fared better, he trusts that "the shrewd among you" (ὑμῶν…τοὺς δεξιούς) (527) will also favor this production, recognizing

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[25] Euben argues that "Democratic Athens was as much a culture of performance and spectacle as it was one of accountability and self-scrutiny", Thus theater" stood alongside other public forums as a place to confront matters of important and moment" and that politics, law, religion, athletic contexts, music and poetry were public and performative so that one form of cultural expression merged easily with another" (J. Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 109.)

[26] Cf. Robert C. Bartlett, *Against Demagogues*, 2.

it for its true worth just as Electra reocognized Orestes by the lock of his hair (533-536). Although it might be possible to explain away Aristophanes' complaint as a combination of teasing and flattery to his audience, the fact remains that Aristophanes took the pains to rewrite *Clouds* after its defeat. There is every reason to take him at his word in the parabasis that he is "speaking the truth, by Dionysus who nurtured me" (519).

Aristophanes' claim has a further implication, namely, that there are multiple levels to the comedies that cannot be reduced to one single audience: he speaks to the vulgar and the wise alike.[27] As Troncoso argues, "un intento de reducir las Nubes a su denominación más vulgar posible es especialmente inapropiado, pues Aristófanes se sale de su modo habitual en la parábasis para enfatizar que esta obra fue emprendida para los sofoi entre la audiencia.[28]" As a consequence,

[27] Cf. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 22-37. Aristophanes' distinction between the vulgar and the wise resonates with Strauss' controversial view that (some) writers differentiated between "exoteric" and "esoteric" interpretations. The "exoteric" level is the interpretation of the text that reflects the opinions and prejudices of the majority of readers. Its purpose is twofold: first, it protects the author from persecution for expressing unorthodox viewpoints; second, it protects the community from ideas that might potentially dissolve their attachment to the political community. In other words, the exoteric interpretation reflects and tries to preserve morality or custom. On the other hand, the "exoteric" level implies an "esoteric" level that reflects the poet's genuine views but that is not necessarily consistent with the morality of the political community. This view is "hidden" or de-emphasized and can only be understood through careful and sensitive reading of the text.

[28] David Morales Troncoso, "El Socrates de Aristofanes en la Parodia de Las Nubes", 39-40.

A. W. H. Adkins' procedure of attempting to understand the symbolism of the Cloud-chorus on the basis of what "most members of the audience at any time could follow" cannot be sustained.[29] Instead, the comedies contain a paradoxical mixture of blunt, outspoken and even shocking speech, with subtlety, indirectness and guile. The combination of direct and indirect speech is represented in the action of the plays themselves. Dicaeopolis might claim to speak the hard truth to his Acharnian compatriots; but he does so while he is wearing a disguise meant to evoke their pity so that he is not immediately killed. The dull-witted Kinsman in *Women at the Thesmophoria* gives an extremely offensive speech to the women, to the effect that every nasty thing Euripides had said about them is true; but he does so only after having infiltrated the Thesmophoria disguised as one of them. Most significantly, the Cloud chorus, the patron deities of poets and philosophers alike, are also master illusionists, capable of appearing in any form they choose.[30] We are thus able to approach the comedies with these two key considerations: first, that Aristophanes is serious in his claim to teach justice and the good to the city; second, that the form such teaching can take may combine indirect as well as direct forms of representation.

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[29] A. W. H. Adkins, "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato", in *Antichthon*, Vol. 4, 1970, 17.

[30] Kenneth J. Reckford puts it very well: "We have an actor (who might be Aristophanes) who is playing a comic figure, Dicaeopolis, surnamed "Just City", who is playing the Mysian prince Telephus, who is pretending to be a Greek beggar in order to argue his own (Telephus') case before the members of a comic chorus who are playing old Acharnian charcoal-burners who are now going to be treated as Achaean dignitaries – if all this doesn't teach the audience to become aware of role-playing and deception, then what will? (Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New-Comedy, Volume I: Six Essays in Perspective* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 179.

This understanding of Aristophanes' approach permits us to turn to the problem of the dual critique of both tradition and Socratic education in a new manner. As this thesis will argue in the first chapter, the positive teaching in *Clouds* lies less with the problematic defense of tradition that Just logos offers in the center of the play than it does with the assertion of the superiority of the poet over all other types of thinkers, above all Socrates. This claim is quite explicit in the comedy, but its profound implications for understanding Aristophanes' critique of Socrates are much less clear. Had the version of *Clouds* we possess been performed, the spectators would have seen Aristophanes speaking in his own name in the parabasis as the head of the Cloud-chorus, the very deities whom Socrates "worshiped" to the exclusion of all others (518-562).[31] Socrates' punishment at the hands of Strepsiades at the end of the play is, of course, on a meta-theatrical level, a punishment at the hands of Aristophanes. And yet punishment for what exactly? Is Socrates culpable for denying the existence of the gods, or for spilling the beans to an ignoramus like Strepsiades? And to what extent are the Clouds themselves complicit in Socrates' crime given that they both aid and abet Socrates' education of Strepsiades in the beginning of the play, and then deny their complicity at the end when the tables turn on Socrates? These problems suggest that we need to dig deeper into the underlying relationship between Aristophanes and Socrates.

However, the notion that poets are superior to philosophers does not resolve the problem of understanding Aristophanes' critique of philosophic wisdom in *Clouds*. It is true that Socrates is defeated, yet it is also true that the Unjust logos is victorious in the public arena, and that whereas formerly it had been the "weaker" argument, now it is the "stronger" (916-924): what was once

[31] Cf. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West: "This identification of Aristophanes with the Chorus in the *Clouds* is unique among his plays" (*Four Texts on Socrates,* 136 n. 88).

morally inferior is now victorious in fact. This is as much as to say that whereas it was more difficult to convince the Athenian citizenry of the Unjust logos in the old days, it is now more difficult to make the case of the Just logos. Somehow, at some point, a critical change in public opinion took place in Athens, indeed, a generational change.[32] This seems paradoxical: although Socrates may be held accountable for corrupting Strepsiades, he is hardly well known. Strepsiades only knows him by his reputation as a great sophist, not his name (100-101). Socrates lives in the Thinkery with his pale, bare-footed students and does not seem to frequent the agora as Plato's Socrates does.[33] Put another way, the sophistic argument that is associated with Socrates has already infiltrated the public arena independent of his direct or, for all we can know, indirect influence. Socrates' association with the sophists and "new education," whatever it is precisely, is not one of cause and effect: Aristophanes does not hold him responsible for corrupting all of Athens. Yet Socrates is not the only representative of the sophistic education. The catalyst for the final disaster in the play, when the enraged old man burns down the Thinkery occurs over a debate about poets, not philosophers or sophists. In particular, the rustic Strepsiades favors Aeschylus whereas the newly educated Pheidippides has discovered the joys of Euripides (52-54). In a brilliant dramatic portrayal of the Unjust logos in action, the son beats the father for not agreeing with him about Euripides' superiority as a poet and then, as we have already noted, goes a step

[32] Cf. James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' "Frogs"" 107-121. Redfield offers an illuminating discussion on the evidence for this generational change.

[33] Strepsiades remarks that the students resemble the Laconian captives from Pylos who were kept in an Athenian prison for four years (*Clouds*, 186).

further to justify mother-beating. This episode in *Clouds* points to the significance of the poets to the problem that sophistry poses to the city, and in particular to Euripides.

Euripides, of course, was not in any obvious sense a philosopher but rather a tragedian. Yet he was a tragedian educated in Socratic thinking. Apart from appearing in *Clouds* as the poetic spokesman *par excellence* for the Unjust Logos, he is shown in the beginning of *Women at the Thesmophoria* as discoursing on the natural origins of hearing and sight (13-21).[34] *Frogs* ends with a short invective against "those who chat in corners like Socrates," where Euripides is defeated by Aeschylus. Most importantly, he is famous, like Socrates, for debunking the city's gods and introducing his own novel constructs. He swears by the same deities as Socrates, by "Aether, my nourishment and Axis of Tongue / And Intelligence and keen smelling Nostrils" (893-894). He therefore appears as a strange hybrid of philosopher and poet; a Socrates liberated from the narrow confines of the Thinkery with the ability to project his voice to the stage with all of Athens as his audience. In order to understand this strange combination of philosopher and poet, this thesis will consider Aristophanes' portrayal of Euripides in the two plays that feature him as a central character: *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Frogs*.

Women at the Thesmophoria seems to present Euripides in his most positive light: whereas Socrates is destroyed for teaching Strepsiades that "Zeus is not," Euripides is threatened with death by half the population of Athens and manages to escape unscathed. Socrates' enemy is a single

[34] Although Aeschylus and Euripides cannot simply be identified with the Just and Unjust logos (that would be equivalent to saying poets are the same as logoi (arguments), respectively; they seem to transcend them. This problem will be considered in the chapter on *Frogs*.

ignorant rustic, Strepsiades, who had the misfortune of having an undisciplined son with expensive tastes. Euripides' enemy is the whole of the Athenian female population who are furious with him for depicting them in a few notorious tragedies to their husbands as lascivious adulteresses. Whereas Strepsiades spontaneously decides to burn down the Thinkery in a fit of rage, the Athenian women conspire in the sacred festival of the Thesmophoria to assassinate him. Euripides proves his resourcefulness by enlisting allies to come to his aid. He convinces his Kinsman (an old relative who accompanies him) to infiltrate the Thesmophoria on his behalf and persuade the women to desist from their plan to kill him. With the help of the tragic poet Agathon, the Kinsman undergoes a comic transformation from old man to old woman but, after successfully entering the festival, the plan unravels when he gives an absurdly direct speech arguing that Euripides should be exonerated on the grounds (as we have already noted) that everything he had said about the women was true. Now in trouble himself, the Kinsman calls on Euripides for help. The tragic poet manages to save the day by appearing at the eleventh hour, in various disguises, eventually making a truce with the women so that they cease their persecution of him. *Women at the Thesmophoria* shows us the power of Euripidean tragedy: its anti-theological animus, its amorality, and its ability to manipulate the mores of the city *and* its astonishing powers in defending itself from censure. At the heart of this power lies the ability of the poet to wear different masks either devised from his own poetic inventiveness or borrowed from others. As Henderson states, the play is an exploration of "the nature of dramatic mimesis both comic and tragic."[35]

[35] Jeffrey Henderson, *Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 446.

Women at the Thesmophoria shows the particular power of Euripidean tragedy, at least in comparison to Socrates' failure in *Clouds*. *Frogs* now ups the ante. In *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Euripides takes on the women of the city, infiltrates by proxy their sacred festival and escapes persecution. In *Frogs*, Euripides must compete not against the city, but against the greatest poetic representative of the city, Aeschylus. Moreover, the contest takes place at a critical juncture in Athens' war against Sparta, a year before Athens' final defeat. *Frogs* thus offers us the best perspective available in any of the comedies on the nature of tragedy, its moral significance to the city and its relation to comedy. As Henderson asserts, "Aeschylus and Euripides emerge as representatives of the character, both poetic and civic, of their respective eras, and the decisive test turns on which poet is more able to effect 'the salvation of Athens and the continuation of her choral festivities' (1418-1419)".[36]

The play begins with Dionysus and his slave, Xanthius, on their way to the house of Herakles to discover the way to Hades. Euripides' recent death (two years before the play was performed) has meant that there are no longer any decent tragedians in Athens. Dionysus conceives a passion for Euripides while serving as a crewman on board an Athenian naval ship and resolves on descending into Hades, Orpheus-like, to bring back the dead poet. Fearing the hellish monsters in the underworld, he goes to Hades disguised as his brave brother Herakles with the plan to spirit away the great poet unobserved. Once there, however, Dionysus in disguise meets a nasty reversal when a servant of Hades wishes to punish Herakles-Dionysus for the various misdemeanors that the real Herakles had committed when he kidnapped Kerberos. Dionysus' attempt to escape by

[36] Jeffrey Henderson, *Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*, 5

swapping roles with Xanthius backfires, and both undergo a whipping trial in order to determine which is a god (gods are supposed to feel no pain). After the parabasis, Xanthius disappears and Dionysus reenters the stage, this time as the judge in a formal contest between Euripides and Aeschylus. The debate between the two great poets is intense and spectacular – and ranges from vicious ad hominem attacks to demolitions of metrics. While the tragedians are almost the opposite of each other – Euripides a champion of the newfangled, sophistic arguments and Aeschylus a conservative defender of the Marathon virtues – the battle is for a long time roughly even until Dionysus abruptly decides in Aeschylus' favor. The play ends with Aeschylus returning to Athens, while Euripides stays in Hades.

As this study will argue, *Frogs* represents the culmination of the debate between Just and Unjust logos in *Clouds.* And yet these tragedians, who appear almost as analogues of the Just and Unjust logos, are really much more complex and multidimensional than the logoi. Whereas the logoi represent the rhetorical arguments in favor of the new and old educations, the two tragedians are flesh and blood poets who serve as the epitomes of their respective generations. Aeschylus does not just represent the rational argument in favor of the traditional education, but is actually a member of the Marathon generation who, through his distinctive tragic style, provides the most powerful aesthetic representation of old Athenian morality, favoring as he does piety, moderation and courage.[37] Euripides, likewise, offers the most powerful challenge to the traditional morality by representing the new education in the most compelling form. So attractive is Euripidean tragedy, indeed, that Dionysus, god of the theater, is convinced in the first part of the play that

[37] Aeschylus took part in the battle of Salamis.

Euripides is the tragic poet who needs to be resurrected to the stage, without ever once considering Aeschylus (52-54). One is then tempted to conclude, with James Redfield, that "the conflict between Aeschylus and Euripides is a poetic expression of the conflict between old and new politics, and the victory of Aeschylus is a rejection of the new life-style, a return to the old moral center."[38]

Nevertheless, although Redfield is right that the ending of *Frogs* points to a "return to the old moral center" – to the old virtues that propelled Athens to its political peak after the Persian War, the play presents a set of interpretative difficulties that radically affect how one understands this return to tradition. Just as in *Clouds* the preeminence of Aristophanes over Socrates is self-evident and yet the precise relationship between the Clouds and Socrates is ambiguous, so also in *Frogs*, Aeschylus' victory is absolutely clear and yet the reasons for his victory are difficult to determine. The biggest problem in this regard is attempting to reconcile the disguised Dionysus-Herakles, the comic god besotted by Euripidean tragedy, with the (relatively) neutral judge of Part Two who is able to mediate between the poets, both of whom agree to be judged by him. The disjunction between the sections of the play is so great that Redfield, an otherwise sensitive critic, has concluded that "The first half of the *Frogs*…is pure clowning; it has no point except the comedy itself", while reserving for the second part the interesting thematic content.[39] And yet this is surely to do a disservice to Aristophanes. Surely there must be a connection between the beating contest in Part One, where Pluto's slave attempts to distinguish between a mortal and a god, and

[38] James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' "Frogs"", 117

[39] James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' "Frogs"", 115

the climax of Part Two which is decided in favor of the poet who champions the gods of the city.[40] Whatever precisely is the case, the task is set for the final chapter of the thesis to show how the two parts might be plausibly connected to explain Dionysus' decision at the end of the play.

In sum, an analysis of these three comedies will provide us with a higher perspective from which we can reflect upon the points of tension and points of convergence between philosophy, comedy and tragedy, from Aristophanes' point of view.

[40] Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 258-262.

Chapter 1: Clouds

Clouds provides the best starting point for understanding Aristophanes' critique of philosophy, represented in the figure of Socrates. As Aristophanes claims that his comedy does not merely entertain but also teaches his audience to be just (as we established in the introduction), we have reasonable grounds for seeking in this critique, not merely a criticism of "Socratism" but also a positive teaching of some sort.[41] Yet, as will be demonstrated, this positive teaching cannot be found directly in Aristophanes' apparent defense of tradition. For *Clouds* does not just demolish Socrates and the sophistic type he is associated with, but also offers a searing, albeit more understated, critique of this tradition. Tradition appears, in *Clouds*, in two guises: first, in Strepsiades, the old rustic and nominal head of the family; and, second, in the Just logos who appears as the rational defense of the traditional education. Socrates' spectacular defeat at the end of the play should not distract us from the facts that Strepsiades' plan to escape his creditors fails completely and that Just logos is not only defeated by Unjust logos, but defects to his side. These two manifestations of tradition, in other words, are presented in the play as fundamentally problematic. We are therefore compelled to look for Aristophanes' claim to teach justice, not in his representations of tradition per se, but in his representation of his own comic practice.

Aristophanes represents that practice by appearing in his own name as leader of the chorus of Clouds who are also the patron goddesses of all intellectual, creative types (331-334). He

[41] This discussion will use throughout Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West's translation of Clouds in *Four Texts on Socrates*. When necessary, it will provide the original Greek from *Aristophanes Comediae*, ed. F.W. Hall and W.M. Geldart, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

appears, indeed, among the very deities whom Socrates worships (518-562). Thus, Aristophanes' claim to be superior to Socrates is presented at the most obvious level in the play, in a way that could be immediately understood by every member of the audience. What is far from obvious, however, is the ground of this superiority, for it is difficult to know exactly what the Clouds' relationship is to Socrates and Strepsiades: on the one hand they appear as Socrates' allies; on the other, they champion the gods of the city, whom Socrates denigrates, and claim to be Strepsiades' punishers. This strange volte-face has long puzzled interpreters of *Clouds* and posed one of the most significant interpretive difficulties of the play.[42] The aim of this chapter, then, is to make sense of Aristophanes' critique of both Socrates and the tradition his philosophy attacks through Aristophanes' claim for the superiority of his own comic practice.

Strepsiades' Familial Woes.

The catalyst for the disaster at the end of the play is located in the beginning of *Clouds,* in Strepsiades' peculiar family situation and not with Socrates. Unlike in the *Apology*, where Socrates' quest to verify the Delphic Oracle compels him to meddle in the affairs of citizens (*Apology*, 20e-22e), Aristophanes' Socrates confines himself to his Thinkery. The original injustice that prompts Strepsiades to seek out Socrates' help has nothing at all to do with Socrates' novel doctrines about the gods. Strepsiades sleeps uneasily because he is anxious about the debts

[42] See Cedric H. Whitman sees the Clouds change of heart as an "anomaly" (see *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, 128-129). Cf. David Konstans "Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", 79. Charles Segal argues that the Clouds' change of heart was present in the first version of the play ("Aristophanes' Cloud Chorus", in *Arethusa*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1969, 143-161).

his son Pheidippides has accrued through his obsession with horses. Strepsiades' anxiety reflects his powerlessness to extricate himself from a situation that is daily getting worse. Although nominally head of his household, he lacks any paternal authority, with the capacity neither to prevent his son from accruing debts nor even to punish his slave for petty misdemeanors.[43] Strepsiades indicates the effective rule of son over father when he remarks later that "I know that I once obeyed you, a lisping six-year old" (861-862). The play thus opens with the head of the family tormented by a psychological conundrum which he cannot resolve: his love for his son has caused him to indulge Pheidippides' appetite for horse racing; yet this indulgence is the cause of his most pressing troubles and will potentially ruin him. As he tosses and turns while his son snores away peacefully, he shows that he both loves and resents his son and wife at the same time.

The prior cause of Strepsiades' inability to prevent his son from accruing debts lies in the peculiar mix of classes brought about by the union of a rustic with an aristocratic woman. A match-maker helped Strepsiades marry an aristocratic woman, the niece of the grandiloquent Megacles, son of Megacles (46-48).[44] In the brief acme of their erotic attraction, his scent of "new wine," "fig crates," and "wool" mixes seamlessly with her "perfume," "saffron,; "kisses with the tongue," and

[43] The war has something to do with this situation: the proximity of the Spartans to Athens made it easy for slaves to run away.

[44] One might ask how it came to be that a poor fellow like Strepsiades could have been matched with the niece of such a rich man. It is possible that she may have had some physical defect that made her less attractive to men of her class. It could be equally true that the Megacles clan was large enough that not all the relations were rich (Strepsiades does not mention his father-in-law in the play).

"expenses." But domestic reality separates the two soon enough, so that a stingy rustic is confronted with a wife and son with aristocratic tastes and expenses and insufficient means to satisfy them. The mésalliance of the parents is reflected in the oxymoronic name of their son, "Pheidippides" ("thrifty-horseman"), a hybrid of paternal thrift and maternal extravagance. Pheidippides himself, however, is not a hybrid, but takes fully after the mother. Strepsiades has no hold over Pheidippides because the latter knows he can always appeal over his father's head to Uncle Megacles. When the father's scheme of tricking the son into agreeing to attend the Thinkery by making him swear on his filial love (reinforced by an oath to Dionysus) fails, the son defies the father because "uncle Megacles won't let me go horseless!" (οὐ περιόψεταί μ᾽ ὁ θεῖος Μεγακλέης / ἄνιππον) (124-125). Strepsiades' paternal authority is trumped by the superiority of the maternal aristocratic family over his own rustic heritage, and he has nothing else, neither physical strength nor intelligence, to restore the imbalance.

The opening of the play shows us how injustice may arise organically from the family itself. The catalyst for Strepsiades' domestic woes is not philosophy, but eros, which compelled him temporarily to forget the differences between his own rustic and his wife's aristocratic upbringing until it was too late. This primary cause is not, in itself, unjust, but it generates the conditions for injustice. A stingy husband lacking paternal authority with an extravagant wife and son is bound to end up in the situation we find Strepsiades in as the play opens. Given these circumstances, Strepsiades only slightly exaggerates when he later blames "necessity" (ἡ…ἀνάγκη) for compelling him to submit himself to the Clouds' guidance (437). He is not a man naturally inclined to break the law. His only outstanding quality is his stinginess, and this vice, as

Aristotle points out, does not cause one to seek the property of others.[45] Even when the Clouds offer to make Strepsiades the best speaker in Greece so that he could win every proposal in the Assembly, he responds that his only desire is to "twist justice enough to give my creditors the slip" (ἀλλ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἐμαυτῷ στρεψοδικῆσαι καὶ τοὺς χρήστας διολισθεῖν) (434).[46] The old man is too rustic and parochial to entertain the tyrannous possibilities that Socrates' education allegedly permits. Strepsiades is forced into a position where acting justly would lead to ruin: he chooses injustice without hesitation and without any guilty conscience that he is offending the gods.

Strepsiades' Encounter with Socrates

In order to quit himself of his debts by any means, and unable to convince his recalcitrant son, Strepsiades is compelled to enroll himself into the Thinkery as a student. The family drama that opens the play sets the rustic old man on a collision course with Athens' most eccentric intellectual. The comedy that ensues is generated from the juxtaposition and mutual misunderstanding of the highest of the high with the lowest of the low, the same general principle that animates Cervantes' comic duo Sancho Panza and Don Quixote. Both the high and the low are made to appear ridiculous by Aristophanes, both the absurdly abstract experiments undertaken by the students in the Thinkery and Strepsiades' unbelievable boorishness in failing to understand what they are about. The student boasts of a clever experiment that takes the microscopic measurements of a flea's foot, too tiny to be seen with the ordinary eye; of the intestinal workings

[45] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1121b 20-30.

[46] Strepsiades name is related to the verb "to twist".

of gnats which fart through their behinds rather than their mouths; of Socrates' astronomical contemplations which are interrupted by a lizard crapping on his head. Strepsiades can make neither head nor tail of these intellectual subtleties except to reason that if the students are capable of such clever abstract thoughts, then they must easily be capable of talking their way out of any lawsuit. He can understand only what is either immediately in front of him or what he has directly apprehended from his own (narrow) field of experience.[47] Socrates' contemplation of celestial bodies means nothing to the old man; but he laughs at the thought that a lizard crapped on his head. When he sees a group of students bending over to investigate what lies beneath the earth he immediately assumes that they are looking for vegetable bulbs (188). He does not believe the student when shown a map of the world since he cannot see any judges sitting at the point where Athens is meant to be, and when shown where Sparta is on the map, he remarks that it should be taken far away – a few inches to Athens being much too close for comfort.[48] There is, in fact, only one point in which Strepsiades actually grasps a subtle thing that Socrates does: the student recounts how Socrates managed to steal a cloak from the wrestling school under the pretext of carrying out a complex geometrical calculation, enabling him to feed his emaciated students. This act of petty theft, perhaps more than anything else, convinces Strepsiades that he has come to the right place. Without further ado he is granted admission to see the great man himself.

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[47] Peter Euben also makes this point: "Strepsiades is relentlessly literal-minded, bringing every thought down to earth with a resounding thud, as if his body and worries weigh upon him with such force that he cannot raise his sights or his mind" (Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 120-121).

[48] Cf. Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates' Ascetism", 35. Habib emphasizes the difference between looking at the world as a "scientist" rather than as a "citizen".

Aristophanes' theatrically brilliant manner of staging the appearance of Socrates sets the disjunction between high and low in sharpest relief. Socrates appears to Strepsiades, and to the audience, suspended in a basket as he contemplates the sun (225). One might say that he almost appears as a god, with all the self-sufficiency that a god might be imagined to have. The student does not even refer to Socrates by his name, but simply as "himself" (αὐτός), as if he were entirely self-sufficient; pure thought thinking itself.[49] So remote does Socrates appear from any earthly matters that he, at first, does not even hear Strepsiades calling him (219). However, when he does eventually reply, the contrast between Socrates and Strepsiades in their modes of address could not be more striking. Strepsiades calls out to Socrates using the diminutive form of his name "ὦ Σωκρατίδιον" ("Little Socrates!"), a form of address that implies familiarity and affection, rooting

[49] Eric Havelock offers a detailed analysis of the significance of this term and other self-reflexive phrases that resonate with phrases found in Plato's works. See "The Socratic Self as It is Parodied in *Clouds*" in *Yale Classical Studies*, Vol. 22, 1972, 1-18. It is significant that Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedo*, recounts his interest in the philosophy of Anaxagoras which strongly recalls Aristophanes' parody here: "One day I heard someone reading, as he said, from a book of Anaxagoras and saying that it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything. I was delighted with this cause and it seemed to me good, in a way, that Mind should be the cause of all" ("Phaedo", trans. G. M. A. Grubbe in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, 97 b-c). Nevertheless, Socrates firmly rejects this doctrine in the dialogue as being incoherent (*Phaedo*, 98 b). David Morales Troncoso suggests that Aristophanes draws on a combination of Anaxagoras and Diogenes in this parody of Socrates (El Socrates de Aristofanes en la Parodia de Las Nubes, 44-46).

the speakers to a particular place and time.[50] Socrates, on the other hand, addresses Strepsiades from on high, as "ephemeral one" (ὦφήμερε), a creature of a day, the furthest thing from the eternal. He is, as he explains after, "treading the air and contemplating the sun" (ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον) so that he can suspend his mind and mix it with the air, the element of contemplation (225). Yet the English "contemplation" does not quite capture the sense of περιφρονῶ, which emphasizes the ability to think about an object from all sides. For this reason, air is necessary to maintain the lightness and agility of thought. Earth, on the other hand, would impede it by drawing to itself the moisture from thought; that is, by rooting the speaker too much to a particular place (234).[51] Behind the difference between Socrates and Strepsiades lies an abstract universalism of philosophical contemplation that renders the thinker indifferent to his city, his body and his fellow citizens, and a boorish particularism that is incapable of any abstraction whatsoever.

Nevertheless, Socrates' intellectual rodomontade should not distract from the significant fact that he does come down to earth from his basket in order to find out more about Strepsiades.[52] Had he been as self-sufficient and as airily unconcerned with the affairs of the world as he had

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[50] West uses the form "Socratesie", *Four Texts on Socrates*, 124.

[51] There is another joke here too. Strepsiades misunderstands Socrates' περιφρονῶ (think around, contemplate) for ὑπερφρονεῖς (think down on, despise). There is a blasphemous underdone implied in Strepsiades' misunderstanding of the act of contemplation.

[52] The "coming down" in *Clouds* recalls the first word of the opening sentence of Plato's *Republic*: "I went down (κατέβην) to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston, to pray to the goddess…" (Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1968), 327a.

intimated, we might have expected him to have stayed in the basket. In fact, the great philosopher also has his earthly needs. The student's story about Socrates' act of petty theft had already suggested what one of these needs is: Socrates and his students still need to eat in order to carry out their investigations. Now Socrates' willingness to descend to earth and inquire about Strepsiades' presence in the Thinkery reveals another need. When Socrates asks him why he has come to the Thinkery, the old rustic explains that he wishes to become a speaker in order to escape his debts and that he would be willing to pay Socrates whatever he wishes. Perhaps sensing the dubiousness of offering to pay the fee for lessons in how to cheat those to whom he owes money, Strepsiades reinforces his offer with an oath to the gods (245). However, Socrates exhibits little interest in Strepsiades' financial woes or his offer of payment, but a great deal of interest in Strepsiades' belief in the gods. To Strepsiades' assurance that "I swear by the gods to pay you" (μ᾽ ὀμοῦμαί σοι καταθήσειν τοὺς θεούς), he responds that "we don't credit gods" (θεοὶ / ἡμῖν νόμισμ᾽ οὐκ ἔστι) (literally: the gods are not recognized currency/conventional for us) (247-248).[53] The play on words points to something remarkable about Socrates that one might not expect from a sophist. The currency Socrates trades in is not ordinary money, but rather truth about divine matters.[54] In other words, Socrates is interested in Strepsiades in order to gain another student who

[53] This interpretation is justified by Strepsiades immediate response: "What do you swear with? Iron coins, as in Byzantium"? (τῷ γὰρ ὄμνυτ᾽; ἢ / σιδαρέοισιν ὥσπερ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ;).

[54] Kenneth Dover believes that Socrates does receive payment in the play (a fact necessary to Dover's more general thesis that Socrates is only a stand-in for the general sophistic "type") (Kenneth Dover, *Clouds Acharnians, Lysistrata*, xii). But there is very little evidence in the play to support this view. Apart from the play on words above that suggests that Socrates' currency was

will "know plainly" (εἰδέναι σαφῶς) what the divine matters (τὰ θεῖα πράγματ᾽) are. He not only needs to eat every now and then, but he also needs pupils with the correct theoretical judgments.

Surprising as Socrates' need for students is given his professed self-sufficiency, more surprising still is his apparent disinterest in money.[55] The most famous sophists in Greece, such as Prodicus (mentioned in the play) and Protagoras were accustomed to charge large fees for tutoring the sons of aristocratic families, promising in return for the tuition the knowledge of how to gain political influence and prestige. Strepsiades' desire to learn rhetoric from Socrates in order to cheat his creditors, although comically narrow in its scope (he only wishes to cheat his creditors and not to become the greatest speaker in Greece), is nevertheless consistent with the motivations typically attributed to those wishing to associate with the sophists, such as Hippocrates in Plato's *Protagoras*.[56] And yet, strangely enough, Aristophanes seems not to have taken the opportunity of tarring Socrates with the infamy of peddling atheistic ideas while quietly enriching himself on the side, even though he would have had every opportunity to portray Socrates in this way. We might then have seen a scoundrel trying to cheat his creditors but being cheated in turn by a devious sophist who conceals his love of money with elaborate promises for success in the lawcourt or in

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really the "correct view" of divine matters, he never asks for payment. His acts of petty theft obviously do not count.

[55] James Redfield also believes that Socrates did not take payment for his teaching (James Redfield, "Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", 55).

[56] See Plato, "Protagoras" in *"Protagoras" and "Meno"*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 311b-313c.

the assembly.[57] Moreover, Aristophanes certainly provides Socrates with the motivation for enriching himself, since he and his students live in squalor with small means of supporting themselves absent generous donations. How is it then that Socrates would not accept a blank check from a prospective student?[58] The simplest answer is that Socrates is much too absorbed in his intellectual contemplations to be concerned about money except when urgent need demands otherwise. Abstracting oneself from earth - from the needs of the body - also has the effect of rendering one indifferent to self-interest.[59] Although his attempt to contemplate the sun by mixing his thought with air might appear absurd and comically remote from the concerns of the city, it has also rendered him exempt from the principal vices associated with the city.

This comic meeting of the highest of the high and the lowest of the low can now be put into sharper focus. Socrates' arcane intellectual contemplations have rendered him inhumanly indifferent to the needs of the body; he is interested only in a student who is willing to learn the truth about the gods and "associate in speech" with the Clouds. The mere willingness to associate with the Clouds seems sufficient for entry into the Thinkery for Socrates; he makes no further

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[57] Plato implicitly levels this charge at the rhetoricians in *Gorgias*. See Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[58] Cf. Leo Strauss' remark that "nowhere in the play, after Strepsiades has knocked at Socrates' door, do we find any reference to Socrates taking any pay for his teaching" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 120.

[59] Cf. James Redfield: "Socrates in the *Clouds*…is not a charlatan; he is a kook, a weirdo who believes his own stuff" (James Redfield, "Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", 55).

inquiries into Strepsiades' circumstances, nor even bothers to see whether the old man has the requisite intellectual abilities for such an education. Given the general conditions of studying in the Thinkery, we may fairly surmise that his educational services are not in high demand. Pheidippides' initial disdain for Socrates might be taken as a representative sample of common opinion among those who might otherwise be able to afford the luxury of study.[60] Strepsiades, on the other hand, can hardly think of anything beyond his immediate bodily needs and his narrow purpose of getting rid of his debts. The strange experiments and weird ideas put forth by Socrates and his students are not interesting in themselves to Strepsiades; they are only a means to an end. He reasons like the well-meaning parents of a prospective arts student who think that, behind the complex terminology of the various subjects their child will study, there must be something practical: if Socrates can measure the length of a flea's jump, he can certainly teach him how to get out of his debts. All that remains now is for Strepsiades to be inducted into the Socratic education.

Aristophanes dramatizes Strepsiades' introduction to the Socratic education not in terms of a student learning the rudimentary elements of a philosophical education, however, but as an initiate being inducted into a mystery cult.[61] In a way, this might be the last thing we would expect,

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[60] When Strepsiades shows Pheidippides the Thinkery, the latter exclaims: "Ugh! Villains, I know. They're boasters, / pale, shoeless men that you're speaking of, / and among them that miserably unhappy Socrates and Chaerephon" (102-104).

[61] For a discussion on the relationship between Comedy and Greek Religion, see Martin Revermann, "Divinity and Religious Practice" in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 275-290. F. M. Cornford offers a provocative

given the obvious fact that Socrates is brought down at the end of the play for teaching that the gods do not exist. What then is the significance of the mystery cult?[62] Although Aristophanes represents the absurdity of both Socrates and Strepsiades, he does so from the point of view of the low, the needs of the body being the natural starting point for comedy. There is therefore a natural affinity between Aristophanean comedy and Strepsiades' carnal, literal view of the world against that of Socrates, although not a strict identity.[63] The picture Aristophanes provides us of Socrates' philosophizing and the education to enter such philosophizing is taken from the perspective of an Athenian of below average intelligence. The closest approximation to the experience of being

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argument that Greek philosophy has a much closer relationship with Greek religion than is usually believed (See *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (Dover Publications Inc, Mineola, New York: 2004). David Morales Troncoso considers the possibility that the mystery cult association has an historical basis through his links with Pythagoras (El Socrates de Aristofanes en la Parodia de Las Nubes, 42).

[62] It is difficult to determine the full significance of the mystery cult analogy (if it is indeed an analogy) since we lack historical knowledge about precisely what the mysteries involved. There is the further difficulty that associations that would have been readily apparent to an ancient Athenian audience are generally lost on a modern audience who tend to think of religion from a monotheistic perspective.

[63] I mean that behind Strepsiades' absurdities there lies a more profound reflection that Strepsiades himself is obviously unaware of.

introduced to philosophy from such a point of view is to be inducted in a new mystery religion.[64] After all, the subtle arguments and abstruse experiments that constitute the Socratic education resemble, to the outsider, the strange rituals peculiar to a mystery cult, the true significance of which is only available to the initiated.

The association of the Thinkery with a mystery cult is established from the first moment Strepsiades arrives.[65] When Strepsiades asks what thought he has interrupted by knocking on the door. The student replies that "it is not sanctioned (οὐ θέμις) to say, except for the students (140). When Strepsiades replies he has come as a student, the student agrees to tell him on condition that "you must believe these things are Mysteries" (νομίσαι δὲ ταῦτα χρὴ μυστήρια) (143). Strepsiades' formal preparation to meet the Clouds, however, makes the point most spectacularly. The induction that Strepsiades must undergo parodies religious ritual, complete with special crown (τὸν στέφανον), sacred couch (τὸν ἱερὸν σκίμποδα) and being sprinkled with flour in order to

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[64] Khalil M. Habib explains the religious association with Socrates' Thinkery in a different way: "Aristophanes' Socrates first appears…as a pretentious ascetic who renounces comforts and who subordinates himself to his science and his understanding of nature, as asceticism is a "form of self-sacrifice and, therefore, contains a religious instinct…[that] is in contradiction with science itself. Hence the Clouds refer to Socrates as a *priest* and describe him in religious rather than philosophic terms" (Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates Asceticism in the Clouds", 30). Although I think this assertion is true, Habib's explanation does not account fully enough for the significance of Aristophanes' use of the mystery cult motif.

[65] A. W. H. Adkins stresses the significance of the mystery cult analogy in "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato", 13-24.

become a fine-as-flour speaker (255). So similar are the set of rituals that Socrates undergoes to summon the Clouds that Strepsiades momentarily convinces himself that he is about to be sacrificed like a character in a Sophoclean tragedy (256).

And yet a close imitation of the mystery rites points, at the same time, to two major aberrations that make Aristophanes' parody almost look blasphemous.[66] First, Socrates' invocation of the Clouds imitates the form of the sacred rites while inverting the content, substituting the formulaic prayers to the Olympian deities with circumlocutions for natural phenomena. In order to appreciate the point, it helps to compare Socrates' invocation of the Clouds to the Thesmophorian women's sacred rites. The latter invoke the Olympians: "Zeus of the great name"; "[Apollo] of the golden lyre", "All powerful Maiden, Gray-eyed [Athena]", "the Child-Who-Kills-The-Beasts [Artemis], "Golden-faced scion of Leto" [Apollo] and "august lord Poseidon" and "the

[66] Adkins asserts that "the presentation of the *phrontisterion* as a place of initiation in which (bogus) mysteries of (false) deities were held would have been regarded not as amusing but as blasphemous by the majority of Aristophanes' mass audience; for the one cult which in ancient Athens one cannot treat lightly, and which no ancient Athenian would suppose that a mass audience would treat lightly, is the mysteries" in "Clouds, Mysteries Socrates and Plato," 15. Although it is dangerous to assume too much about how the audience may have reacted to this conceit, Adkins is correct at least in highlighting the blasphemous undertones, though perhaps wrong in thinking they would not be funny to the audience. Adkins does not take into account the fact that Aristophanes implies in the debate between Just and Unjust logos that the audience themselves are complicit in the education defended by Unjust logos – the majority of the audience may be countered among the "buggered" (1098).

maiden daughters of Nereus of the sea" (*Women at the Thesmophoria,* 321-324). Socrates' prayer, in contrast, invokes "master and lord, measureless Air" (ὦ δέσποτ᾽ ἄναξ ἀμέτρητ᾽ Ἀήρ), "bright Aether" (λαμπρός τ᾽ Αἰθὴρ) and "the august goddesses clouds" (σεμναί…θεαὶ Νεφέλαι). The Clouds chorus responds, arising "clearly apparent in our dewy, shining nature…to lofty mountain peaks" (279-280); they invoke "sacred land with well-watered fruits"; "roarings of rivers most divine"; "deep-thundering, roaring sea" where "the untiring eye / of Aether blazes / with glistening rays" (286). The only deity recognizable in Socrates' invocation to the Clouds is "deep-resounding father Oceanus" (πατρὸς ἀπ᾽ Ὠκεανοῦ βαρυαχέος), not an Olympian deity, but one of the primeval titans whom Zeus overthrew when he ended the reign of Kronos (277).[67] The ancient enmity between the cosmic deities and the Olympians is perfectly congruent with the Clouds' implicit rivalry with Zeus.

Strepsiades, for his part, is both terrified and confused by this awesome display: these deities seem entirely new and do not correspond to any of the other divine beings he is familiar with. At a loss, he hazards a guess that they are some kinds of heroines (ἡρῷναί τινές) (315). Socrates informs him that they are "heavenly Clouds, great goddesses for idle men, who provide us with notions and dialectic and mind (ἥκιστ᾽ ἀλλ᾽ οὐράνιαι Νεφέλαι μεγάλαι θεαὶ ἀνδράσιν ἀργοῖς: / αἵπερ γνώμην καὶ διάλεξιν καὶ νοῦν ἡμῖν παρέχουσιν) (316-317). They are, in effect, representations of the activity of pure thought itself, the philosophical equivalent of the muses who presided over the activity of poetic invention in the traditional Greek pantheon. The identity of this strange new version of the muses is confirmed as Strepsiades slowly begins to comprehend what Socrates is saying. Indeed, his dawning awareness corresponds exactly with his ability to see the

[67] Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Dorothea Wender (London: Penguin Books, 1973), lines 56-85.

Clouds on stage, a twenty-four member Chorus decked out in feminine garb. As we might expect given his low IQ, he is not able to recognize them until they are right under his very nose.[68]

However, whereas the Muses are associated with poetry, Socrates first stresses the Clouds' function as goddesses of rhetoric. Apart from "notions, dialectic and mind," they also provide their adherents with "marvel-telling" (τερατείαν), "circumlocution" (περίλεξιν) and "striking and seizing" (κροῦσιν καὶ κατάληψιν), technical terms pulled directly from the rhetoric playbook (318).[69] In this capacity, they capture a fundamental ambiguity in rhetoric: they reflect rhetoric's capacity to be the vehicle of deception and the purveyance of lies on the one hand and, on the other, to convey truth. The former, shadowy side of rhetoric is made immediately apparent by their association with generally unsavory and untrustworthy intellectual types in the Greek world: sophists; Thurian diviners, practitioners of the art of medicine, idle-long-haired-onyx-ring-wearers, song-modulators of circling choruses and idle do-nothings (331-334); in short, confidence men and tricksters. They perfectly reflect this facet of rhetoric by lacking any true form of their own; the Clouds can appear to be anything they want to be.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude from this that the Clouds' symbolism is restricted to the negative side of rhetoric, for they also have the capacity to reveal the essence of things. Their ability to reveal truth, paradoxically, also arises out of their formlessness. When Strepsiades wonders how what he had previously thought to be mere clouds could appear in the form of mortal

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[68] Socrates exclaims that Strepsiades' eyes must be oozing pumpkins if he cannot recognize the Cloud chorus by now (327). This instance is one of several examples where the visual drama of the play makes the point easier to understand.

[69] See note 60 in "Clouds", 128.

women, Socrates answers that they have the power to "become all things that they wish" (γίγνονται πάνθ᾽ ὅ τι βούλονται) (348). This truth can be proven empirically by simply looking at clouds and making out the different shapes that they form. However, according to Socrates, their various forms are not simply random. They are able to imitate their objects in such a way as to make something fundamental about them apparent. For example, if they decide to imitate a notorious homosexual, they can take the form of a centaur, a sexually rapacious and indiscriminate combination of beast and man; for a plunderer of public property, the form of a wolf; for a great coward such as Cleonymus, the form of a deer (348-355). They are capable of actually seeing through illusions to the true essence of things by being perfect imitators.

And yet the rhetorical function of the Clouds only serves as a prelude for the deepest, most shocking truth that lies at the heart of Socrates' intellectual mystery cult, the real condition for initiation into this strange religion. The Clouds themselves make this apparent when they speak for the first time, fondly addressing Socrates as their "priest of subtlest babble" (λεπτοτάτων λήρων ἱερεῦ) whom they specially favor for his willingness to wander the streets barefooted, enduring many evils on their behalf (359-363). The exclusivity implied in the Clouds' address to Socrates is reciprocated by the philosopher, who affirms that "they alone are goddesses; everything else is drivel" (αὗται γάρ τοι μόναι εἰσὶ θεαί, τἄλλα δὲ πάντ᾽ ἐστὶ φλύαρος) (365). When the surprised old man asks him "Come now, by the Earth, isn't Olympian Zeus a god for us?" (ὁ Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἡμῖν, φέρε πρὸς τῆς γῆς, οὐλύμπιος οὐ θεός ἐστιν;), Socrates responds jeeringly, "What Zeus! Don't

babble. Zeus doesn't even exist" 366) (ποῖος Ζεύς; οὐ μὴ ληρήσεις: οὐδ᾽ ἔστι Ζεύς.).[70] As proof, the philosopher propounds three devastating arguments showing how the Clouds, and not Zeus, are responsible for rain, thunder and lightning. Zeus should be able to make it rain without clouds, and yet clouds are always present when it rains; clouds create thunder filling with water and bumping into each other as they are compelled along by whirl (αἰθέριος Δῖνος), just as the stew churning around in Strepsiades' belly at the Panathenea produces its own set of loud eruptions. Finally, lightning, supposedly the instrument of Zeus' divine wrath against perjurers, is merely dry wind that gets trapped inside the clouds and is compelled to burst out, igniting itself in the process. Strepsiades himself furnishes his own analogy to this one: one day he forgot to slit a sausage at a festival and got burnt when the sizzling fat burst out into his eye (411).

Zeus having been philosophically done away with, all that remains is Strepsiades' formal acceptance into the Thinkery by an affirmation of the central tenet of the Socratic faith. The Clouds address Strepsiades for the first time, promising him great wisdom and happiness among Athenians and Greeks provided he has a "good memory" (μνήμων), is "a thinker" (φροντιστὴς) and is willing to endure all sorts of evils including shivering in the cold, going without dinner, refraining from alcohol and eschewing the gymnasium. Strepsiades is silent about the intellectual qualities necessary for the rhetorical education, but enthusiastically declares his willingness to be "forged on an anvil" (ἐπιχαλκεύειν παρέχοιμ᾽ ἄν) as far as the hardships are concerned (422). The ability to endure hardships and live an ascetic life seems to be the only quality that the old man actually

[70] It is significant that Strepsiades swears by "earth" (πρὸς τῆς γῆς), the opposite element of Socrates' air/aether. This fundamental opposition will return in *Frogs* when Aeschylus beats Euripides in one round of poetic combat for the weightiness of his phrases (*Frogs*, 1364-1410)

shares with the philosopher. And yet this point is not negligeable, for the Clouds had singled out Socrates himself among the other sophists for his unique willingness to live ascetically, and not for his wisdom (362-363).[71] Apparently satisfied with Strepsiades' expression of enthusiasm, Socrates poses the central question:

> Now won't you believe in no any god but the things we believe in:
>
> This Chaos, and the Clouds, and the Tongue, these three?
>
> ἄλλο τι δῆτ᾽ οὖν νομιεῖς ἤδη θεὸν οὐδένα πλὴν ἅπερ ἡμεῖς,
>
> τὸ Χάος τουτὶ καὶ τὰς Νεφέλας καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν, τρία ταυτί; (422-423)

Of course, by this strange trinity Socrates really refers to facets of the same primary phenomenon. For as he had mentioned, the Clouds are merely borne along by ethereal vortex, by "necessity"; they are not really entities endowed with personality as the convention Greek gods were. By the

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[71] The Clouds single out Prodicus, another sophist, for his "wisdom and judgment" (σοφίας καὶ γνώμης) (361). Ehrenberg describes Prodicus as "a preacher of serious, if somewhat trivial, ethics"…[he]…had his ideas about the origin of the gods: he thought they were man-made, but an expression of gratitude for the gifts of nature. In that gratitude Prodicus saw the origins of religion. The identity between deities and their gifts (wine – Dionysus; water – Poseidon; fire – Hephaestus; grain – Demeter, etc.) gave his theory a backing that could easily be understood" (Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilization During the 6th and 5th Centuries, B.C.* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1968). 276). If this description is accurate, the Clouds' approval of Prodicus adds further weight to the argument that the Clouds are insincere when they later change sides, claiming to be champions of the gods of the city.

same token, "the tongue" (τὴν γλῶτταν) – another way of saying rhetoric – is simply a feature of chaos' rule. For, if there is no Zeus and there is only chaos, all human phenomena can be reduced to rhetoric, to persuasion and not to some law propounded by a divinely inspired law-giver.[72] All of this, of course, is lost on Strepsiades, who responds that

> I simply wouldn't converse with the others [i.e. gods] even if I should meet them,
>
> Nor would I sacrifice or pour libations or offer incense to them. (424-425)
>
> οὐδ' ἂν διαλεχθείην γ' ἀτεχνῶς τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐδ' ἂν ἁπάντων:
>
> οὐδ' ἂν θύσαιμ', οὐδ' ἂν σπείσαιμ', οὐδ' ἐπιθείην λιβανωτόν.

Incapable of fathoming the new metaphysical reality of Zeus' non-existence, Strepsiades takes Socrates to mean that he should offer sacrifices only to the Clouds, and not to the Olympians, as if he were promising to snub a group of odious acquaintances at the next social gathering. The full

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[72] Khalil M. Habib offers a useful explanation for the connection between rhetoric and natural philosophy: "Socrates reduces the universe to bodies in motion governed by necessity. Because the human body individuates humans from one another, there is no ground for justice in nature. The world of justice and injustice thus disappears. Only the art of rhetoric exists, persuading, through its powers over the imagination, of the existence of justice. Rhetoric becomes the sole means by which to establish justice or a common good in a world where only disparate bodies exist. And if there is no foundation for justice in nature, then justice becomes a matter of rhetorical formulations that can be twisted however one wishes" (Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates' Asceticism in Aristophanes' Clouds", 37. Habib's interpretation is vindicated by Pheidippides' reasoning about Athenian law later in the play (cf. 1407-1429).

significance of denying the existence of the gods must wait until he experiences the implications viscerally, when his position as father and head of the family is radically undermined. The result of the Socratic initiation ceremony, as elaborate and impressive as it is dramatically, is not to create a promising disciple of the Clouds, but a time bomb.

Unsurprisingly, Socrates' attempts to educate Strepsiades prove disappointing for both parties: Socrates is appalled at the dullness of the old man who forgets the rudimentary elements before he has even learnt them; and Strepsiades, for his part, cannot understand why he must learn such arcane subjects as metrics, rhythm or grammatical gender when he could simply be told the "most unjust logos" (τὸν ἀδικώτατον λόγον) (655-657). When Strepsiades fails all the other subjects, Socrates resorts to teaching the rustic what we might call today "creative thinking": he must try to "think" his way out of a problem that he can at least fathom since it relates immediately to himself - the problem of his debts. This set of exercises, as ridiculous as it seems, has a serious intention aimed at dragging Strepsiades out of his body in order that his mind might become lighter and able to mix with air, the element of pure, abstract thought. In order to achieve this mental liberation, Socrates compels Strepsiades to lie on a flea-ridden mattress, a means of exaggerating the incessant, nagging calls of the body, akin to a holy man wearing a hairshirt. If Strepsiades can manage to ignore the discomfort caused by the fleas, he has the basis for achieving what Socrates already demonstrated he had mastered when he first appears in the play, suspending himself in midair, mixing his mind with the air.[73] Nevertheless, even Strepsiades, accustomed as he is to

[73] There seems to be a serious basis to this caricature. David Morales Troncoso finds parallels here with Diogenes Laertius "que sostenía que el Aire era la única fuente original de animación desde la cual devenían las cosas vivas al ser, pues las cosas que existen serían alteraciones del aire, un

discomfort and privation, at first can hardly endure being bitten all over by the bugs. As Socrates exhorts him to "concentrate yourself in every way / and spin yourself around" (διάθρει πάντα τρόπον τε σαυτὸν / στρόβει πυκνώσας), all the old man can do is writhe around under the blanket, shrieking as piteously as Herakles did in his death throes as he was succumbing to Deianeira's poisoned cloak in a tragedy of Sophocles (709-715). After some time, however, the old man quietens down - so much so, in fact, that he falls asleep (732). Then, when Socrates inquiries whether he has "got hold of anything" (ἔχεις τι;), he merely answers that he has got hold of "nothing except the dick in my right hand" (734) (οὐδέν γε πλὴν ἢ τὸ πέος ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ). Apart from nagging physical discomforts, weariness on the one and sexual desire on the other also appear as the natural enemies to contemplation.[74] Nevertheless, in spite of these impediments, the old man makes some modest progress. He conceives the notion of despoiling his creditors by enlisting the aid of a Thessalian witch to shut away the moon so that the month when the payment is due will never arrive. Under further encouragement from Socrates to slacken his thought into air, he imagines melting away the wax tablet carrying his indictment with a sunbeam reflected through a

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sustrato performative infinito (apeiron) que, por el hecho de ser omnipresente, es omniciente, eterno y, consequentemente, divino (El Socrates de Aristofanes en la Parodia de Las Nubes, 46).

[74] In *Symposium*, Socrates stands still for hours thinking through a thought (*Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 175A-D. Allan Bloom remarks that Plato gives us "a glimpse of Socrates in his most characteristic activity…He appears to be self-sufficient, a thing that puzzled Aristophanes, who tried to treat it as a mistake and a folly" ("The Ladder of Love" in *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 75.

glass lens. However, just at the moment when Strepsiades seems to have made his first concrete steps in his educational journey, he undoes everything with an answer so stupid – even by his standards – that Socrates expels him from the Thinkery forthwith. Asked what he would do if he were a defendant in a lawsuit with no witnesses at hand to assist him, he replies without hesitation that he would go and hang himself; that way, "no one will bring a lawsuit against me if I'm dead" (οὐδεὶς κατ᾽ ἐμοῦ τεθνεῶτος εἰσάξει δίκην) (782). As Habib puts it, "Strepsiades' attachment to himself is so deeply ingrained that he actually believes he will survive his own death."[75] Socrates discovers to his frustration that nothing, not even a course in creative thinking, can pull Strepsiades out of his body. It proves to be the last straw, and Strepsiades is immediately expelled.

Abandoned by Socrates and in a state of desperation at having become a Thinkery drop-out, he asks the Clouds for advice, who tell him to send a grown-up son if he has one. They urge him on in this endeavour by renewing their promise that he will receive "very many good things because of us alone of the gods" (πλεῖστα δι᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀγάθ᾽ αὐτίχ᾽ ἕξων / μόνας θεῶν) (805-806). Heartened by such counsel, Strepsiades succeeds in accomplishing what he was impotent to do before. No longer cowed by his brawny and robust son, and unmoved by the son's appeals to his aristocratic relatives, he reasserts his paternal authority on the basis of his new-fangled, semi-digested knowledge that "Vortex is king, having driven out Zeus" (Δῖνος βασιλεύει τὸν Δί᾽ ἐξεληλακώς).[76] (828). In fact, Strepsiades' second attempt to persuade his son to enter the Thinkery

[75] Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates' Asceticism in Clouds", 39.

[76] His understanding is worse than we think it is. At the end of the play, Strepsiades remarks that he thought that a goblet had actually replaced Zeus (1473-1474). His understanding is so limited

parodies his own initiation into the mysteries by Socrates, a piece of comedic ingenuity of parodying a parody that piles absurdity on absurdity. This time, Strepsiades plays the role of a demented Socrates, while the unwitting Pheidippides, taken completely by surprise by the turn of events, plays the befuddled student. Whereas Socrates had addressed Strepsiades from on high in his basket as an ephemeral, Strepsiades now patronizes his son by mocking him for being "a little child" (παιδάριον) who is "unlearned" (ἀμαθὴς) and "dense" (παχύς) (821 and 842). He then imitates the initiation into the Socratic mystery, by making out to Pheidippides that he is in possession of special secrets that he must not teach to anyone and then telling him immediately thereon that "There is no Zeus" (οὐκ ἔστιν…Ζεύς). Pheidippides, for his part, is not especially shocked at the revelation of Zeus' non-existence, but genuinely frightened at his father's bizarre behavior (843).[77] When the old man attempts to convince him that the gender of chickens should be distinguished with newly-coined, artificial terminology that no one has ever heard of, he concludes that his father has gone completely out of his wits. Nevertheless, he obeys his father's wishes, and the rule of father over son is ironically restored on the basis of the father's superior knowledge. Nevertheless, this temporary restoration of the conventional order of things (and on the basis of convention, if a novel one: newly coined terms) is really a devil's bargain. The father's authority can last only so long as he maintains his tenuous superiority in point of knowledge over his son, which ends the moment the latter embarks on his own, more promising, education.

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that the concept of a whirling chaos is beyond his grasp. "Dinos" can mean both "whirl" and a "large round goblet" (Liddell and Scott, 203).

[77] Pheidippides is young and not so attached to the gods – his lack of piety had been proven earlier when he commits an act of minor perjury (91).

Pheidippides will repeat his father's words about the non-existence of Zeus back to him almost verbatim as the enraged old man rushes to set the Thinkery on fire at the end of the play (1468-1470).

The Rhetorical Education of Pheidippides

The climax of Strepsiades' education had been the elaborate initiation into the mysteries of the Socratic sect - the introduction, in other words, of a man completely unequipped for a philosophical education into the secrets of rhetoric and natural philosophy. The highlight of Pheidippides' education, on the other hand, consists of a strange debate between the Just and Unjust logoi, which also forms the center of the play. The rhetorical debate is, therefore, a distinct advance over the initiation of Strepsiades. Pheidippides suffers from none of the disadvantages that plagued the old man in his educational attempts; he is (according to the father) "wise-spirited by nature" (θυμόσοφός…φύσει), aristocratic and young (877). His obsession with horses reflects his love of honor rather than money or the vulgar needs of the body – a promising beginning for an education that concerns itself with higher things.[78] He is therefore able to witness a debate that comprehensively reflects the rhetorical education in terms of two abstract speeches battling it out for supremacy, something that Strepsiades would never have been capable of achieving.

We now witness the spectacle of two speeches – "logoi" – appearing on stage ostensibly to do battle over the education of Pheidippides' soul. The Just logos champions the traditional

[78] Cf. Pheidippides' remark: "How pleasant it is to consort with novel and shrewd matters / and to be able to look down on the established laws! / For *I,* when I was applying my mind to horsemanship alone, / couldn't even say three phrases before I went wrong (1399-1403).

education while the Unjust logos defends the novel education.[79] After a brief but acerbic skirmish, the Clouds (acting as adjudicators) implore the Just Logos to "display…what you used to teach them in the past" (ἀλλ᾽ ἐπίδειξαι σύ τε τοὺς προτέρους / ἅττ᾽ ἐδίδασκες) and the Unjust logos to "display…the novel education" (σύ τε τὴν καινὴν / παίδευσιν) (934-937). The Just logos is lambasted as an "old fogey and out of tune" (τυφογέρων εἶ κἀνάρμοστος), "ancient" (ἀρχαῖος) and a "Kronos" (Κρόνος) while the Unjust logos is called a "shameless pederast" (καταπύγων…κἀναίσχυντος), a "ribald" (βωμολόχος) and "a parricide" (πατραλοίας) (908, 915, 929 and 909-911). Their deepest difference consists in their understandings of justice. In the preliminary skirmish we learn that the Unjust logos does not believe justice exists, whereas the Just logos maintains that it is "with the gods" (παρὰ τοῖσι θεοῖς) (903). Justice either does not exist or it is closely tied or even identical to piety: neither side admits the possibility of a justice according to nature.

[79] Euben argues that the debate between Just and Unjust logos is "disconcerting" in the extent to which "it anticipates the issues and polemics of our own culture wars…Old Education's aggressive traditionalism insists that existing practices are natural, present identities are fixed, and established hierarchies are necessary; his apocalyptic prophecies and ranting against promiscuous sex, self-indulgent youth, wayward teachers, the decline of standards, and disrespect for authority are all summed up in the call for 'Decorum, Discipline, and Duty'" (Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 117). Martha Nussbaum has also interpreted the debate between Just and Unjust logos in terms of the culture wars, with Allan Bloom on the Aristophanean side, charging Socrates with corrupting the young (Martha Nussbaum, "Socratic Self-Examination," 33).

However, while the two notions of justice distinguish the *logoi* most profoundly, the battleground over which they fight is moderation. Just logos delivers a rhetorical display that hearkens back to the good old days of Athenian glory "when moderation was believed in" (ὅτι…σωφροσύνη 'νενόμιστο), to the education that made the men that fought at Marathon (962 and 986). We are meant to be impressed by the discipline, asceticism, deference to the old, and, most of all, the decorum in erotic matters that such education inculcated (972-980). Just logos promises that its devotees will be honored, but only in the form of the moderate pleasure of being crowned with a wreath at the coming of spring (1007-1008). On the other hand, Unjust logos attacks moderation through a powerful appeal to the liberation of erotic desire.[80] This liberation, in turn, rests on the natural philosophical teaching that roots the human passions in the "necessities of nature" (τὰς τῆς φύσεως ἀνάγκας) (1075).[81] One should follow nature by following one's

[80] Ehrenberg outlines the consequences of the physis doctrine among the sophists: the doctrine of physis "became the leading force, either as an expression of the natural equality of men, and thus a justification of democracy, or as the opposite, an expression of the natural uniqueness of the individual, in particular the great individual, and thus a support for monarchy or tyranny. Taken as a whole, the theory was an answer to the belief whether pious or rational, in the "unwritten laws" (Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*, 278). The political dimension of the Unjust logos will be explored further when we discuss Euripides in *Frogs*. Cf. Callicles' statement in *Gorgias* that "in most cases these things are opposed to each other, nature and convention" (482e).

[81] Cf. James Redfield: "There is a paradox of freedom and necessity in this union of the divine and the animal: once we discover our impulses are after all completely natural, we feel ourselves free to pursue them. To understand ourselves is to pardon ourselves; therefore, the acceptance of animal

desires and not worrying about punishments. The substance of each logos is reflected in its form. Just logos attempts to persuade through an epideictic display that is intended to instill awe and silence (although its attempt to maintain decorum is somewhat thwarted by Unjust logos' rude heckling). Unjust logos, on the contrary, proceeds by Socratic-style dialectic, a form of cross examination that forces Just logos to fight and lose the debate on unfavorable territory.

The result of the debate reveals that Just logos has few resources to defend itself against this onslaught of Unjust logos. Once justice becomes closely tied to piety, the argument for justice stands or falls according to the integrity of the Greek religion, a vulnerability that the dialectically minded Unjust Logos exploits to the utmost. Warm baths are supposed to make a man cowardly, yet the manliest Hercules gave his name to hot springs (1051). Young men should not spend their time loitering in the marketplace (*agora*), yet Homer honored Nestor with the title "*agorētēs*" (1056-1057). The myths do not even prove that the moderate - those who curb their natural inclinations for a noble cause - get their just reward. Where the tyrant Hyperbolas reaped talent upon talent for his lack of moderation, Peleus resisted the amorous advances of Acastus' wife only to be abandoned in the forest with a measly sword to defend himself (1063-1066). The hero won a goddess as a wife for his moderation, but she soon left him because this same moderation made

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necessity, the valuation of the release of the instincts, results paradoxically in a godlike freedom from restraint. The consequences are predictably disastrous (James Redfield, "Philosophy and Poetry in Aristophanes' Clouds", 60).

him a poor performer in the sack (1069).[82] Finally, immoderate behavior does not even have to fear legal punishment. Liberating one's desires from pious constraints is likely to lead to adultery, but with the cunning of Unjust logos one can always wriggle out of an accusation (1077). Even punishment of the most emasculating and shameful variety will not do any lasting harm, and might even be a prerequisite for a successful public career (1083-1085).

Unjust logos proves to be more than a match for Just Logos on the rhetorical battlefield; but Just Logos is not merely defeated; as we have already noted, he defects to the enemy. The importance of this point is reflected in the strange fact that the debate, apparently staged to convince Pheidippides to sign up to one or the other of the educations, has no effect on him at all. At the beginning of the debate, the Clouds exhort the contenders to "Display, you, what you used to teach them in the past, and you, the novel education, so that he, when he's heard you both speaking against each other, may decide and go to school (ἀλλ᾽ ἐπίδειξαι σύ τε τοὺς προτέρους / ἅττ᾽ ἐδίδασκες, σύ τε τὴν καινὴν / παίδευσιν, ὅπως ἂν ἀκούσας σφῷν / παίδευσιν, ὅπως ἂν ἀκούσας σφῷν) (933-938).[83] However, when Strepsiades drags him into the Thinkery before the debate begins, Pheidippides predicts that "verily in time you will be indignant about these things" (ἦ μὴν σὺ τούτοις τῷ χρόνῳ ποτ᾽ ἀχθέσει), and after it finishes he repeats to his father that "you'll regret these things" (865 and 1114-1115). Strepsiades went over to the Unjust Logos when he

[82] There are indications that these interpretations of the myths are distortions, but this makes no difference for the rhetorical purposes of the argument. The distortions further prove the vulnerability of the Just logos' defense of the Greek pantheon.

[83] The Just logos also appeals to Pheidippides to "be bold and choose me, the stronger, speech" (989-990).

decided to cheat his creditors, long before this debate in the school took place, and Socrates is either absent or takes no part in the discussion except to supply the venue. The Clouds remain impartial, and the majority of the audience can already be counted among the "buggered" (1089-1093). It turns out that the only one in a position to be convinced by Unjust logos is the Just logos itself.

In order to understand the significance of this surprising fact, we must keep in mind the subtlety in Aristophanes' conceit of the logoi. The speeches are not exactly identical to the educations they represent: they are, rather, the arguments a rhetorician would employ to persuade his listeners by appealing to one education or the other; they are a means of persuasion whose relative strength depends on the prejudices of the audience listening.[84] For example, a rhetorician speaking to an audience of pious old men would need to use Just logos to achieve his purposes; a rhetorician speaking to an audience familiar with the sophistic teachings would employ Unjust logos. Pheidippides, in fact, does precisely this when convincing his father of the merits of father-beating. He proves his mastery of the rhetorical education by offering to justify father beating by means either of the Just or Unjust logos (1336-1337).

For this reason, Just logos, for all his appeals to justice and piety, appears especially suspicious. For, even in the display he gives in the debate, he has difficulty concealing the tension between what he secretly desires and what he believes is moral and just that lies behind all his talk of moderation and the good old days. At root lies the unlawful erotic desire already affirmed by Unjust logos in his frank description of the nature of human individuals. The Just logos' strange sexual preoccupation with young boys in the course of his defense of modesty is a case in point:

[84] A better translation for logos in this context might be "discourse."

"it was needful," he says (one can imagine a sinister note in his voice), "for the boys to keep their thighs covered while sitting at the gymnastic trainer's / so as to show nothing cruel to those outside"; "when they stood up, they had to smooth the sand / back again and be mindful / not to leave behind an image of puberty for their lovers"; "At that time no boy would anoint himself below the navel, / so that dew and down bloomed on their private parts as on fruit." Even his indignant criticism of the lazy manner in which the sacred dance in honor of Tritogeneia was carried out at the Panathenaea festival seems to have an ulterior motive lurking behind it: the young men are meant to dance the famous Pyrrhic war dance naked, with their shield arm extended out from their body; but, these new comfort-loving youngsters perform the dance with the shield close to their body in order to keep themselves warm. Is Just logos really indignant about the insult to the deities of the festival or regretful that he cannot ogle the boys' naked bodies?

Consequently, although the logoi appear to be exact antitheses in the substance of their argument, their real difference lies in the presumption of what the majority of their audience believes. It is precisely at this point where the notions of the "stronger" (κρείττων) and "weaker" (ἥττων) become significant. One might also translate "stronger" and "weaker" to mean the case that is easier or more difficult to make among a given audience.[85] For example, in the United States, the open borders logos would typically be "stronger" among an audience of Democrats and

[85] Ehrenberg notes on the basis of Protagoras' famous phrase of the two contradictory *logoi* "that it ought to be possible to argue both sides of a statement in turn, and that a clever speaker would be able to persuade his audience to accept anything" (Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*, 276).

"weaker" among Republicans.[86] At the very beginning of the debate, Just logos calls Unjust logos the "weaker one" (ἥττων / γ᾽ ὤν) (893). He therefore assumes that the majority of the audience in the amphitheater are traditionalists who regret the passing of the good old days and abjure the corrupt, hedonistic sophisticates. However, his confidence in this belief weakens progressively in the debate until he reaches an abrupt realization, all the more comic because it was a forgone conclusion from the onset. Unjust calls Just logos "shamefully squalid" (αὐχμεῖς αἰσχρῶς) – probably pointing to the rags which Just logos is wearing, while Just logos admits that Unjust logos is "faring well / although before you were a beggar claiming to be Telephus the Mysian", (σὺ δέ γ᾽ εὖ πράττεις. / καίτοι πρότερόν γ᾽ ἐπτώχευες, / Τήλεφος εἶναι Μυσὸς φάσκων), that is, a beggar claiming to be a king in disguise (921-923).[87] The tables have turned so that in present-day Athens,

[86] This does not mean the "weaker" logos cannot still win if it is argued with skill and determination. More honor is due to the speaker who wins by the weaker argument since it requires more rhetorical skill. In fact, Unjust logos seems to pretend that he is the weaker logos at the beginning of the debate in order to make his inevitable victory all the more spectacular. He asserts that "I'll defeat you who claim to be stronger than I" (ἀλλά σε νικῶ τὸν ἐμοῦ κρείττω / φάσκοντ᾽ εἶναι (894-895).

[87] Telephus the Mysian was one of Euripides' most famous characters. Aristophanes makes significant use of the character in *Acharnians* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*. See "Acharnians" in *Against Demagogues What Aristophanes Can Teach Us about the Perils of Populism and the Fate of Democracy*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 430-434 and *Thesmophoriazusae*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (manuscript), 730-738.

the Just logos is now the beggar and the Unjust Logos the well-to-do.[88] The implication this observation has for the question of who is really the stronger argument is obvious. All that Unjust logos has to do, once he has discredited Just logos through dialectic, is to make Just logos stop talking for a second and have a look around him (1087-1088). He proves to Just logos' immediate satisfaction that the public advocates (συνηγοροῦσιν), the tragedians (τραγῳδοῦσι), the popular orators (δημηγοροῦσι) may all be counted among the "buggered" (εὐρυπρώκτων - literally "wide-arsed"). Unjust logos definitively concludes the discussion:

Unjust: Then surely

you recognize that you're speaking nonsense?

And among the spectators, consider which are the greater number.

Just logos' reaction is immediate:

Just: I *am* considering.

Unjust: What do you see, then?

Just: Many more, by the gods, who are buggered!

[*Pointing to particular men in the audience*.]

Him, at any rate, *I* know, and that one,

[88] This reversal resonates with a reference at the beginning of the play when Strepsiades complains that since the war he has not been able to discipline his slaves. He looks back with nostalgia to pre-war Athens (6-7).

And him, with the long hair.[89]

Unjust: Then what will you say?

Just: We've been worsted!

[*Flinging his cloak into the audience, he addresses the spectators*.]

You debauchees!

Before the gods, receive my cloak, since

I'm deserting to you!

Just logos' defection, culminating in tossing his cloak to the audience, reveals the true relationship between Just and Unjust logos. Although they appear initially as polar opposites, the one in defense of the traditional education inculcating moderation and justice, the other in defense of the novel education with its natural philosophy and hedonism, in fact they are two sides of the same coin. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Just and Unjust logos are the inner and outer layers of the same sophist: Unjust logos represents the inner nature of the sophist, while Just logos represents the spurious moral cover he uses when he is in need of respectability – indeed his cloak. In sum, Just logos mounts his fiery defense of the old education only because of his mistaken belief that it is still necessary to garner respectability among the Athenian audience. The reason for this mistake is nothing other than his dullness; he is, as Unjust logos says, an old Kronos

[89] There could be a joke here that Just logos recognizes certain members of the audience to be "buggered" because he already has had illicit sexual encounters with them. Cf. *Themophoriazusae*, 35.

who is out of tune with the times. The other old Kronos in the play, Strepsiades, had made the same mistake.[90] The moment Just logos realizes which way the wind is blowing he is able to abandon his cloak, not even with regret but with manifest enthusiasm.[91]

The faulty defense of tradition should not be mistaken for tradition itself. For the rhetorician's use of tradition as a means to advance his own purposes is worlds apart from the tradition itself. Just logos' appeal to the morality that made the Marathon warriors, however insincere it might be, is nevertheless significant for pointing to the virtues that are indispensable

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[90] Strepsiades says to Pheidippides at the beginning of the play that "It's said that they have two speeches, / the stronger, whatever it may be, and the weaker. / One of these speeches, the weaker, / wins, they say, although it speaks the more unjust things" ("Clouds", 112-115).

[91] The very least this argument proves is that there was some ambiguity as to whether the old or new education was the favored view among the Athenian demos. Dover's point that Aristophanes was restrained by self-interest not to go blatantly against "the sentiments and attitudes which were widespread at the time" begs the question as to which sentiments and attitudes he means in a period of turbulent change and profound disagreement (Kenneth Dover, *Clouds, Acharnians, Lysistrata*, viii). It seems likely that, given the question was not settled between the new and old educations, Aristophanes had great artistic leeway. An historical analogy - to make the point clearer – can be found in the time of Elizabeth I of England (1558-1603) when there was no settled opinion about the state of religion. Since arguments raged between the Anglicans, separatists and Catholics, considerable latitude of artistic and philosophical expression was permitted to writers like Shakespeare that would not have been possible in an age where a single orthodoxy was firmly established.

for political life: moderation and justice. It is also significant for showing the extent to which these virtues depend on belief in the gods, for Zeus is the guardian of justice. What the defeat and defection of the Just logos really prove is the corruption of present-day Athens where it is no longer necessary even to cover an argument with an aura of respectability. A generational change has evidently taken place from the time of Strepsiades' childhood when piety and the strict upbringing have been eroded.[92] Aristophanes' attack on the degeneration of Athenian democratic life is consistent with *Knights*, where Demos' miraculous rebirth reflects by its very impossibility the poor state of the city's political arena where orators counseling short-term gain always trump those with the city's true interest.[93]

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[92] Ehrenberg offers considerable insight into the generational gap that opened as a result of the rise of the sophists. The sophists, he says, were "largely responsible for a widening of the gap between the generations. This divergence reached its critical stage during the war, as is reflected in Aristophanes' *Clouds* and *Wasps*. The older generation had suffered severe losses through war and pestilence, and the ruling class was giving way to the influx of men of comparatively little education and still less tradition and experience. The ways of life and the beliefs of the older people had to a large extent been wrecked by developments which put new demands on, and opened new possibilities for, each single citizen" (Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*, 271.

[93] See "Knights", trans. Robert C. Bartlett in *Against Demagogues: What Aristophanes Can Teach Us about the Perils of Populism and the Fate of Democracy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 1320-1390. Thucydides, writing about the general political degeneration affecting Greece as a result of the Peloponnesian war, offers a wider perspective on the issue. See particularly, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed.

It is significant, however, that Aristophanes does not make Socrates directly complicit in the victory of Unjust logos in the play. Although he acts as a kind of venue manager, he does not take part in the debate and is probably offstage.[94] Neither is he easy to identify with the Unjust logos, although they share some significant points in common: both are cunning dialecticians; both look to nature. On the other hand, Socrates' ascetic life has more in common with the moderate practices extolled by Just logos than with life of erotic excess. He possesses a superhuman ability to endure harshness for the sake of his philosophical pursuits, and he lacks any interest in pursuing lovers.[95] The philosopher is strangely unerotic, at least as far as sexual desire is concerned. His eros is directed exclusively to the contemplation of the eternal beings.

The fact that the debate demonstrated that the public forum is already biased in favor of the Unjust logos, as we saw, also has important implications for our understanding of Socrates. Just as Socrates is not responsible for Strepsiades' original decision to enter the Thinkery, so he is

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Robert B. Strassler (London and New York: Free Press, 1996) 3.82-83. Cf. Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1967) 221. It is notable in this connection that Strepsiades blames the war for some of his troubles at the beginning of the play: "Perish, the, O war, because among many other things, now I can't even punish my servants!" (6-7).

[94] The manuscript does not contain any stage directions. The editors of the Cornell Paperback edition have Socrates offstage.

[95] Socrates' statement in *Symposium* 177D that "I claim to have expert knowledge of nothing but erotics" is worthy of note here.

not responsible for the victory of Unjust logos.[96] It is the Clouds' idea, not Socrates,' that Strepsiades send his son to the Thinkery. Furthermore, Socrates' isolation in the Thinkery distances him from the city's affairs.[97] If Aristophanes' comedy is an attack on Socrates, the attack does not make Socrates directly responsible for the corruption of the city, but only for the corruption of a single man. Socraticism – whatever precisely it may be – is a symptom and not the cause of a greater problem.[98]

The Radicalization of Strepsiades

Where the debate between the Just and Unjust logoi exhibits the comical implosion of the defense of tradition, the final part of the play presents the comical implosion of philosophy, where the logos of the Unjust education is followed to its most shocking conclusion. Yet, at first, it appears that Strepsiades' plan to have his son educated in the Thinkery in order to cheat his

[96] Cf. Peter Euben: "Socrates himself leaves the stage, which suggests that the initial opposition between him and Strepsiades is not identical with the agon between the two kinds of education" (Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 124).

[97] James Redfield argues that "Aristophanes…places philosophy within a more general context of cultural change – from this point of view, cultural decadence (James Redfield, "Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", 56).

[98] Cf. James Redfield: "The plot of the Clouds centers on the relationship between father and son, and if it is about a social issue, it is about the failure of one generation to pass on its values to the next. Socrates appears in the context of this issue not so much as a cause but as a symptom. (James Redfield, "Philosophy and Poetry in Aristophanes' Clouds", 54).

creditors is wholly successful. Unlike the father, Pheidippides emerges from the Thinkery totally transformed, with a pale complexion and a negating and contradicting look; his days of horsemanship over (1171-1172). He proves to his father's satisfaction that he is a master of jurisprudence by demonstrating that the day in which Strepsiades' debts are due, called the "old and the new," is a misunderstanding of the lawgiver's original intention: Solon had intended two days, one (the last day of the month), where settlements could be reached, and the other (the first day of the new month) for the outstanding debts to be collected. Since one day cannot be two, Pheidippides suggests that Strepsiades is not obligated to pay the money back. Although he fails to follow the logic, Strepsiades is convinced that his son has mastered the ability to argue his way out of any lawsuit: his victory is apparently complete.

This point marks the zenith of Strepsiades' fortunes in the play. After his expulsion from the Thinkery, he had (with some encouragement from the Clouds) succeeded in restoring his paternal authority over his recalcitrant son (833-839). Now, the psychological gordian knot – Strepsiades' attachment to a son who is ruining him – is suddenly cut the moment Pheidippides proves his rhetorical aptitude. He now becomes the father's savior – his veritable Ring of Gyges, rendering the old man immune (as he thinks) to any criminal prosecution.[99] The old man is so elated that he sings a song praising himself for having a blessed and wise nature, with a son whom all his friends will envy. He even treats his son to a sumptuous feast, no doubt a rare event for the

[99] Cf. Peter Euben: "Sophistry is the magic ring. It creates a verbal fog bank around human actions, rendering one immune to retribution and punishment" (Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 127). Cf Plato, *Republic*, 359a-360d for the story of Gyges the Lydian who came across a magic ring that rendered the wearer invisible.

stingy rustic who had quibbled over the length of a wick in an oil lamp at the beginning of the play (56-57).

Strepsiades' elation at Pheidippides' education is also accompanied by extreme hubris, presaging his impending ruin. The tyrannical implications of the Unjust logos are manifested by the narrowminded old man in contempt for his fellow citizens, whom he considers as "booty of us wise men" (ἡμέτερα κέρδη τῶν σοφῶν ὄντες), "stones" (λίθοι), "number" (ἀριθμός), "mere sheep" (πρόβατ᾽ ἄλλως) and "stacked-up jars" (ἀμφορῆς νενησμένοι) (1202-1203).[100] He enacts a version of Callicles' lionlike "strong man" who evinces contempt at his weak, sheeplike fellows who huddle together for protection under the laws.[101] And yet, Strepsiades' narrow mind limits the scope of his tyrannical desires to treating his creditors with incredible insolence. As he is about to dine with his son, two of these creditors turn up to give him notice. When the first man, a fellow demesman, reminds him that he had sworn by the gods to give back the twelve minae he had borrowed for one of Pheidippides' horses, Strepsiades tells him plainly that oaths mean nothing to him now that his son has learnt the "unassailable speech" (τὸν ἀκατάβλητον λόγον) (1229).[102] He goes further: he would even put down a three-obol piece just to enjoy the feeling of perjuring himself since "those in the know" find swearing by Zeus and the rest of the gods "laughable" (1239). Aristophanes ratchets up Strepsiades' hubris even further in the case of the second creditor,

[100] This final insult refers to the way the spectators would appear in the amphitheater to an actor on the stage (note 197, *Four Texts on Socrates*, 164).

[101] Plato, *Gorgias* 483e.

[102] His increased confidence is reflected in the term he uses for what he had called before the "weaker" speech.

a “miserable, unhappy man,” limping along after having been thrown out of a chariot. Whereas the first fellow merely demanded his money back, the second creditor evokes our pity. When Strepsiades indicates that he should not pay the money back because the creditor is ignorant of the operation of the rains, the creditor offers to let Strepsiades just pay the interest on the loan (1285). The offer is refused on the basis of the spurious pretext that a fixed quantity like the sea cannot be increased, and Strepsiades hounds the invalid off the stage with an animal prod. These two episodes represent the maximum level of hubris the old man given his limited imagination. The Clouds predict impending ruin (1303-1322).

Sure enough, Strepsiades’ good fortunes prove to be only momentary as the apparent reconciliation between father and son is shattered by a violent dispute over the poets. Although Strepsiades had embraced the new education as far as it served his purposes, he reveals in this episode his much profounder kinship with the old. His patchy understanding that Vortex has replaced Zeus—in other words, that one god has simply replaced another god-- has not affected his preference for Simonides and Aeschylus, poets who recall the Athens of his youth. By contrast, Pheidippides’ tastes are entirely in keeping with his new education. He prefers Euripides, a newfangled and wiser poet who depicts visions of unrestrained eros, alluded to by the Unjust logos, by speaking of incest between brother and sister (1377). When the father, revolted by such themes, refuses to admit the superiority of Euripides, he is subjected to a thorough beating by the son. Of course, his hypocritical appeals to “neighbors,” “kinsmen,” and “demesmen” to bear witness to this ill treatment – the very people he had moments before treated with spectacular insolence – fall on deaf ears.

And yet the beating is only a sip of the bitter draught of punishment he must drink for his wickedness so bitter, indeed, that he wishes that he had taken out an even bigger loan on a four-

horse team (1406-1407). Pheidippides humiliates the old man further not only by beating him, but also by forcing him to admit that the beating is justified. The son is so confident of his rhetorical ability that he boasts of being able to justify the action by either of the two speeches, the stronger or the weaker (1337). The Clouds encourage him to "seek some way of persuasion so that you will seem to speak just things" (πειθώ τινα ζητεῖν, ὅπως δόξεις λέγειν δίκαια.) (1398). If Strepsiades beat him as a boy because he was "well-intentioned and concerned," then it is just for Pheidippides to beat his father when he surpasses him in wisdom, since "old men are children twice" (δὶς παῖδες οἱ γέροντες) (1409 and 1417). Nothing can extricate Strepsiades from this devastating argument, which establishes the right to rule on the basis of wisdom alone. His pathetic appeals to his paternal care in raising the son as a baby, bringing the child bread when he cried out for mamma, are ignored. His appeal to the law against father-beating is met with an ingenious rebuttal: the lawgiver was, after all, a mere human being, like Pheidippides. Nothing rules out the possibility that Pheidippides could persuade the city to make father-beating a law (1423-1424). Moreover, father-beating is more in accordance with nature since chickens and other beasts regularly wage war with their parents, and "how do they differ from us, except that they do not write decrees?" (καίτοι τί διαφέρουσιν / ἡμῶν ἐκεῖνοι, πλήν γ᾽ ὅτι ψηφίσματ᾽ οὐ γράφουσιν;) (1427-1429). Strepsiades reluctantly concedes that this argument is reasonable. He is forced into obeying the same logic that he had exploited first in forcing Pheidippides to go to school and then in fobbing off the creditors.

But Pheidippides goes one step further again: not only can he make the case for father-beating by means of the Just logos, but he can also make the case for mother-beating by means of the Unjust. He had proven the former by appealing to an argument that would be palatable to a traditional understanding of justice: if fathers could claim to beat their sons because they are wiser and benevolent, then wiser and benevolent sons may beat foolish fathers. And yet the Unjust logos

makes no appeal to justice since justice is non-existent; instead, it appeals to nature which counsels the unrestrained pursuit of the passions. For this reason, the Unjust logos had emphasized particularly adultery and unlawful sexual pleasure: the "wisest" of the poets and expositor of the Unjust logos, Euripides, had spoken, evidently approvingly, of incest between brother and sister. If nature sanctions the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure with no fear of punishment, divine or even human, why should it exclude mother, sister or daughter, whether they are willing or not? In any case, Strepsiades, who had been willing to be persuaded even that his own beating was justified, is so outraged by the mere mention of mother-beating that he refuses to let Pheidippides speak another word. "If you do this," he says, "then nothing / will prevent you from throwing yourself / into the Pit / along with Socrates / and the weaker speech!" (1446-1450). Just as the corpses of executed criminals are thrown outside the walls of Athens, so Strepsiades indicates that Pheidippides has passed so far beyond the boundaries of morality that he might not only cease being his son, not only cease being a citizen, but even cease being a human being.[103] He experiences viscerally the utmost implication of the unjust teaching and is transformed into a zealous defender of the Athenian gods.

Nevertheless, Strepsiades' new-found piety occurs on the basis of the love of his own – his family – and not on account of the gods themselves. The catalyst for his radical transformation consists not in some revelation that proves the gods' existence, but rather in the instinctive

[103] "But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a city" Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a 25.

realization that the gods are absolutely necessary for his family to exist.[104] For, if mother-beating could be justified by the Unjust logos, that is, by the argument that adultery and sexual transgression are permitted by nature, then Strepsiades would have no solid basis for knowing that those dearest to him, his children, are indeed his own.[105] Although adultery is also a threat to the family, incest is far more egregious because it takes place within the privacy of the household, with none of the usual barriers that stand in the way of rival lovers.[106] Since only a deep, firmly held belief in the gods is capable of maintaining such a prohibition, it becomes of the utmost importance to punish anyone who denies their existence. For this reason, Strepsiades calls on his son to help him destroy Socrates in the name of "ancestral Zeus" (Δία πατρῷον) (1468), the manifestation of Zeus particularly concerned with the family.[107] We recall that it was the very love

[104] Strauss observes that "Granted that the family is more natural than the city, yet the family cannot be secure and flourish except by becoming a part of the city. The prohibition against incest compels the family to transcend itself, and as it were, to expand into the city (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 123).

[105] Cf. Khalil M. Habib, "The Meaning of Socrates' Asceticism in Aristophanes' Clouds", 32.

[106] This understanding of the importance of the gods for imposing the prohibition against incest is strangely consistent with the view of Freud in his studies of primitive religions. See especially the "The Horror of Incest" in *Totem and Taboo*: *Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1950) 1-20.

[107] It may seem absurd to say that the gods are the ultimate custodians of the family because they uphold the prohibition against incest. After all, it is perfectly obvious that a family can exist

of his family that prompted him to commit the first injustice. By conceiving the plan to cheat his creditors instead of being ruined, he put the good of himself and his family before that of his fellow citizens. As a result, his dramatic return to piety does not accompany a restoration of justice. He is the same man in a new cloak.

The corollary to affirming the existence of the gods is to punish those who deny their existence. Strepsiades therefore immediately raises the question of who should be blamed for this monstrous blasphemy. There are only three suspects: Strepsiades himself, the Clouds, or Socrates.[108] His immediate instinct is to blame the Clouds since he had placed his affairs in their hands (1452). It had been the Clouds who had promised him untold happiness if he associated with them urged him to send his son to the Thinkery. However, they fire back that Strepsiades himself is "responsible for these things by yourself, / because you twisted yourself into villainous affairs (αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν σαυτῷ σὺ τούτων αἴτιος, /στρέψας σεαυτὸν ἐς πονηρὰ πράγματα) (1455).[109] They then make a stunning excuse:

> We do this on each occasion to whomever
>
> We recognize as being a lover of villainous affairs,

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without belief in god or gods. We must keep in mind that Aristophanes only gives us two explicit options in the play and that we must follow the logic of these options: either justice is "with the gods" or it does not exist.

[108] Although Pheidippides' love of Euripides is the catalyst for the meltdown at the end of the play he is innocent of having wished to associated with Socrates in the first place.

[109] The point is more forceful in Greek because Strepsiades' name is related to the verb "to twist".

Until we throw him into evil

So that he may know dread of the gods (1458-1461).

Their answer shows that Strepsiades is not the only one who has undergone a transformation. The Clouds, too, who had apparently been (at the very least) complicit in Socrates' education now present themselves as the champions of morality. They had known all along that matters would come to such a turn, they now claim, and had only pretended to offer him everything he had asked for in order to teach him a lesson. They had seemed to be the new deities to replace Zeus and the traditional Greek pantheon; they now appear as their protectors and enforcers. In making these claims they satisfy the longing in Strepsiades' soul by appearing to him as punishers of those who offend against the gods. Although he remarks that such a deed is "villainous," he nevertheless is persuaded that his punishment is "just" (δίκαια) (1462).[110]

Yet, just because Strepsiades agrees with the Clouds' explanation does not prove that they are speaking truthfully. They had, after all, claimed to be the patron deities of rhetoric which includes the rhetorical technique of justifying any argument according to the traditional understanding of justice. Neither do they directly intervene to punish Socrates, who, if their assertion that they punish wrong-doers is correct, should have been punished long ago. The enraged old man finally conceives the idea of burning down the Thinkery, not by consulting with the Clouds, but appealing to Hermes (or something he thinks is Hermes). Finally, Pheidippides, whom Strepsiades exhorts to join him in burning down the Thinkery, flatly refuses on the basis

[110] Dover thinks that the Clouds are sincere in their assertion that they had meant to punish Socrates all along (Dover, *Clouds, Acharnians, Lysistrata*, lxx). Cf. A. W. H. Adkins, "Clouds, Socrates, Mysteries and Plato", 15.

that "I wouldn't do injustice to my teachers" (ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἂν ἀδικήσαιμι τοὺς διδασκάλους.) (1467). If there is really an underlying asymmetry concerning who commits the crime and who gets punished, then we must examine the Clouds' defense of themselves with a critical eye.

The Clouds' Apology

What then is the relationship between the Clouds and the gods of the city? Earlier, in the episode of Strepsiades' initiation into the Socratic mysteries, the Clouds appeared as new deities who did not seek to be a part of the traditional pantheon of gods, but rather to replace the entire divine dynasty.[111] They are thus not merely one deity among many but an entire divine order in themselves. They could claim to be so comprehensive because they contained within themselves a representation of the two strands of the sophistic teaching that can take into account all phenomena in the universe: natural philosophy and rhetoric; nature and convention. They are born from Oceanos, a cosmic deity, and are compelled along by Ethereal Vortex (380). In less metaphorical language, they are composed of the elements and driven along by necessity. In so far as they represent rhetoric, they are able either to disclose or to conceal the nature of things by imitating their true essence, just as they can imitate a coward by taking the shape of a deer. On the other hand, they are the patron deities of sophists, idlers, frauds, chorus writers; in fact, all intellectual types including poets and philosophers, Socrates and Aristophanes.[112]

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[111] Dionysus, in Euripides' *Bacchus*, for example, only seeks to be recognized as a god. This recognition does not imply that the other gods should not be worshiped.

[112] Peter Euben interprets the meaning of the Clouds somewhat differently with different implications: the play "seems to display each character projecting himself onto the clouds

However, while philosophers and poets share the same source for their wisdom, their wisdom differs in substance and authority about the gods. Aristophanes appears in the parabasis as a cloud and speaks to the audience directly. Accordingly, he appears as a woman and associates poets with women by relating a story in which he gave birth to two "illegitimate children" (his first two plays) when he was supposed to be a virgin (529-530). However, he makes this self-debasing joke while speaking as the leading cloud.[113] Since Socrates is a worshipper of clouds, Aristophanes suggests that poets are higher than philosophers.

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according to his own half-sublimated desires and half-acknowledged ambitions, as if to warn interpreters that they are in danger of doing the same thing to the *Clouds*. For both characters and philosophical readers, the clouds are ciphers; goddesses for atheists, nature for conventionalists, and foundations for antifoundationalists. Both the clouds and the poets use their powers of mimetic illusion to engage and mirror men's fantasies and follies." (Peter Euben, *The Poet's Voice*, 113-114). If Euben is right, then the Clouds' change of sides is only the result of a different "projection". I am not convinced this view is very helpful in understanding the relationship between rhetoric and natural philosophy the Clouds' representation seems to encompass.

[113] The anecdote of the illegitimate children suggests that, unlike Socrates, Aristophanes has something more in common with Unjust logos' appeal to erotic liberation. In addition, we are reminded that the Clouds turned into women because they first saw and imitated the nature of the notorious homosexual Cleisthenes. If we picture Aristophanes on stage decked out as a woman, it is not difficult to categorize him too among the "buggered". This makes the clouds' Claim to be champions of morality at the end of the play all the more hypocritical.

Aristophanes the cloud is also similar to the gods in respect to his audience: both desire worshippers. Aristophanes chides his audience for their ingratitude and lack of judgment for not giving him first prize for his comedy, despite its being his "wisest" (522). As a poet, Aristophanes must compete with the others poets by talking up the virtues of his own creation and denigrating those of his rivals. Thus, his *Clouds* should be preeminent for its wisdom, its modesty and its novel sophistication, while other poets, such as Eupolis, are mere hacks (553). Poets are preeminent as clouds, but, within their own order, they are in competition with each other.

Aristophanes' relation to his rival poets mirrors precisely the Clouds' relation to the other gods. In the epirrhema that directly succeeds the parabasis in which Aristophanes complains about the poor reception of his play, the chorus of clouds chides the spectators for their injustice and ingratitude: "For although we of all gods benefit the city most, / to us alone of daemons you do not sacrifice or pour libations – we who watch over you" (576-579). Just as Aristophanes reminds the spectators of the outstanding qualities of his play, the Clouds point out the various benefits they have bestowed on the ungrateful Athenians, warning them against foolish military expeditions and the bad choices of generals by thundering and drizzling portentously (579-581). The gods compete for worshippers just as the poets compete for spectators.[114] As new deities without an established clientele of worshippers, the Clouds' need for worshippers is all the more intense.

This also helps us make sense of Socrates' peculiar relationship with the Clouds. The Clouds single out Socrates as their special devotee because he endures many evils on their behalf (362-363). So devoted is Socrates that he might even be called a fanatic: his primary concern in his dealings with other human beings is convincing them that the Clouds "alone are goddesses;

[114] Cf. James Redfield, "Philosophy and Poetry in Aristophanes' *Clouds*," 57.

everything else is drivel" (365). He promises to educate Strepsiades on condition that he cease believing in Zeus and believe in the Clouds instead. The Clouds themselves remain wholly silent on this issue: not once in the play do they ever dare to deny the existence of the other gods. Indeed, when addressing the audience, they refer to the regular Greek deities as if they were their companion entities.[115] When, for example, they encourage Strepsiades to enroll his son into the Thinkery, they promise that he will receive "very many good things because of us alone of the gods" (πλεῖστα δι᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀγάθ᾽ αὐτίχ᾽ ἕξων / μόνας θεῶν); they claim to be the most useful benefactors for human beings without going so far as to deny the existence of the other gods directly (805-806). At the same time, however, it is difficult to avoid the implication that they have something to gain by replacing Zeus and that they eagerly reap the benefits of Socrates' imprudence. They promise to help Strepsiades immediately after Socrates extracts from Strepsiades his promise to believe only in them (426-527). Further, Socrates had proven to Strepsiades before that the Clouds, and not Zeus, are responsible for rain and lightning. Not only do the gods compete, but they perform overlapping functions so that the acquisition of worshippers is a zero-sum game.[116]

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[115] Aristophanes himself, for example, was nurtured by Dionysus, god of the theater (519). See also 563-574.

[116] Plato takes up this thread in Aristophanes' account of the gods in *Symposium*. Human beings were originally circular, resembling cosmic deities. Their hubris placed the gods in a dilemma because "the gods knew neither how they could kill them and (just as they had struck the giants with lightning), obliterate the race – for, in that case, their own honors and sacrifices from human beings would vanish – nor how they could allow them to continue to behave licentiously"

The Clouds' cagey prudence is vindicated by the resolution of the play. Their denial of the responsibility of leading Strepsiades into blasphemy and their claim to punish disbelievers are at once hypocritical and, strictly speaking, true. They prove themselves the master rhetoricians they claimed to be by switching sides and styling themselves the champions of morality, dodging the blame for their complicity in the affair. As a result, it is Socrates alone who receives the full brunt of Strepsiades' fury. Although Strepsiades was himself responsible for wanting to cheat his creditors, it was Socrates who tried to convince him that the gods did not exist. No amount of clever speaking can extricate the philosopher from this most criminal blasphemy. Where the battle between the logoi seemed to prove that dialectical reason can beat the awe inspired by epideictic display, Aristophanes impresses upon us the full power of awe. In his zeal to punish the blasphemers, Strepsiades renders himself immune to reason, brushing aside the objections of his son that Zeus has been thrown out by Vortex. The play concludes by showing that the gods are maintained not by reason, but by unthinking awe before gods and the law and that the latter is far more powerful than the former, once it is aroused.

And yet the restoration of tradition does not place it on any better footing than it was at the beginning of the play. The motive of Strepsiades' crime was not intellectual curiosity, but the desire to escape from his debts that had come about as the result of an impossible family situation. The irony of Strepsiades' discovery that the gods are absolutely necessary to maintain the integrity

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(*Symposium*, 190A, b-c). Zeus hits upon the solution of splitting them in two, at once punishing and weakening the human race by making them more reliant on the Olympians, and doubling the number of worshippers at the same time. The gods are not self-sufficient, but radically dependent on human beings.

of the family is that it was his family situation in the first place that caused him to commit the crime. The psychological conundrum of Strepsiades both loving and hating his son at the same time is never resolved.[117] And so human beings appear to be trapped in an endless cycle of injustice that neither philosophy nor tradition are capable of breaking, with the central contradiction lying in the heart of the family itself.[118] And yet, as problematic as tradition might be according to Aristophanes, it is still better than the corrupting influence of the Socratic education which risks dissolving the family completely because of its too-public atheism. From this very limited standard, Aristophanes is indeed a sincere but not uncritical advocate of the Just logos.

The most positive assertion in the play, however, comes not from the superiority of the Just to the Unjust logos, but the superiority of Aristophanes' own comic practice to the philosophizing of Socrates – although not for reasons we might have expected. Socrates turns out to be inferior, not so much because he is proven wrong, but because he has no prudence and no political acumen. His mystery religion that replaces Zeus with the Clouds violates the first principle of a mystery religion: there must be a distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated. Instead, Socrates and his students let the cat out of the bag without taking sufficient precautions to ensure that men such as Strepsiades are capable of learning. His isolation from the city, his unconcern with its affairs, and his zeal to disseminate the truth about divine matters render him vulnerable to a country

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[117] In fact, this ambivalence towards his son may also be extended towards his wife who, we can safely infer, has not been conducive to a happy domestic situation.

[118] This problem is taken up in *Assemblywomen* where Praxagoras' new regime imposes communizes erotic relations between men and women. See *Assembly of Women*, trans. Robert Mayhew (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997).

bumpkin with the rudest intelligence. That Socrates was, in fact, charged and then executed for "corrupting the youth of Athens" and "disbelieving in the city's gods" proves that Aristophanes' point has substance.[119]

[119] James Redfield also concludes that "The *Clouds*, in fact, reveals to us that the charge ridiculed by Socrates in the *Apology* is not so ridiculous as it is there made to appear" ("Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*", 58).

Chapter 2: *Women at the Thesmophoria*

In *Clouds* we saw that the foundation of the Socratic teaching lay in the distinction between nature and convention which is at the heart of the study of natural philosophy and rhetoric. This radical teaching was premised on the notion that Zeus, the great punisher of perjurers, does not exist and that instead "vortex" or chaos, rules. As a result, the notion that law is sanctioned by the gods is exposed as being without foundation. Instead, law belongs to the realm of human convention which can be changed by cunning and persuasive rhetoricians. However, there is a further corollary: if the gods do not exist and there is no justice (except in the element of human opinion), there is no reason to dedicate oneself to the common good of the city as the brave Marathon fighters had done, but there is reason to pursue one's private good. Unjust logos had specified this private good to be the immoderate pursuit of the most intense and most numerous pleasures, hence primarily sexual pleasure. As a result, it stressed particularly the desirability of adultery, of sexual gratification outside the bonds of law and convention (*Clouds*, 1071-1082). Nevertheless, if the pursuit of physical pleasure is justified by the passions that nature has instilled in every human being, there still remains the fear of human punishment. Even if one can dispense with Zeus, there will still be human beings willing to inflict punishment on wrongdoers on his behalf. Unjust logos had dispensed with this final objection by arguing that jurors can always be persuaded by cunning rhetoric. The distinction between nature and convention, then, resulted in a radical doctrine that promoted the pursuit of one's private good, on the grounds that that is naturally good, at the expense of the city's good, on the grounds that that is good merely by convention, i.e., not good at all.

Socrates himself, however, had pursued his particular private good in a highly unusual way by dedicating himself absolutely to philosophy. So extreme and uncompromising was this dedication that he eschewed the kinds of physical pleasures advocated by Unjust logos in a manner that made him strangely resemble the moderation espoused by Just logos. Yet, such resemblance should not be misinterpreted to mean that Socrates practiced such moderation for the sake of justice. Where the Just Logos had lionized moderation as the foundation for an education that makes boys into Marathon fighters ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Athens, Socrates had exercised moderation as a means to pursue philosophy. Philosophy demands such stringent devotion to the activities of the mind that Socrates attends only to the most minimal of bodily requirements: to eat. Any attention to the less necessary but more intense physical pleasures would have compromised such an enterprise. Socrates is not just for the sake of justice, but because he is simply too interested in contemplation to concern himself much with the affairs of the city. When it is necessary to steal a cloak (or two) in order put dinner on the table he does so without qualms.

Although Socrates differs from the Unjust Logos in pursuing philosophy over physical pleasure, they agree in pursuing the private over the public good. The natural philosophical teaching that Ethereal Vortex rather than Zeus "governs" the universe debunks any argument in favor of subordinating private good for the sake of the city. Aristophanes depicts the essentially private nature of philosophy through his brilliant comic device of the Thinkery, that institute of eccentricity where pale, barefooted acolytes measure the distance a flea can jump, what is below the earth and high above in the heavens. This philosophical school exists in a bubble, wholly separate from the political life of Athens and seemingly immune to its concerns.[120] However, the

[120] The isolation of the Thinktank is even more incredible considering the war with Sparta.

conclusion of *Clouds* demonstrates that this isolation, while necessary for philosophy, is also a great liability. Socrates' lack of concern for the affairs of the city makes him vulnerable to attack. He is destroyed by an old rustic, who has only the most rudimentary understanding of the philosophical teaching. The philosopher's rhetoric is useless against an enemy who refuses to listen, and he has no allies to call upon who can render him material assistance.[121] Socrates' way of life thus proves to be a failure by the standards of both Just and Unjust logos. By the standard of Just logos, philosophy erodes the authority of the law and the virtues necessary to support the common good of the city. By the standard of Unjust logos, Socrates fails because he cannot protect even his own private interests.

If one could imagine a Socrates who, instead of isolating himself, had more prudently turned his attention to the city, while maintaining his keen interest in the truth according to nature, one would have someone like Euripides. Euripides harmonizes the fundamental features of the Socratic teaching with the qualities of a great tragic poet who as such knows how to manipulate his audience. He shares with Socrates the understanding that "Vortex" rather than Zeus controls the universe; that justice and law are conventional; that the private good takes precedence over the common. Yet as a poet he is thoroughly acquainted with the affairs of the city and has powerful means of persuasion at his disposal. In Euripides, we see a fusion of the philosopher and poet that combines the strengths of both, uniting intelligence with the ability to persuade a large audience. In contrast to Socrates, Aristophanes presents Euripides as a crafty fellow who can protect himself against attack. Socrates was taken unawares by Strepsiades, but Euripides discovers the intention

[121] Socrates' student Chaerephon appears to be useless. Pheidippides will not commit injustice against his master, but neither can he help him much.

of the Thesmophorian women before the action of the play has even begun. Socrates manages to convert one promising young man to the theoretical life, but Euripides, according to the second female orator at the Thesmophoria, "has persuaded the men that gods do not exist, that is, about half the city of Athens" (450-451).[122] How does Euripides, this great tragic poet imbued with Socratic wisdom, achieve such impressive feats, and what do those feats mean for our understanding of Aristophanes' critique of philosophy more generally? The first step is to look more closely at what it means for Euripides to be a "Socratic" poet.

In *Clouds* the catalyst for the rupture between father and son was an argument about the superiority of Euripides to Aeschylus. Pheidippides had praised Euripides as being "the wisest" of the poets and had enforced his view by beating Strepsiades as a means of "educating him" (*Clouds*, 1321-1333). The act is a brilliant fusion of the literal (Pheidippides is strong and robust and capable of physically overcoming his father) and the figurative, where father-beating represents an attack on traditional morality itself. And yet Euripides goes further even than Unjust logos. Whereas the latter had made a case for unleashing eros by demolishing moderation in favor of various pleasures: "boys, women, cottabus, relishes, drinking, boisterous laughter" (1073), Euripides goes to the heart of the matterby speaking of incest between brother and sister (1372). Euripides' specialty as a poet is depicting the unlawful, erotic nature of human beings underneath the cloak of morality. His wisdom consists in part in depicting the utmost implications of the Unjust logos poetically; his specialty is eros.

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[122] This study will use Thomas L. Pangle's unpublished translation of *Women at the Thesmophoria*. When necessary, it will provide the original Greek from *Aristophanes Comediae*, ed. F.W. Hall and W.M. Geldart, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

However, the brief mention of Euripides in *Clouds* as the poetic spokesman for Unjust logos does not allow us to form any clear picture of the way in which his tragedies have angered the women in *Women at the Thesmophoria*. What then is the link? At the beginning of his debate with Aeschylus in *Frogs*, Euripides boasts that he has pioneered the art of writing poetry that makes his audience clever and cunning. His great poetic innovation has been to insert "intelligence" (νοεῖν) into poetry:

EU: - By applying subtle rulers and squaring off insertions of words,

To use intelligence [νοεῖν], to see, to understand, to twist and turn, to be erotically

In love [ἐρᾶν], To be artful, and to be suspicious, to think of all of everything.

AES. To that I agree!

EU: In such ways I introduced thinking (φρονεῖν…εἰσηγησάμην)

Among these [indicating the audience],

Putting calculation in the art

And inquiry, with the result that now they think

About everything and thoroughly understand,

And among other things, also their houses

They administer better than before,

And they inquire: "How is this going?

Where's this that belongs to me? Who took this?" (956-968)

Euripides' poetry reflects his characteristic intelligence and his adherence to Unjust logos by teaching his audience how to look after their own affairs. Unlike Aeschylus, who (says Euripides) uses bombast to exhort his audience to feats of military virtue for the sake of the city, Euripidean poetry offers the best advice on how to pursue one's private good.[123] It suggests that the substance of life lies in the domain of the private since claims to pursue the public good are merely specious covers for private interest. And yet this new attention directed at the private sphere – at the household – puts Euripides on a collision course with the women, the traditional custodians of the private sphere. The women did particularly well in the old regime of selfless dedication to the common good. For citizen-warriors concerned above all else with politics – with warfare and defense of the city – were much less attentive to the management of their own affairs. It is no coincidence that in Sparta, where dedication to the common good was even more extreme than Athens even in the days of Marathon, the women had a particularly bad reputation.[124]

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[123] Cf. Arlene Saxonhouse: "The citizen of the state is also a member of the family, but the demands of the community for public life destroy the family happiness by focusing the male citizen's attention on that which is public rather than on the family unit from which he emerges. The difficulty is the central one of political life: the relation between the universal public and the particular private, between that which is common and demands one's active participation and that which is one's own ("Men, Women, War, and Politics: Family and Polis in Aristophanes and Euripides" in *Political Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1980, 66).

[124] Aristotle observes that "the licence of the Lacedaemonian women defeats the intention of the Spartan constitution, and is adverse to the happiness of the state…the legislator wanted to make

It is not a fantastic leap of logic to deduce that Euripides' domestic advice on how to manage pilfering slaves in *Frogs* might apply equally to the women of the household. The conceit of *Women at the Thesmophoria* is that the women of Athens are furious with Euripides for writing scurrilous things about them in his tragedies, with the result that their husbands have become suspicious of their activities and curtailed their liberties inside the household. According to the first female speaker in the Thesmophoria, Euripides has "spattered" the women of Athens with "mud" by calling them "adulterer-bangers in our ways, erotic lovers of men, / Wine tipplers, traitoresses [and] chatterers", with the result that as soon as the men come home from the theatre benches, they search high and low for hidden adulterers (392-397). Whereas before the women had lived in comparative liberty, they are now suspected of the slightest irregularity and have no means of carrying out their usual tricks of passing off another's child as their own, or marrying an old bridegroom in order to take control of his wealth (407-413). It might be tempting to imagine that Euripides leveled such charges against the women because he was a misogynist, or on the grounds that the women were corrupting the morality of the city, but there is no indication of these possibilities in the play.[125] Although he exposes the immorality of the women, he does not do so

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the whole state hardy and temperate, and he has carried his intention in the case of the men, but he has neglected the women, who live in every sort of intemperance and luxury" (*Politics*, 1269b).

[125] Cf. Henderson's useful point that "Euripides' reputation as a misogynist was evidently based not only on the predilection of so many of his female characters for misconduct but also on their unprecedented intensity and vividness. These characters were of course already present in the traditional myths, and other tragic poets had also dramatized them. But Euripides was distinct in having frequently embellished the myths, making wicked characters (male and female) even

on moral grounds; indeed, Euripides himself is subject to the criticism that his poetry encourages immorality (451). Rather, Euripides' tragedies present the women unfavorably because he has sought to teach the men (among other things) how to avoid being cheated both by their slaves and their women. The slaves are in no position to complain, but the women are.

Yet if Euripides is a spokesman for the Unjust Logos, which counsels the disregard of the good of the city for one's private interests, why should he be concerned with writing tragedies that counsel the good, if only the private good, of his fellow citizens? The reason is not so difficult to deduce. As we saw in *Clouds*, poets are very competitive creatures, vying with each other for the acclaim of their audience in order to win poetry competitions. The superiority of the poets over philosophers like Socrates derives from the ability of poets to manipulate their audience by manipulating the passions. Euripides is no exception. However, he has discovered a novel formula that has resulted in extraordinary success. By convincing his audience to become more attentive to their private interests he has pursued his own interest even further. In revealing the sneakiness of wives and lovers to the Athenians, he has won acclaim as one of the foremost tragedians of Athens who is philanthropic—a friend to men. Indeed, the universal wrath of the wives of Athens is testimony to how effective Euripides has been in convincing their husbands. In this sense, the success that Euripides has enjoyed provides the catalyst for the crisis of the play. So persuasive has Euripides been in teaching Athenian men to keep their wives in check that the women have decided to destroy him.

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worse; inviting the audience to empathize with them; and making their speech and behavior seem closer to every day experience than was customary in tragedy" (*Aristophanes: Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria*, 448-449).

Women at the Thesmophoria challenges Euripides on his chosen ground, that of the Unjust logos. He boasts that his poetry makes his audience savvy to their private good. Now Aristophanes tests the strength of Euripides' boast by placing him in the most precarious situation with the highest stakes that one could conceive of in a comedy. He must escape his own destruction from a tribunal composed of half the city, the women. A sacred prohibition forbidding any man from entering the secret rites of the Thesmophoria prevents Euripides from speaking there openly in his own defense. What resources are at the tragic poet's disposal when all he can rely on is his means of persuasion? The answer to this question will shed light on the superiority of poetry to philosophy, as Aristophanes sees it.

Agathon, Beauty Queen

The play opens as Euripides puts into action his cunning scheme to convince the tragic poet Agathon to infiltrate the Thesmophoria on his behalf and persuade the female assembly to let him off the hook. Unlike Strepsiades, who tosses and turns in his bed tormented by the conundrum of his son's debts, we never see Euripides at a loss; his plan has already been put into motion before the comedy begins.[126] His atheism, and hence his lack of concern for divine punishment, frees him from any scruples that such a crime, which involves violating a religious festival, will be punished from on high. On the other hand, his scheme does not dispose of the problem that he must expose whoever agrees to speak on his behalf to formidable human punishment should he be discovered.

[126] Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 214.

The first challenge Euripides must therefore overcome is to find someone willing or naïve enough to expose himself to the danger immediately threatening himself.

On paper, so to speak, the tragic poet Agathon is the obvious candidate for such a plan. Being still young and recently arrived on the tragic stage he is not yet well-known, and he is so effeminate that he requires almost no alteration to enter the Thesmophoria incognito. Watching him perform impromptu, the Kinsman can hardly believe that he is actually a man (97-98). "How sweet the song," he remarks in wonder, invoking "Lady Genetyllides" (goddesses of female eroticism), "how feminine and redolent of tongue-kissing" (130-131). He wonders at how this androgynous human being manages to unite such incongruous items as "a long stringed lyre" with a "*krokōtos*," or gym equipment with a bra, and he appears on stage with neither the customary leather phallus nor "titties" (137-143).[127] Agathon appears to the Kinsman as a kind of sexual enigma: some signals indicate that he a man; some as a woman. Agathon's ability to imitate women is so fine that he is capable of imitating not just one woman, but a whole tragic chorus of women, playing in turn the chorus leader and the chorus as they praise the gods in a religious festival similar to that of Thesmophoria (101). He seems to be the perfect candidate for Euripides' scheme.

Agathon's androgyny contrasts markedly with Euripides' inflexible masculinity. The difference in their sexual appearance reflects the difference in the principles that they represent. Whereas' Euripides concerns himself with "intelligence" by piercing the cloak of convention and uncovering the complex erotic underlay in the individual, Agathon takes "beauty" as his principle,

[127] A *krokōtos* is "A saffron robe worn by women when partying" (n. 17, *Thesmophoriazusae*).

so that his tragic poetry consists in presenting his scenes in the most beautiful light possible.[128] Aristophanes establishes the essence of Agathonian poetry in the strange encounter the Kinsman and Euripides have when arriving at the tragedian's house. Just as Strepsiades' first encounter with Socrates in his basket reflects something fundamental about Socrates' pretensions to be pure thought thinking itself in the air – a kind of god of intelligence—Agathon presents himself according to his own idiosyncratic image of a poetic divinity. A servant, acting as a kind of herald, first appears proclaiming that "people hold reverent silence…For there is a visitation / Of a worshipping troupe of the Muses in the house / Of the master composing song" (41-42). So august and holy is this solemn laying of the foundations of a new tragedy that the servant commands "windless Ether" to "hold its breath," the "sea's gray-green wave" to cease its crashing and "the race of winged ones" to "lie down to sleep" (46). Where the Clouds had appeared as replacements of the muses in *Clouds*, they appear here as the ministers (not as the masters!) of the tragic poet who appears to wield the power of Orpheus over nature. Socrates, for all his pretensions, only claimed to be able to "think around" the heavenly bodies, contemplating them in perfect

[128] Plato's depiction of Agathon in *Symposium* offers some interesting analogues. As Bloom notes, Agathon "seems to stake a tacit claim to being the most beautiful male present in a discussion about love of males…" ("The Ladder of Love", 112). Although, according to Bloom, Agathon's speech is superficial, he contributes to the discussion by turning the attention of the symposium to the relationship between eros and beauty ("The Ladder of Love", 115).

abstraction; Agathon appears to claim that he actually has power over them as a god above nature.[129]

The difference between Agathon and Euripides in the essence of their poetry extends to their depiction of women. Whereas Euripides had depicted his women at their worst, Agathon presents them in the most flattering light conceivable. Agathon's performance of an extract of his new play foreshadows exactly the opening rituals of the Thesmophoria that we see in the comedy, but with the difference that the women appear in Agathon's version as idealized versions of themselves (or, perhaps, as ideal images of what they would want to present to the city). Agathon (acting as both Choryphaeus and Priestess) opens his choral ode "receiving the lamp sacred to the two Underworld Deities," Demeter and Persephone, the two goddesses of the Thesmophoria (101-102) just as the Thesmophorian women begin the proceedings of the day by making prayers "to the twin Thesmophorians" (297). Agathon's women, however, are so pious that they are ready to worship whatever set of divinities the chorus leader happens to decide is appropriate for the occasion (105-106). Their innocent prayers contain no hint of the hypocritical self-interestedness that Aristophanes comically depicts in the "real" Thesmophoria in the next scene (295-379). Unlike Euripides and Aristophanes, Agathon's particular specialty as a tragedian consists in rendering his subjects in the most beautiful light possible. His form of tragedy covers over the blemishes that Euripides is adept at emphasizing.

Nevertheless, Agathon's poetic power to fill his audience with awe at the beauty of his subjects does not have its desired effect on the Kinsman, who seems particularly immune to

[129] In the *Symposium*, Agathon "describes Eros pretty much as himself" ("The Ladder of Love," 115).

Agathon's poetic charm. While Euripides keeps quiet, the Kinsman cannot restrain himself from heckling the servant who announces, with the reverence due a god, Agathon's making of a new tragedy. He destroys the effect of the servant's proclamation by shouting "bombast" and "bombast on top of bombast" to the servant's command that "windless Ether hold its breath" or that the "race of winged ones lie down to sleep" (43 and 47). When the servant declares that "Agathon, of the beautiful verses / Our champion is about to –" the Kinsman finishes the line with "Get fucked?" (50). And when the Servant stops, put off by these interruptions, asking who it is that is "bringing crudities under the eaves of this house?!", he responds that it is someone

> …who is ready, for you and your poet
>
> with the beautiful verses, to roll up and rub
>
> Right into the "eaves"
>
> With this pecker, and "pour out some castings." (59-63).

The Kinsman's crude sexual inuendo is able to neutralize and subvert the attempt to instill awe in the audience. He seems peculiarly able to expose the poetry of beauty as a form of boasting.

The Kinsman goes further in exposing the artificiality of Agathon's particular kind of tragedy after the tragedian finishes his little performance. Although the Kinsman is impressed with the femininity of poetry and the poet's peculiar androgyny, which makes it almost impossible to know his real sex, he nevertheless criticizes his "way of life" for his lack of manliness. After all, it is obvious that Agathon is an egregious example of what Unjust logos meant when he referred to the tragedians as belonging to the "buggered" (1091-1092). Agathon, at first, attempts to claim that his way of life is indeed manly since

I wear the clothes that suit what I'm judging

For, a real man [ἄνδρα] who is a poet must

Take on the characteristics suitable to the dramas

Which he must make.

So here: if one makes feminine dramas,

One must make one's body partake of those ways (146-150)

According to this odd line of reasoning, Agathon is a "real man" whose very manliness compels him to appear as feminine as possible! He must change himself in conformity with the demands of his subject matter, rather like an ancient version of the school of method acting characteristic of Marlon Brando or Al Pacino. What Agathon lacks by nature he can compensate for with imitation. If manliness is the subject of his poetry, he has the requisite physical characteristics; if femininity is needed, he has the power of imitation at his disposal (154-156). Between his nature and his ability to imitate, he has all bases covered. As a result, his clever defense of his manliness also contains an extravagant boast that the poet can perfectly render the nature of any subject he wishes, just like the chorus of Clouds who seamlessly take on the exact nature of the thing they want to imitate.[130] They had, after all, only appeared in Clouds as women because they caught sight of the notorious homosexual Cleisthenes (*Clouds*, 355). Agathon's formula that the poet takes on the

[130] Socrates' discussion of the imitative art of the poets in Book X of *Republic* offers a striking analogue with the symbolism of the Clouds. See particularly the poets' ability to hold up a mirror to the world (596d-e).

characteristics of his subject serves both as a clever defense of his manliness and as a boast of the (seemingly) unlimited imitative power of the poet.

However, this line of reasoning, as flattering as it is to the poets, proves dubious. If imitation were really so effortless and effective, Euripides would presumably have had all the resources necessary to appear at the Thesmophoria in feminine guise himself, without needing anyone's help. The tragic poet's appearance at Agathon's house suggests that the poets are not self-sufficient beings. Moreover, Agathon is notorious for his pathic homosexual escapades, competing during the night with the women for male lovers.[131] To take seriously his defense of his manliness would require one to believe that he far excels Brando or Pacino in the earnestness of his method acting.[132] As it turns out, Agathon himself quickly retreats from this position and turns his own argument on its head. The Kinsman, already adept at exposing boasters, calls Agathon's bluff by daring him to produce a Satyr play with himself playing a star role (157-158).[133] Agathon refuses, this time in conformity with the principle – the very antithesis of his first argument – that "necessity dictates that one's poetry be similar to one's nature" (ὅμοια γὰρ ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τῇ φύσει) (167). Whereas Agathon had first maintained that the poet changes his nature to suit the thing he

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[131] Euripides assumes that Kinsman has had sex with Agathon at some point even though the Kinsman does not recognize who he is! (35).

[132] As Kinsman crudely puts it, Agathon would "ride a man" in order to produce a play like *Phaedra* (153).

[133] As Pangle notes, "After a tragic trilogy there was normally a farcical play with a chorus of satyrs as companions of Dionysus with erect phalluses engaged in drinking and sexual pursuit" (Note 22, *Thesmophoriazusae*, 166.

is imitating, he now says that that poetry will reflect the nature of the poet. Different poets will have different natures depending on their way of life. Thus, as the Kinsman correctly deduces, "Philocles, being ugly makes ugly poetry[134] /And Xenocles, being bad, makes bad poetry, / And Theognis, again, being cold makes cold poetry! (168-170).[135] Taking as his models Ibycus, Anacreon, and Alceus who were "effeminate in the Ionic fashion," and Phrynichus who "Was himself a beauty and dressed beautifully," Agathon suggests that he has attempted to beautify himself in order to produce the most beautiful poetry. And yet the Kinsman exposes Agathon's poetry as pretentious and artificial: what appears as the divinely beautiful is really the product of a skillful application of the cosmetic art.[136]

Exposing Agathon's tragic art to be little more than a kind of cosmetics of tragedy appears to diminish the dignity that the poet claims at his entrance, but it still reflects the fact that Agathon has all of the qualities necessary for Euripides' purposes. If he who "plunders the femininity of the Cyprian" (i.e., Aphrodite) can concoct an argument that he excels in manliness, then he could surely convince the Thesmophorian women to desist from their persecution of Euripides. If his claims to be revered like a veritable god and that his verses charm their audience with the beauty

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[134] Aristophanes also makes "ugly" poetry. This suggests an antithesis between Aristophanean comedy and Agathonian tragedy (as we will see). Euripides who is seemingly capable of portraying characters in an ugly light has more kinship with Aristophanes than with Agathon, despite both of them being tragic poets.

[135] Theognis lived in Thrace (a particularly cold place in winter). In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis jokes that the coldness of the place where Theognis lives renders his poetry frigid (138-40).

[136] Cf *Gorgias* 463a-463d for Socrates' account of the cosmetic art.

might be extravagant, he will nevertheless excel in moving among the Thesmophorian women undetected. Yet, for all his suitability, Euripides' plan to ask Agathon for his assistance contains a gaping hole: Agathon has absolutely no motivation to help Euripides. When the tragic poet cuts to the chase and bluntly petitions him to be his pleader at the Thesmophoria, Agathon immediately refuses, saying that it would be "insanity" for him to bear Euripides' evil (195-196). He underscores the absurdity of the request by quoting a line of Euripides' *Alcestis* back at him, where Admetus asks his father Pheres to die for him.[137] Euripides, of all people, must know that everyone pursues their private good and above all their self-preservation: why on earth would Agathon put his life in jeopardy for the sake of a man who owes him no obligation or friendship and possesses no familial tie? Euripides' own tragedies prove the unreasonableness of his scheme to ask Agathon for help. Euripides, usually so full of clever responses, has nothing to say.

The Kinsman

The Kinsman's attachment to Euripides supplies the critical motive that Agathon lacks. Agathon has all the persuasive ability but none of the motivation; the Kinsman the motivation, but doubtful ability. The very fact that Aristophanes named this character by his relation to Euripides,

[137] In the tragedy, Kind Admetus is told that he can escape his imminent death if he finds someone willing to die in his place. His family refuse, but his wife Alcestis volunteers to die on his behalf (Euripides, "Alcestis" in *The Greek Plays*, trans. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm (New York: Modern Library, 2016), 443-481.

rather than giving him a proper name, underscores the importance of this familial tie.[138] However, the Kinsman is only a relation by marriage, not by blood, as we learn when he impetuously offers Euripides his help (210). If Pheres, Admetus' very own father, had refused to give his life for his own son, then surely a father-in-law owes much less to his son-in-law. The familial link, while important in explaining the association between the two men, does not provide a fully satisfactory explanation of the Kinsman's attachment to Euripides.

The beginning of the play suggests that the Kinsman is attached to Euripides not so much through the family connection but through the awe that Euripides' superiority inspires. Aristophanes puts his customary complaint in the mouth of the Kinsman who vents his frustration with Euripides for dragging him around the city all morning without even telling him where they are going (2-4).[139] Euripides responds to the Kinsman's complaint, not by answering his question but by telling him that he does not need to hear what immediately will appear before his eyes. This response, which one might expect to infuriate the kinsman even more, has the opposite effect. Euripides adroitly calms his relative while avoiding the question by launching into a natural philosophical disquisition of the origins of seeing and hearing. The Kinsman's fascination with

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[138] Pangle notes that "The Kinsman is never referred to be name in the play; ancient commentators identified him as Euripides' father-in law Mnesilochus" (Note 2, *Thesmophoriazusae*, 1).

[139] Aristophanes' comedies typically begin with a complaint. In *Clouds*, Strepsiades complains of not being able to sleep because of his son's snoring ("Clouds", 1-18); *Birds* opens with Euelpides and Peisthetairos cursing the bird they are trying to follow ("Birds", trans. Wayne Ambler and Thomas L. Pangle in *Aristophanes' Critique of the Gods* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2013), 1-12. Dicaeopolis complains about the state of affairs in Athens (1-43).

this account, which he struggles to understand, instantly causes him to forget his anger. Euripides' knowledge of the natural causes of things inspires awe in his companion, in a manner that strongly recalls Strepsiades' initial admiration for Socrates' arcane wisdom.[140] Like Strepsiades, the Kinsman proves his boorishness by making a hash of the teaching. Euripides distinguishes the domains of seeing and hearing by tracing each of these senses to its distinct natural origin. Ether devised the eye in imitation of the disc of the sun and the ear as a funnel bored into the head (17-18). Euripides suggests that seeing with one's own eyes renders hearing superfluous.[141] Likewise, what one cannot see with one's eyes is the proper domain of what one must hear. Nevertheless, the Kinsman completely misunderstands the teaching, interpreting the distinction between seeing and hearing to mean that he should neither see nor hear at all.

This brief comic exchange reveals more about the two men than meets the eye. Seeing and hearing are the two most important senses for philosophical investigation and for dramatic poetry, but in different ways. The ability to correct one sense with another is the empirical foundation of philosophy, whereas the confusion of the two is requisite for the dramatic illusion essential for

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[140] "Clouds", 144-183.

[141] Strauss observes that "The quest for the first things is guided by two fundamental distinctions which antedate the distinction between the good and the ancestral. Men must have always distinguished (e.g. in judicial matters) between hearsay and seeing with one's own eyes and have preferred what one has seen to what he has merely heard from others. But the use of this distinction was originally limited to particular or subordinate matters. As regards the most weight matters – the first things and the right way – the only source of knowledge was hearsay", *Natural Right and History*, 86-87.

good dramatic poetry. The stories one hears of Zeus striking down perjurers with lightning bolts can be questioned by seeing lightning bolts striking Zeus' temple with one's own eyes.[142] On the other hand, the dramatic illusion cast by a fine dramatic speech must beguile the senses so that what one hears overcomes the evidence of one's eyes as one sits in a theatre and looks at a stage. The Kinsman's wonder at Agathon's strange mixture of male and female characteristics is an example of such a confusion of senses: Agathon's feminine song is at odds with the mixture of signals he sees. This exchange on the way to Agathon's home casts in sharp relief the difference in understanding between the wise man and the buffoon.

As it turns out, a combination of both of these elements is necessary for the true success of Euripides' scheme. The Kinsman admires the tragic poet enough to be dragged about town all morning without knowing where they are going or why. It is not clear, on the other hand, whether any amount of admiration would be sufficient for the Kinsman to comply with the extraordinary favor for which Euripides is asking. The plan, after all, requires someone to expose himself to the full wrath of half the city and to face potential destruction by the Thesmophorian women, in order that Euripides himself may be spared the risk. Agathon, a canny man in his own right, perceives the hypocrisy in the request the moment that Euripides petitions him.

Agathon's point blank refusal and Euripides' subsequent lapse into despair causes the Kinsman to hand himself over completely to the tragic poet, to do with as he wishes. Euripides ends up gaining what he needs from the exchange. Was that just luck? If so, it seems remarkable that Euripides just so happens to replicate the poetic trope for which he is famous for: evincing pity for the plight of characters (especially scoundrels) in order to convince his audience that their

[142] See also Socrates' explanation for the existence of the Clouds, *Clouds* 370-411.

cause is not as bad as it appears. *Acharnians* had illustrated Euripides' particular poetic ability when Dicaeopolis goes to Euripides' house to borrow the rags of Telephus (a famous character in one of Euripides' tragedies) in order to face his fellow Acharnians with his head on the chopping block (*Acharnians*, 395-479). The costume of the beggar and other accoutrements succeeded in evincing pity in some of the Acharnians for Dicaeopolis' plight (he was considered a scoundrel for making a private peace with the Spartans). In the same way, by staging his own apparent failure to convince Agathon in front of the kinsman, he persuades the Kinsman to help him of his own free will. That Euripides' lamentations are really crocodiles' tears is evinced by his rapid change in demeanor the moment the Kinsman offers his assistance: "Oh thrice bedeviled me!" he wails, "How I am destroyed," but then immediately after the Kinsman pledges to aid him he orders him to strip off that cloak without so much as a thank you (209).[143]

Euripides also enjoys another piece of extraordinary luck: Agathon just happens to be at hand to lend him a razor and feminine clothing in which the Kinsman can be plucked, shaven, and singed to prepare him for his debut among the Thesmophorian women. The effeminate poet's expertise in cosmetics proves indispensable for tarting up the ugly old man – a feat that Euripides alone could never have accomplished. Just as Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes borrows pity-inducing rags from Euripides, Euripides borrows the implements of beauty from Agathon. Fortunately, Agathon proves more accommodating in lending the necessary equipment than he does in volunteering to go to the Thesmophoria in Euripides' stead. The end of the first scene of the play resolves its first great challenge, with the Kinsman comically decked out in female trappings and trotting off to the Thesmophoria to do Euripides' bidding.

[143] Cf Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 219.

Even so, it might well appear that a disaster is in the works, for the Kinsman appears as the antithesis of Agathon, hostile to the kind of poetry Agathon produces. Agathonian poetry possesses the power of beautifying its subject to make it appear in its most ideal, divine form; the Kinsman, on the other hand, had exposed Agathon as a boaster, sabotaging the pompous prelude of his servant with a series of crudities about his master's sexual proclivities (41-69). The Kinsman proves that Agathon's androgynous beauty is really the successful accomplishment of the cosmetic art that covers over the human blemishes underneath – most significantly the vulgar desires of the body. The Kinsman, on the other hand, offers a constant reminder of the body. He complains of the weariness of his feet at the beginning of the play, and his aggressive eroticism (active rather than passive) dispels the illusion fabricated by the young tragic poet. The Kinsman reminds us very much of Aristophanes himself. He is, therefore, Agathon's natural antithesis, for if Agathon worships beauty, Aristophanean comedy revels in the grotesque. For this reason, too, under the Kinsman's gaze Agathon's poetry is exposed as artificial, the beauty of the poetry being subverted by the reminder that Agathon himself competes with the women for lovers under the cover of darkness.

The Kinsman replacing Agathon as Euripides' defender in the Thesmophoria is tantamount to replacing Agathon's variety of tragedy with comedy. But in order to prepare the Kinsman for his special mission, Euripides must borrow Agathon's poetic devices to achieve the seemingly impossible: to create a hybrid of Aristophanes and Agathon; to transform an ugly, vulgar old man into a woman; to make comedy somehow beautiful (immediately after his transformation he develops "a womanish concern with his looks").[144] The outrageous plucking and singeing that

[144] Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 219.

takes place in the ensuing scene constitutes a burlesque of this process of transformation. It is a tribute to Agathon's skill that they accomplish the Kinsman's transformation successfully enough that he fools the women until Euripides' ruse is exposed. It remains to be seen how this form of persuasion will be received by the Thesmophorian women.

The Thesmophorian Women

In *Clouds*, Strepsiades had ultimately rebelled against the Unjust Logos and its atheistic teaching to become a pious defender of the gods, punishing Socrates for denying the existence of Zeus. Yet Aristophanes had shown a deeper irony underlying Strepsiades' dramatic reconversion. He had no problem ditching the gods when he thought doing so served his interests. His fear of Zeus' punishing thunderbolts did not prevent him from conceiving his wicked scheme to cheat his creditors, nor from denying Zeus' existence in favor of Vortex in order to learn Unjust logos. Only the visceral realization that the denial of the gods threatened the existence of his family and the things dearest to him opened his eyes to the necessity of Zeus. As a result, the catalyst of Strepsiades' conversion was not a newly awakened piety and sense of justice, but the understanding that the gods are necessary for his most vital needs. Piety is not identical to justice.

Strepsiades, however, is an oddball. He does not represent the typical Athenian citizen, much less the average pious man. He is a rustic who straddles the rich and poor classes and who has, by chance, come into contact with the highly unusual Socratic education. Just as we cannot gauge Socrates' effect on Athens through this strange citizen, we cannot use Strepsiades as the model of the pious man. For a more representative sample, we must turn to the Thesmophorian women. In *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Aristophanes paints a comic portrait of the more pious

half of the city engaged in their most pious activities. The women are ostensibly at the Thesmophoria to carry out the rites of a sacred festival in honor of the twin goddesses. Despite the many acts of sacrilege they commit in their performance of these rites, there is no question that they believe in the deities they worship. Whereas in *Clouds*, Strepsiades had already heard about the Unjust logos that permits the rhetorician to allude punishment, the Thesmophorian women do not for a moment entertain the possibility that Zeus is not or that the common good of the city could be debunked rationally in favor of the interests of the individual. So thoroughly bound up with the city are they that the women are represented as a collective, as the Chorus, with the individual women who speak out being representatives of the collective.

However, the festival of the Thesmophoria is not merely a religious institution, isolated from the affairs of the city, but a parody of the Athenian assembly that met on the hill of Pnyx and voted on measures. There is a sustained double entendre in the play in which the women represent (on the one hand) the women of Athens, the half of the city that believes so firmly in the gods that they remain untouched by the influence of the atheistic sophists; and (on the other hand) the political, public-spirited part of the city that deliberates on the city's affairs. What Aristophanes depicts in the procedures of the Thesmophoria is nothing like Socrates' mystery religion, but rather a set of deliberations regarding the pressing affairs of the female assembly: how to handle Euripides. The initiations into the Socratic mysteries take place in private, out of the purview of the city; the festival of the Thesmophoria is by its very nature a public event. As a result, the Thesmophorian women act in the capacity as devotees of the city's gods, and deliberators who direct the city's affairs for the ostensible good of the community.

The women therefore are literally the female half of the city, at once a mere section of the city (the female half) *and* the whole city simultaneously, especially as the locus of religious

worship (??). In so far as they represent the literal women of the city, they are distinguished from the men in being caretakers of the household where the men take charge of political affairs. In so far as they represent the pious part of the city concerned with the affairs of the city, they are distinguished from the men who have been corrupted by the atheistic teachings propounded by Socrates, Euripides, and others.[145] As the second female speaker says when the women deliberate on what to do with the poet, "this fellow, by composing in the tragedies market, / has persuaded the men that gods do not exist…" (…οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγῳδίαις ποιῶν / τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀναπέπεικεν οὐκ εἶναι θεούς) (450-451). On the other hand, in the parabasis, the women claim that they are superior to the men because they are much better preservers of tradition, of the *nomos* (819-820). According to this conceit, manliness consists in independence (literally and intellectually) from the *nomos* of the city; womanliness consists in concern for the *nomos* and preserving the ancestral customs.

Much of the comedy in Aristophanes' depiction of the Thesmophoria lies in the disjunction between the pretensions of the women to indeed represent the common good of the city through their worship of the deities and deliberative speeches, and the fact that they inadvertently verify

[145] Henderson's points out that "Aristophanes avoids satirizing the women's ritual activities *per se*, choosing only a few superficial details as the basis for his comic fantasy, whereby the female festive community parodies the male civic polis, and the women's assembly parodies the men's, including the ability to condemn an enemy. The assimilation is enhanced if the Thesmophoria actually met on Pnyx Hill, where the Athenian assembly (composed exclusively of adult citizen men) normally sat (Jeffrey Henderson, *Aristophanes: Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria*, 448).

substantiate? vindicate? Euripides' claims about them to be true. This is not to suggest that the women are secret lovers of the Unjust logos who had explicitly done away with the understanding that "justice is with the gods," but rather that the women reflect a profound tension inherent in the morality of the city itself. This tension can be found in the opening prayers to the gods which attempt to affirm that the good of the city is identical to the good of the individual. The herald prays that the gods "make this present assembly and gathering / the most beautiful and best / Very beneficial to the city of the Athenians, and fortunate for you yourselves!" and that she "who acts and …who publicly speaks / The best things concerning the populace of the Athenians, / And that of the women / Carry the victory on account of this! (302-309). The herald's prayer assumes that the good of the individual woman, the good of the women as a class distinct from the men, and the good of the city as a whole, are identical. Unlike Just logos who made the case for the good of the city as a sophist would make it in a rhetorical debate, the women appeal to the gods. Piety and awe, not reasoned argument, convey the impression of this unity.

Nevertheless, the impression of the unity of the common good with that of the individual is undermined when the Chorus turns from praying to the gods on behalf of the good of the city to cursing its enemies. The distinction between friend and foe, so intrinsic to political life, reveals inadvertently that what had seemed to be the identity of private interest with the common good is really a set of distinct interests. The women single out nine different objects for their invective:

1) Anyone who plots against the demos of women (335)
2) Anyone who negotiates with Euripides and the Medes (337)
3) Anyone who is thinking of tyranny or wants to bring the tyrant back (338-339)
4) Anyone who denounces a woman palming off another's child as her own (340)

5) Slave girls acting as go-betweens who blab to the master or bring back a false report (341-342)
6) Male adulterers who deceive with false speech and fail to deliver what was promised (343-344)
7) Old hags who give gifts to male adulterers (345)
8) Courtesans who receive gifts and betray their lovers (347)
9) Barmen or barmaids who are stingy with the servings of wine (348)

First, the women distinguish their interests from those outside, namely the men, by referring to themselves using the strange phrase "demos of women" (τῷ δήμῳ…τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν). While "demos" means "the people" as a whole or the "commons," here the women refer to themselves as if they constituted the entire city. The phrase reflects the conceit of the play that the women represent the city, while the atheistic men-folk exist outside its confines. Literally, men are excluded by sacred law from participation in the Thesmophoria. But figuratively, only those men with Agathon's skill – effeminate men like Cleisthenes – who are able to appear as women (who are able to appear as pious) are able to enter and move about freely.

The second curse relates closely to the first: the first had merely referred to any potential enemy of the demos of women; the second specifies exactly who these enemies are. The fact that there are two enemies who do not seem to have any relation to each other (what does Euripides have to do with the Medes?) is due to the extended double entendre of the play.[146] Euripides is the

[146] Cf. Ionna Karamanou: "the perception of women as a symbolic political entity could underscore the analogy between Euripides and the Medes. As the Persians threatened Athens with destruction

enemy of the women as women; he has spoken badly about them to the men, who have the power to make their lives very unpleasant at home. However, as figurative representations of the Athenian assembly, they speak of the Medes with whom Athens was at odds.[147] Conspiracy against the women is tantamount to treason with a foreign power against Athens. This curse is further notable for being broken by the women themselves later in the play, with no consequence at all (1165-1171).

The third curse, against anyone thinking of making themselves a tyrant, or bringing the tyrant back, is notable for reflecting their genuine common interest in Athens in the list of curses. The particular tyrants the women probably have in mind is the famous Peisistratus and his son Hippias (the latter of whom died some eighty years before Aristophanes wrote *Women at the Thesmophoria*). Their oppressive rule left an indelible impression on Athenian minds and stands in contrast to the comparative liberty Athens enjoyed in the years leading up to the Peloponnesian War. As subject as the women are to ridicule for their hypocritical ways, Aristophanes shows that the representation of the common good is by no means wholly an illusion. At the end of the play, when the strife between the women and Euripides is resolved, they call upon Athena, the "Hater of tyrants," "who possesses our city" (1140 and 1143).[148]

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and still retain their destructive potential, so Euripides represents a threat to the whole female sex ("As Threatening as the Persians: Euripides in Aristophanes' 'Thesmophoriazusae'", 158).

[147] At this time there were discussions, facilitated by Alcibiades, about making a treaty with the Persians (cf. Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 8.53).

[148] Cf. Thucydides 8.65-8.67.

The final six curses, the majority, reflect in some way feminine intemperance, a good indication that matters involving physical pleasure are especially significant in illustrating the tension between the common good and the good of the individual in the city. Unjust logos had pitted the pleasures of the body against the law, showing that intemperance was justified by nature. The women, however, present their acts of petty betrayal and lust in the form of a crime against the collective interests of the women. Their self-interest is concealed to from themselves as much as it is from the outside world in the form of moral indignation. The five kinds of curses treating sexual intemperance are also significant for reflecting a division of interests even among the women themselves. For example, the wives of the male-adulterers presumably are up against the adulteresses, slave girls against mistresses, and the old against the young.[149] Of course, the disjunction between the prayers and the curses of the women passes by entirely unnoticed by the women themselves. Although these sins of lust and intemperance are comic distortions of particularly feminine crimes, they reflect more generally the morality of the city.

The Punishment of Euripides

The disjunction in the formal opening of the Thesmophoria between the public profession of the common good in the prayers and the array of private interests reflected in the curse becomes a significant problem for the women when it comes to punishing Euripides. Consistent with the double representation of the women as both literal women and the city as a whole, the problem of punishing Euripides takes place on two levels. On the literal level, the women cannot punish

[149] The end of *Assembly Women* provides a striking example of the old women's interest being contrary to the young women's (*Assembly of Women*, 879-1112).

Euripides directly, having no direct political power in the city. On the other hand, if the women had no power whatever to punish, Euripides would not have feared them as much as he does. His fear of them points us to the figurative level of the women who, as members of the Athenian assembly or ecclesia, can call on the prytanes to punish reprobates. Within the comic conceit of the play itself, what the female assembly decides is tantamount to a decision from the ecclesia. The question these female politicians must deliberate upon is not whether to punish Euripides, but how. In particular, should they try to do away with the troublesome tragedian in secret, or punish him publicly on charges that he has injured the interests of the city? The two oratorical displays that form the centerpiece of the play reflect these two possible courses of action.

The first speaker delivers a studied oratorical performance that urges the women to destroy Euripides "either with poisons or by some single artfulness" (430).[150] She begins with a formal declaration of her concern for the good of the women, outlines the supposed slanders of the tragic poet and its consequences on the material interests of the women, and concludes by urging his destruction by devious means. However, despite its polished structure and finesse in delivery, the first speech is comically incoherent. The speaker claims that she has borne the misery of seeing the women assailed with every sort of slander conceivable and that this has caused "a great evil for the men" who come home from the theatres suspecting the women of adultery on the slightest irregularities (394). At first these irregularities appear innocuous enough; a plaited garland, a dropped dish, or a girl falling sick (400-406). However, we then learn that Euripides has made it

[150] The herald draws attention to the parallel between the women and the speakers in the assembly by pointing out that "she's hawking and spitting, / Just like the orators do! (Looks like she's going to make a long speech)." 381-382.

impossible for a woman to "pass off another's child as her own / When she lacks children" or for young women to marry old men (407-413). Finally, the first speaker drops the mask entirely by complaining that the men have reared Molossian hounds that frighten away adulterers and have installed fancy locks that have made it impossible for the women to steal from the stores as they had been able to do before (414-427). The moral indignation that the first speaker attempts to arouse in her audience forces her tacitly to confirm the truth of Euripides' assertions, thereby undermining that very indignation. She certainly proves that Euripides has injured the interests of all the women as a class distinct from the men, and that they must exact revenge. Yet, from the point of view of the city as a whole, her charges become impossible to state publicly.[151] Small surprise, then, that her proposed solution is to do away with Euripides in secret.

The second speaker delivers a much shorter but more cunning speech that permits the women to exact their revenge on Euripides by means of a publicly acceptable denunciation. Her speech more than compensates for its lack of oratorical formality by its apparent candor and potent combination of moral indignation with pity for the person of the speaker. It has something of the Euripidean tragic charm. The first speaker had expressed in formal oratorical terms her distress at the slandering of the women, but the second speaker plainly states that she is a war-widow with five little urchins whom she can feed only with difficulty (446-448). Now, because of Euripides, her meagre livelihood of selling garlands in the myrtle markets has taken a nosedive because he "has persuaded the men that gods do not exist, / With the result that we don't sell even half as much" (οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγῳδίαις ποιῶν / τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀναπέπεικεν οὐκ εἶναι θεούς: / ὥστ᾽

[151] Indeed, the first female orators has things that she cannot even say openly to the female assembly. Instead, she states that she will write these things down with the secretary (432).

οὐκέτ᾽ ἐμπολῶμεν οὐδ᾽ εἰς ἥμισυ.) (451-452).[152] The war-widow only obliquely acknowledges the charges of the first speaker and instead focuses her indignation on the material loss she has suffered as the result of the tragic poet's atheistic plays. Euripides should be punished because her children are now going hungry, although the truth of this assertion is made dubious by her excuse that she needs to hurry back to the agora because "it is necessary to / Weave garlands commissioned for twenty men" – apparently business is not quite so bad as it seems (457-458).[153] Although the Chorus had praised the first speech highly for its oratorical competence and persuasive subtlety, it acknowledges the second speech to be "more subtle yet than the earlier!" (κομψότερον ἔτ᾽ ἢ τὸ πρότερον) (460). Whereas the first speaker furnished persuasive arguments, that could not be opposed (among the women), the second speaker has convinced the assembly that Euripides must pay "a manifest judicial penalty" (περιφανῶς δοῦναι δίκην.) for his "hybris" (τῆς ὕβρεως) (465-466). The Thesmophorian women resolve the problem of punishing Euripides by framing his offence against their interests as an offence against the city.

The Kinsman's Speech

At precisely this point, the Kinsman intervenes with a speech so shocking that it redirects to himself the anger previously reserved for Euripides. In doing so, he manages to solve the primary problem of the play, of preventing the women from destroying Euripides, but only at the

[152] The fact that the woman is selling garlands (that would be worn at religious festivals) underscores the connection between her line of work and the piety of the citizens.

[153] That men are atheists is a comic exaggeration, like Unjust logos proving that the whole Athenian audience counts among the "buggered" (*Clouds* 1098).

cost of making himself the new target of their anger. Had Agathon pleaded Euripides' cause instead of the Kinsman, he might have been expected to have dazzled the women with a glittering performance that painted Euripides in the most beautiful light possible – Agathon could have made Euripides appear more pious than the most pious woman at the Thesmophoria without making himself the new target of the women's anger. The Kinsman, on the other hand, possesses no such ability. On the contrary, we have seen already that he has much in common with the comic poet himself; his domain is the ugly, the ridiculous, the literal, the very opposite of the beautiful. Disguised in his female outfit, he represents a very comic hybrid of Agathonian and Aristophanean principles: a strange conjunction of opposites. His clothes render him invisible to detection for the time being, but his speech is the speech of a comic poet to the city.

Indeed, his speech to the women is similar to the speech that Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes delivers to his fellow Acharnians.[154] With comic directness, Dicaeopolis stirs up a hornet's nest by telling the Acharnians, to their faces, that the Spartans who had devastated their homes and lands were not to be blamed for the war. Likewise, the Kinsman states to the faces of the women that Euripides should be exonerated because not only the things he said about them were true, but he could have said much worse! Indeed, the two speeches share a remarkable similarity in structure and tone. Dicaeopolis declares that "In fact, I hate the Lacedemonians intensely / And may Poseidon, god at Taenarus, / Shake them and bring their houses down on top of them all! / For I too have vines that have been cut" (*Acharnians*, 509-512). The Kinsman begins his speech

[154] Dicaeopolis speaks with the voice of Aristophanes himself. In the parabasis of *Acharnians* he partitions the audience not to hold a grudge "If, being a beggar, I nonetheless, in the presence of Athenians, / Am going to speak about the city, while writing a comedy" (496-499).

affirming that "to be of especially keen anger / Against Euripides…is not amazing, /Nor that your anger boils. And I myself – as I may enjoy my children! - / Hate that man, for otherwise I'd be mad" (467-470).[155] Dicaeopolis claims the liberty of free speech since no foreigners are present to hear bad things said of the city (502-503). The Kinsman, likewise, attempts to excuse the bluntness of his speech by reminding them, his female audience, that "nevertheless we should speak among ourselves; / For we are by ourselves, and there will be no publication of the discussion" (ὅμως δ' ἐν ἀλλήλαισι χρὴ δοῦναι λόγον: / αὐταὶ γάρ ἐσμεν, κοὐδεμί' ἔκφορος λόγου.) (471-472).[156] The two speeches prove alike the power of comedy to shock its audience with the blunt truth of the matter.

The Kinsman first supports his claim that Euripides should be let off the hook for not saying all he could have said about the behavior of women with a graphic anecdote of an act of brazen adultery (s)he committed when a bride of only three days. A lover who had taken her virginity (at the age of seven!) came knocking on the door on the pretext of going to the latrine with stomach trouble.[157] the young bride sneaks out of the house (taking care to mention she poured water on the hinge), and while her husband pounds together a remedy for the stomach ailment, the young

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[155] Part of the comedy derives from the Kinsman's exaggerated attempts to imitate women. His nervousness naturally causes him to overact. Real women, for example, would not make oaths "As I may enjoy my children!" (469).

[156] The exclusion of foreigners in Dicaeiopolis' case corresponds exactly with the conceit that the women represent the city and will punish anyone for consorting with the Medes.

[157] If such acts of adultery are committed when brides are only three days married, imagine what happens after years of marriage!

bride is pounded by the adulterer as she bends over an altar to Apollo that stood in front of the house (478-489). It is difficult to determine which of the various details in the Kinsman's colorful anecdote is worse: the act of adultery itself, or the blasphemy in committing the act over an altar. Whichever the case, the story underlines the connection between immorality and impiety. Having spoken of his (her) own case, the Kinsman generalizes to the common practices of women: having intercourse with slaves (if no one else is around); chewing garlic so that the husband does not smell anything suspicious once he comes back from guard duty; hiding adulterers under shawls; or a woman claiming to give birth, procuring someone else's baby with the help of an old woman.[158] All of these things, maintains the Kinsman, make what Euripides says about Phaedra (who conceived an unlawful love for her son in law) rather unexceptional.[159]

The most brazen feature of the Kinsman's speech, however, is not the stories themselves but the audacity to tell such things to the Thesmophorian women so directly. Accordingly, the immediate response of the chorus is not to deny the claims but to wonder how such "brazen boldness" (τήνδε τὴν θρασεῖαν) could have been found anywhere (523). The Kinsman reenacts the

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[158] In *Clouds*, Aristophanes claims that he had a baby (his first play) when he was supposed to be a virgin and not yet permitted to have children (529-530). As Thomas and Grace Starry West explain, "Aristophanes means that he was too young to produce plays ("children") in his own name, so, like a girl with an illegitimate baby, he willingly concealed his authorship (left it to die in an exposed place). Another "girl" (an older playwright) found it and the family "she" brought it to (the Athenian audience) has since fostered it ("Clouds", note 92, 137).

[159] The political analogue to this speech is the brazen hypocritical and immorality of the Athenian assembly. The content of Dicaeopolis' complaints about the city are pertinent here.

special power of comedy to hold up a mirror that reflects a grotesque image of the vices of the audience. Of course, doing so carries the risk of severe reprisals. In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis, speaking as Aristophanes, refers to an incident in which he was prosecuted by Cleon for slander in his *Babylonians* (now lost).[160] Dicaeopolis takes the precaution of borrowing the rags of Telephus in order to soften the blow in his speech to the Acharnians. The effect of this device is to divide the chorus of Acharnians between those who pity Dicaeopolis and those who wish to kill him, thereby allowing him his escape. Had he not visited Euripides, he would certainly have been executed. The Kinsman's device is no less successful than Dicaeopolis.' Although, like Dicaeopolis, (s)he is regarded as a traitor, the speech is so shocking that it paralyzes the Thesmophorian women into temporary inaction.[161]

The reason for this paralysis is that the Thesmophorian women as a collective can only act in the belief that what they are doing can be understood as being just. The women cannot refute the Kinsman for telling lies: although the Kinsman's ability to imitate the behavior of women is tinged with absurdity (there is a comic exaggeration in all his mannerisms), the anecdote itself and the generalizations about female behavior are absolutely convincing. We may well attribute the Kinsman's association with Euripides and not Agathon's cosmetic expertise for his ability to tell such convincing tales.[162] If the Kinsman cannot be refuted, then to act against him would be to

[160] *Acharnians*, 377 (see note 48).

[161] Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 223-224.

[162] Alternatively, if the Kinsman can really be identified with Aristophanes, then it is possible to argue that his knowledge of women's erotic activities exceeds that of Euripides. After all, the

admit too openly that, in fact, everything Euripides said about them is true. They would therefore lose even the pretext of justice and piety that had been the raison d'être of the festival of the Thesmophoria. The Kinsman's speech paralyzes the Thesmophorian women precisely because it uncovers too much the contradiction buried at the heart of the morality of the city, the uncomfortable intuition that the individual good and the common good may not be unified.

The Persecution of the Kinsman

Only an individual woman, and not the collective, has the requisite audacity to step forward and attempt to prosecute this "female pest" for her "extreme hubris" (535). To act against the Kinsman requires a certain amount of brazenness in its turn. As it happens, this particular woman has such qualities: she is caught gulping down sesame cakes (570) and even smuggles a wineskin in dressing it up as a baby (734). Accordingly, she demands the punishment of the Kinsman, not on account of justice but of prudence (533); the Kinsman's crime is not blasphemy or a crime against the city in general but a crime against the women themselves, against the self-interest of the collective. As a result, the woman proposes a punishment that matches the crime: if the Kinsman offended the interests of women particularly (i.e. a traitor to his own interest-group!) then they should "pluck her pussy bare, so that she'll learn / As a woman not to speak evilly of women again!" (538-539). The punishment – amusingly enough – is not so formidable for the pain (since the Kinsman was already thoroughly singed and plucked by Agathon and Euripides) (219-232), but terrifying because it would inadvertently reveal the Kinsman's true sex – it would reveal

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Kinsman argues that Euripides has not said all of the things he could have done about them, and that he should be exonerated for this reason (517-519).

him to be an imposter. The Kinsman's pathetic appeals to "freedom / Of speech" (παρρησίας κἀξὸν λέγειν) for citizens to speak (540-541), to his having uttered his speech "in ignorance" (ἀγίγνωσκον) (543), are naturally ignored. On the other hand, the Kinsman has the upper hand in the argument itself: to the woman's claim that Euripides portrays Melannipes and Phaedras but omits Penelope because she was a sensibly moderate woman, Kinsman fires back that "you could not name a single / Penelope among the women around now, while every one is a Phaedra! (549-550): he proves it by reeling off another list of crimes – this time including murder (560-562). When the Kinsman personally attacks the woman as substituting a baby daughter for the male child of a slave, words cease and blows begin.

The altercation between the Kinsman and the woman is interrupted, however, by the arrival of Cleisthenes – an effeminate man of Agathon's ilk – with word that Euripides has infiltrated their sacred gathering with a disguised spy (574-581). Of course, Cleisthenes' arrival technically violates the prohibition against men being present at the sacred gathering, but the Chorus-leader skirts over this issue by referring to Cleisthenes as "child" (παῖ) (582), and Cleisthenes greets the women who "are kin of my ways" (ξυγγενεῖς τοὐμοῦ τρόπου) (574).[163] This news completely transforms the situation for the chorus. Whereas before they could punish the Kinsman only as a traitor, they can now punish him for having committed "impious deeds" (δράσας ἀνόσια) (668). Unlike Strepsiades, who had some familiarity with the Unjust logos and accused Socrates directly of being an atheist, the women accuse the Kinsman only of impiety, calling his act "an example of

[163] Strauss makes the plausible hypothesis that Agathon had betrayed Euripides by telling Cleisthenes the plan. Cleisthenes and Agathon are both pathic homosexuals (Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 224).

hybris and unjust deeds / And godless [atheistic] ways (παράδειγμ᾽ ὕβρεως ἀδίκων τ᾽ ἔργων / ἀθέων τε τρόπων) (671-672). Not only should the Kinsman suffer the punishment for committing a sacrilegious crime, but he should be punished as a warning to others who are tempted to commit unjust deeds. The kinsman's punishment is tantamount to reasserting the existence of the gods, and proof that "they must piously reverence divinities, / And justly pursue pious and lawful ways" (δικαίως τ᾽ ἐφέποντας † ὅσια καὶ νόμιμα / μηδομένους ποιεῖν ὅ τι καλῶς ἔχει) (675-676).

The Kinsman knows he is in deep trouble at this point. Having failed to slink away from the gathering on the pretext of taking a piss, he is cornered and interrogated (611). His feminine garb had been sufficient for blending into the crowd, but once he becomes the object of suspicion his imperfect performance quickly unravels. In a last-ditch effort, he snatches what he thinks is the baby of the woman he was fighting with, thereby reenacting the famous scene from Euripides' *Telephus* where the disguised king attempts to save himself by taking the baby Orestes hostage. This scene also recalls *Acharnians* when Dicaeopolis snatches the charcoal basket from the Acharnians and threatens to sacrifice it – the charcoal basket being as dear to the Acharnians as a baby would be to its mother (*Acharnians*, 331). However, whereas Dicaeopolis' ruse succeeded in preventing him from being stoned, the Kinsman's ruse is a comic failure. Even the Kinsman's knowledge of the ways of women does not prevent him from underestimating the wickedness of the women.[164] The Euripidean pathos the Kinsman invokes, in what appears to be a desperate scene, quickly evaporates into comic bathos. The Chorus' tragic "Oh august Fates, what is this / Unheard of monstrosity that I behold" is undone by the absurd transformation of the "Cretan swaddling" into "a goatskin / Full of wine!" (735). The regret the wine-loving woman expresses

[164] Cf. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 226.

at losing the "child" she had taken to many such festivals is not enough to prevent her going away with Cleisthenes to call the Prytanes.

Parabasis

The parabasis calls to the attention of the audience the underlying battle between men and women that forms one of the most significant comic conceits in *Women at the Thesmophoria*. As we have seen, the women are presented as the collective; but the men are portrayed only as individuals: Euripides, Agathon, the Kinsman, Cleisthenes, and the Scythian Archer.[165] The chorus of women therefore frame their defense in the name of the "tribe of women" (τὸ γυναικεῖον φῦλον) against the men of the city. Indeed, the only general assertion made about the men as their own group (φῦλον) is that Euripides "has persuaded the men that gods do not exist" (451). Although this odd claim was contradicted in the second female orator's own argument (wreath sales are not quite as bad as she made out), it says something important about the difference between men and women in terms of the comic conceit of the play.

Despite the attacks made against them as a lot of Pandoras responsible for sundry evils, the women cannot be contradicted in their assertion that "as regards the ancestral things / [the men] are worse than us at preserving!" (τὰ πατρῷά γε / χείρους ἡμῶν εἰσιν σῴζειν) (819-820). The women have still preserved the traditional tools needed for them to carry out their labors - the "loom-bar," the "weaving rod," the wool-baskets, the sunshade are still in common use among the women; the men, on the other hand have ditched the "spear-shaft" and the "spear-head" (825) –

[165] Of course, Aristophanes portrays women in other comedies as striking individuals, Praxagora and Lysistrata being the most outstanding. See *Lysistrata* and *Assembly of Women*.

their equivalent of the "sunshade" (the shield) "has been cast away / From the shoulders on campaigns" (828-829). Whatever one might say about them, the women are the custodians of the ancestral, whereas the men have embraced novelties that have caused them to forsake their traditional implements. They repeat the Just logos' attack on the new education that forsook the old Marathon virtues, causing them to neglect the military virtues. Whereas in *Clouds* the Old and New education appeared under the form of the Just and Unjust logos, in *Women at the Thesmophoria* the conflict appears in the argument between men and women over who is better. And yet the women might even be superior to the Just logos in this regard. For the women are not even aware of the sophistic argument – they do not know what atheism is, but only atheistic acts that demonstrate hubris against the gods. Their dedication to the city is not reasoned, as is the Just logos' (and therefore subject to demolition by reasoned argument), but deeply innate.

However, the most surprising proof of the women's conservatism is the fact that, despite their attacks on the men for their neglect of tradition and the bad handling of the city, they are nevertheless defenders of the status quo. The argument the women make in the parabasis is critical of the men, not just for their neglect of tradition but also for their terrible handling of the city's affairs. They make this point obliquely in what looks to be a frivolous argument comparing masculine and feminine names. For example, Charminus (an admiral recently defeated in a naval battle) is beaten by "Nausimache" (naval battle); Cleophon, a leading demagogue who twice frustrated peace attempts ,is beaten "in every way" by Salabaccho, a famous prostitute; the best the Athenians can come up with in battle, Aristomache, ("Best in Battle") is defeated by "her of Marathon"; none of the Athenians have overcome Stratonikē (Victorious Army), nor is any of the current council able to surpass Euboulē (Good in counsel) (804-810). A glance at Athenian affairs in 411, the year when Aristophanes wrote *Women at the Thesmophoria*, is sufficient to give weight

to these jibes.[166] The cataclysmic defeat in Sicily put all of Athens' military affairs in jeopardy, while, on the home front, a revolution was in the works. Nevertheless, the Thesmophorian women here propose nothing like Praxagora in *Assembly of Women* who argued on the basis of the women's superiority at preserving the ancestral customs that the city should be turned over to them (*Assembly of Women*, 214-241).[167] They content themselves with complaining of the injustices within the regime and maintaining their true superiority to the men without proposing to challenge their authority.

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[166] Karamanou calls *Women at the Thesmophoria* "one of Aristophanes' least political plays," meaning that the play steers clear of direct allusions to events occurring at the time (Ionna Karamanou, "As Threatening as the Persians: Euripides in Aristophanes' 'Thesmophoriazusae'", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Vol. 124, 2013, 155. Later in 411 (the year that *Women at the Thesmophoria* was staged), the democracy was overthrown by an oligarchic coup that killed numerous dissenters. It may well have been dangerous even for Aristophanes to comment too directly on political affairs at the time. The oligarchic coup returns as an important theme in *Frogs*.

[167] Arlene Saxonhouse observes in *Assembly of Women* that "By putting the female into power, Aristophanes expressed his own belief that the public sphere has completely disintegrated and become no more substantial than women's private longing for sex and feasts" ("Men, Women, War, and Politics: Family and Polis in Aristophanes and Euripides", 79. The point Saxonhouse makes here could equally apply to the Thesmophorian women.

The Rescue of the Kinsman

Women at the Thesmophoria had begun, we remember, with the problem that Euripides needed to find an advocate to plead his case in the deliberative assembly of the women. Euripides himself had refused to go on account of not being feminine enough, saying that he is grey and sports a beard (190). At a figurative level we had understood the first part of the play to depict the nature of Agathonian poetry, the poetry of beauty and its relation to comedy (the Kinsman). The Kinsman's going in Agathon's stead had been tantamount to defending Euripides by means of comedy, by holding up the comic mirror to the female chorus and showing that all the things Euripides had said was true. Whereas Agathon's poetry had proven to be the diametric opposite to that of comedy, the Kinsman and Euripides are natural allies. Both are highly erotic men. The Kinsman had taken the heat off Euripides in the middle of the play; Euripides must now come and save his friend at its end.

In *Clouds* we learned that one of the reasons why poets are superior to philosophers is that they make for better clouds: poets have the power to change shape and appear in different forms. In *Women at the Thesmophoria*, however, we learn that this shapeshifting power, while certainly formidable, has its limits. Agathon, for example, could justify his effeminate nature and his pleasure-seeking, homosexual forays at night by transforming himself into the god of beauty through his poetry: a lascivious fellow transforms, by the enchantment of poetry, into a chorus of pious women engaged in their most pious activities. As the Kinsman proves, however, Agathon could never produce a Satyr play, and his aversion to ugliness makes his poetry highly artificial. Euripides, too, we learn in this final episode, has his limitations. His poetry had uncovered the erotic ways of women by means of "intelligence," thereby attracting the ire of the women. Euripides himself, however, could not go to the Thesmophoria. While we could say that his refusal

to go himself is a mere selfish pretext (he is a rascal!), it nevertheless raises the question of why he could not go there without so much risk in the first place. Unlike Agathon, Euripides cannot appear as a woman; his poetry is thoroughly masculine (190). If the women represent, at one level, the city in its pious form, we would say that he cannot move easily among them because his principle of intelligence does not permit it: to appear as a woman; to appear among the pious, would be a direct violation of his own principle to lay bare the truth.

The movement in the final part of the play reflects a transformation within Euripides himself, from a thoroughly masculine poet to a poet who is at least able to move among women without causing so much offence.[168] He must learn to pay his dues to the city without debunking its problematic morality. Nevertheless, the attempt to do this involves trial and error – Euripides and the Kinsman must reenact various scenes from Euripidean tragedy in an effort to effect this transformation. The rescue of the Kinsman is contingent upon Euripides being able to somehow moderate his own poetic principle.

The first poetic device fails dismally. As the Kinsman is trapped, under guard as the chorus of Thesmophorian women wait for the Prytane to arrive, he must find a way to attract Euripides' attention; he must fire a poetic signal flare. He naturally chooses a scene from a Euripidean tragedy that resembles as closely as possible the situation he finds himself in. His most pressing need is to

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[168] Karamamou interprets the trope of the female disguise differently: "Considering that female nature is intrinsically associated with ruse, particularly in Euripidean tragedy, the feminine disguise of the kinsman, as well as the of Euripides towards the end of the play, points to their use of female plotting to confront the women at the Thesmophoria with their own weapons" ("As Threatening as the Persians: Euripides in Aristophanes 'Thesmophoriazusae'", 159.

send Euripides a long-distance message: he therefore decides to imitate a poetic conceit from Euripides' *Palemides* where Oeax, a Greek warrior fighting at Troy, sent news of his brother Palamedes' death by writing the message on oar-blades and sending them off to float over the sea (a kind of Ancient Greek message in a bottle). Not having an oar-blade handy, the Kinsman uses the next best thing; a votive tablet, sending it off through the air (Euripides' chosen element), rather than the water. For all the cleverness in adopting this conceit, there is no sign of the old tragedian, and the Kinsman attributes the failure to the fact that *Palamides* was "a cold flop!" (848). He thereby establishes the most basic principle in adapting such poetic devices: in order for it to be convincing it must form part of a successful play.

The second poetic device succeeds in enabling Euripides to appear on stage, but fails to deceive the woman guarding the Kinsman. Because the Kinsman is now still trapped, under guard near the altar of the Thesmophoria, he decides to imitate Euripides' *Helen* where the eponymous woman is kept prisoner, under guard in the palace of Proteus in Egypt. Euripides now appears disguised as a shipwrecked Menelaus and reenacts with Kinsman-Helen the famous recognition scene of the play, the female guard involuntarily becoming Theonoe, daughter of Proteus. Of course, the impromptu performance they produce is really a hybrid of Euripidean tragedy and comedy, with the dialogue functioning on two levels. What we hear is a selection of the most memorable lines from the tragedy; but what we see is the ridiculous spectacle of an ugly old man in drag playing (badly) the most beautiful woman in Greece. Since breaking the fourth wall heightens comedy, but completely destroys tragedy, the result is really to provide the comic climax of the play. Thus, the pathos of the moment of recognition, "Woman! What are you saying!? Return my pupil's gaze!" is undermined by the Woman's heckling; "Stranger, this scoundrel has come hither / To steal the gold jewelry of the women!" (893-894). And, finally, the whole scene

is destroyed as the Kinsman departs from the script in his enthusiasm to be rescued: "Oh long in coming to the fond hearth of your spouse / Take me! Take me, husband – wrap your arms about me! Come I kiss you! Carry me, carry, carry, carry, carry me - / Take me swiftly away! (913-916). The woman merely responds with a threat to clobber both of them over the heads with her lamp (916-917). Although she does not recognize Euripides, she knows a "scoundrel" when she sees one (920). Euripides is now on the scene, but he must try again with another conceit.

Although the reenactment of Helen and Menelaus fails to extricate the Kinsman from the Thesmophoria, it does represent a distinct advance in the process of Euripides' feminization and his corresponding rapprochement with the Thesmophorian women. For, although Euripides had played the masculine character, Menelaus, the drama itself presents a somewhat more favorable view of women. Helen, in Euripides' tragedy, is not the Pandora who caused the Trojan War. Instead, all the infamy that was heaped on Helen as the cause of the war was actually a mistake: the Helen whom Paris seduced was only a phantom of the real woman who had been imprisoned in Proteus' palace in Egypt.[169] Menelaus gets shipwrecked at Proteus palace by chance. By luck the Kinsman had chosen the one tragedy that offers the best defense of Euripides' potential good will towards them. The response of the Chorus, who perform the sacred dance "in the ways lawful (νόμος) here for the women / When we engage at the sacred times in the august revels of the Twin Goddesses" (947-948), is promising: they say that "if anyone / Expects that I, being a woman, / Am going to speak ill of men in a sanctuary, his thought is incorrect" (963-965).

[169] Cf. Euripides, "Helen," trans. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm in *The Greek Plays* (New York: Modern Library, 2016), lines 1-70.

The third poetic device of reenacting a famous scene from Euripides' *Andromeda* finally makes it possible for the compromise the tragedian makes with the women immediately after so as? to cease their mutual persecution. Nevertheless, from the Kinsman's point of view, matters could not be worse. The Prytane arrives with some muscle – a Scythian Archer - whose absence of brains is more than compensated for by brawn. He chains the Kinsman roughly to a stake, in his female garb, as per order of the council. The Kinsman now laments more piteously than ever, blaming Euripides for getting him into such a mess. As it happens, however, the Scythian Archer inadvertently creates the perfect conditions of the performance of a scene in Euripides' *Andromeda* with all the key ingredients, the kinsman playing the woe-begotten maiden, Euripides doubling as the hero Perseus and the nymph Echo, and the Scythian Archer standing in for Andromeda's evil father who had bound her to the rock.[170] Accordingly, Euripides suddenly reappears, signaling to the Kinsman that he should assume the role of Andromeda (1011-1012).

The Kinsman does so, but with considerable difficulty. His distress at being bound to the pillar causes him to confuse his own lament with those of the maiden. He addresses the chorus as "Dear virgins" as if they were sympathetic sea-nymphs, but complains about being doomed by "this Scythian guard" who "Here has long stood, / Having hung me out, ruined and friendless, / A meal for crows" (1015) (1025-1029). He can neither associate "With girls my own age," or hang about in the dicastery casting votes (the favorite pastime of old Athenian men).[171] On the other hand, his greater distress at being held prisoner ramps up the levels of pathos much more in this

[170] Who is the sea monster in this analogy? The Kinsman says that he is "presented as food for the monster Gloucetes" (1034), but the joke is obscure.

[171] Aristophanes wrote *Wasps* on the theme of the Athenian obsession with jury duty.

performance than in the previous one with Helen. If his impersonation of Andromeda is marred in the beginning by his preoccupation with his own suffering, his complaints are more dramatic being all the more sincere: “Would that for me the fire-bearing star of the ether / Might destroy the barbarian! / For no longer is the immortal flame / Dear for me to behold, since I am hung out, / In throat-cutting daimonic agonies, / On the path of the glistening dead! (1050-1055). More than any other moment in the comedy, the Kinsman makes himself the Euripidean object of pity.

At this point Euripides enters the scene as the nymph Echo. He has finally made his transition to feminine form, but only in a very qualified manner. He is seen only by the Kinsman, not by the Scythian Archer who is confused by the sound of a voice coming from an unknown source. And, in so far as he is merely an echo, he merely repeats what Kinsman/Andromeda or the Scythian Archer says. As a female character, he has no substance of his own, what he has being borrowed from others. Nevertheless, Euripides is confident that his Echo will do the trick. When the Kinsman asks who (s)he is, Euripides/Echo replies “the mocker who sings back speech / Who last year in this same land / Myself helped Euripides in the competition” (1059-1061). Unlike the cold flop that was *Palamedes*, Euripides’ choice of staging the *Andromeda* proves much more propitious in convincing the women to let the Kinsman go.

The successful device of the forlorn girl lamenting her fate to a personification of her own echo (a device that again reflects Euripides’ genius at evoking pity) has quite a different result when it involves the comic Kinsman, who immediately forgets the plan and gets angry at the interruptions. Thus, one of the most pitiful scenes in Euripides’ tragedies quickly deteriorates into a ridiculous three-man act of comic misunderstanding worthy of a scene from the Three Stooges. Any sympathy that Kinsman/Andromeda could have generated with her plaintive laments disappears as her suffering gives way to irritation:

Kinsman: Why oh why has Andromeda

Been allotted by fate a share of evils greater than others –

Euripides: Been allotted by fate a share…

Kinsman: Suffering death?

Euripides: Suffering death?

Kinsman: You are destroying me, you hag, with chattering! (1070-1073)

After this back and forth, the Scythian Archer intervenes, heightening the comedy with his confusion and bad Greek.

The climax of the *Andromeda* scene arrives as Euripides transforms himself once again into Perseus, reenacting the moment when the hero first sets eyes on the maiden, the Euripidean moment of love at first sight. However, as with the *Helen* scene, the difference between hearing and seeing with one's eyes produces two levels that cut against one another: one tragic, one comic.[172] What we hear is the dialogue of the tragedy where the hero is "seized with eros for this maiden"; but what we and the Scythian see is one old man expressing his erotic desires for another old man dressed in feminine garb and chained to a post (1117).[173] Euripides' attempt to create the illusion that "This is Andromeda, child of Cepheus" is neutralized by the barbarian's decisive

[172] Cf. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 231-232.

[173] Within the confusion between sight and hearing could be a superior claim to comedy over tragedy: comedy deals with what one sees with one's own eyes. Tragedy goes to the mythic past which no one has ever seen and operates in illusions.

reply: “Look at pecker! Not look small, no?” (1114). Thus, what in tragedy would have been a scene of intense erotic passion between the hero and the maiden is reduced to a crude act of homosexual lust. Euripides’ feeble insistence on the point only evinces a string of threats from the barbarian, and the tragedian is forced to make another expeditious retreat.

If the *Andromeda* scene fails in achieving the immediate rescue of the Kinsman, it sets everything in order for the reconciliation between Euripides and the women. The Chorus now invokes “Pallas, the Lover of the Choral dance”, the goddess of the city of Athens (1137-1138). There is no trace of the divisions implicit in the opening prayers of the Thesmophoria and the subsequent speeches against Euripides. They appear to be almost as ideal as was Agathon’s portrayal of them in the beginning of the play. The performance of the two scenes from *Helen* and *Andromeda* produce a corresponding movement of reconciliation from Euripides’ side. The *Helen* had portrayed in a sympathetic light what the Greek world had reviled as one of the worst of women, and *Andromeda* had depicted the suffering of an innocent maiden. True, neither of the poetic devices had succeeded fully in their object since they could not overcome the testimony of the eyes of the women or of the Scythian Archer. The comic subversion of the scenes corresponds exactly with the superiority of sight to hearing: comedy is truer to what the eyes see than tragedy is.

Euripides’ Treaty with the Thesmophorian Women

Euripides now comes forward, addressing the women directly in his own name with a proposal and a threat: if they are willing to make a permanent treaty with him and allow him to take away his relative, they will “never hear anything bad from me” (1160-1161); if they refuse, he will denounce them to the men coming back from campaign (1169). The Chorus assents to the

compromise but tells him that he must deal with the Scythian Archer himself (1171-1172). The possibility of such an agreement corresponds with Euripides' ability to adopt a female form. If the women indeed represent the city – the common good of the community bound together by the pious reverence of the gods – then Euripides' feminization corresponds to his ability to appear (relatively) pious, or at the very least, not to subvert the common good of the city with his colorful and psychologically accurate depictions of erotic transgressions. Unlike Socrates, who could not compromise and who was destroyed by a fanatic he himself had created in part, the tragic poet has the means at his disposal to appear to transform himself, even if such a transformation comes at the expense of the poetic principle he evinces.

The women, for their part, must also compromise on what they sought in the play. Burning with revenge, they had wished to do whatever was necessary to do away with the troublesome tragedian, whether that meant poisoning him or denouncing him on other charges as an enemy to the city. Nevertheless, unlike Strepsiades, who had accused Socrates directly of atheism, the women's complaint against Euripides was not his atheism, but his proclivity to expose their secret doings, thereby subverting the constant need of the city to represent itself to itself and to others as the nexus of the common good. Unfamiliar and unconcerned with the sophists, the women could not conceive of the debate about Zeus or Vortex' existence, but could only punish acts of blasphemy and hubris that reflected an atheistic lack of concern with divine punishment. As a result, the women never concern themselves with Euripides' atheism, but only with his assurance to leave them alone. As conservatives, they merely wish to go about their business undisturbed as they had before the war and the sophists had arrived to stir things up. They therefore set a low bar for a peace treaty with Euripides: he can think whatever he likes as long as he refrains from disturbing them.

The conclusion of the play reflects the new alliance between Euripides and the Thesmophorian women. The only complication that remains is the uncivilized Scythian who holds the Kinsman under close watch. Having had to deal with the barbarian in the previous enactment of *Andromeda*, Euripides returns armed with a female dancer, himself disguised as an old procuress. His transformation into a woman, impossible at the beginning of the play and only partially accomplished with the Kinsman's help, is now complete thanks to the new peace treaty. From there it is an easy matter to trick the brute with an act of comic misdirection. While Euripides offers up the girl to the Scythian's lustful embraces, he makes off with the Kinsman. The Chorus of women assists the getaway by telling the Scythian that the two fugitives went off in the opposite direction. The final device Euripides employs with the connivance of the Thesmophorian women is fitted to the intelligence of the barbarian whom he endeavors to deceive. No elaborate tragic dialogue is necessary; no high pathos or dramatic complexity needed. The situation hardly taxes the poet's deep knowledge of human eros and its tragic manifestations: it is sufficient to incite the lust of a simple fellow and be done with it. The potentially dangerous implications of Euripides' depiction of eros are thus turned outwards and simplified, to the non-Greek barbarians to whom both elements of the city, the men and the women, can rally around.[174]

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[174] Karamanou argues convincingly that the name of the dancing girl, Artemisia "creates a 'persian' dramatic atmosphere within which the barbarian threat is comically eliminated" ("As Threatening as the Persians: Euripides in Aristophanes' 'Thesmophoriazusae'"), 160-161. Artemisia was queen of Halicarnassus and an ally of Xerxes in the naval battle of Salamis, where she commanded five ships. Herodotus emphasizes Artemisia's ingenuity when she rammed a friendly vessel in order to escape the Persian route. On seeing this cunning maneuver, Xerxes is

Aristophanes' comedies almost always end on a fantastic note. In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis had skipped off with two girls, apparently free from the demands of both his city and even of his family. *Assemblywomen* ends with the permanent establishment of the communism of women, and *Frogs* ends most fantastically with the resurrection of Aeschylus (long dead) to the tragic stage of Athens. One wonders then if the compromise that forces Euripides to tame his depictions of eros in *Women at the Thesmophoria* belongs equally to the realm of fantasy. To what extent do the demands of the city – its demands for the poet to avert his eyes from what goes on in private – compromise the very essence of his poetry?[175] Is it possible to preserve the greatness of Euripidean tragedy without undermining the city and its attachment to its gods and laws? Or, as the final episode with the barbarian might suggest, does it imply a severe diminution of the tragedian's poetic powers? We turn to *Frogs* where Euripides faces not the city itself, but the true poetic champion of the city and its demands, Aeschylus.

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reported to have observed that "My men have become women and my women men" (Herodotus 8.87-88). Karamanou argues that this link is significant in the final part of the play.

[175] Arlene Saxonhouse's reflection on the irreconcilability of the private with the political is pertinent here: she sees "the conflict between the private world and public endeavors which demand a sacrifice of private pleasures; the family is at all times irreconcilable with public demands" ("Men, Women, War, and Politics: Family and Polis in Aristophanes and Euripides", 71).

Chapter 3: Frogs (Part I)

Women at the Thesmophoria witnessed the qualified victory of Euripides over the demos of women. Aristophanes had tested the wily tragedian on his chosen ground, that of the Unjust logos, and shown that the atheistic poet can succeed against the city where Socrates had failed. Despite Euripides' initial difficulty in transforming himself into female form, he could nevertheless call on (or manipulate) allies to come to his assistance. At the end of the play, he had forged a ready alliance with the demos of women, although at a cost. Where Socrates is destroyed by an individual fanatic, Euripides' scheme to escape persecution by the city succeeds.

Although Aristophanes comically portrays Euripides as a rascal, *Women at the Thesmophoria* nevertheless bestows on the tragedian a high compliment. His depictions of the doings of the demos of women, for which he had been persecuted, are fully vindicated by Aristophanes' own portrayal of their deeds in the comedy. Whatever one might say about the morality of his tragedies, one cannot deny the tragic poet's knowledge of human nature. In this way, Aristophanes indicates that Euripides is a superior poet to Agathon who, although he could easily appear as a woman, is obliged to suppress eros in his poetry for the sake of making it appear beautiful. The poet who seeks to beautify tragedy so that it echoes the city's own pretensions as being the divine nexus of the common good (his chorus of women are perfectly pious), can be exposed as artificial and pretentious. The palpable difference between Agathon the man and Agathon the poet suffices as proof of this artificiality.

Euripides' true ally had not been his fellow tragedian, Agathon, but rather the mysterious Kinsman – the character in the play that appeared identical to comedy itself. Like Euripides, the Kinsman is a masculine figure who must undergo a difficult transformation in order to appear in

female form.[176] Like Euripides, the Kinsman is an erotic man who also understands the ways of women. The two men rely heavily on each other, Euripides on the Kinsman to plead on his behalf, the Kinsman on Euripides to rescue him at the end of the play. The two figures form a dual act, their close kinship reflecting the more general truth that the comedy itself is a (qualified) defense of the great tragedian and that Aristophanes borrows much from Euripides' inventions. good

Nevertheless, Euripides' victory in *Women at the Thesmophoria* is qualified by two weighty considerations. First, it is not at all clear whether Euripides' poetry, as true as it might be to the erotic nature of human beings, can ever be made compatible with the requirements of the city. The compromise he forges with the Thesmophorian women at the end of the play suffices to raise the question as to whether a moderate, politically salutary Euripides would not destroy the very essence of his poetry. The proposed solution to Euripides' persecution thus might very well prove worse than the original problem.

Second, Euripides' female antagonists are comic representations of the city who are easily beguiled and whose pretensions at representing the common good are shown up to be hypocritical and self-serving. They appear as absurd as the incompetent assembly in *Acharnians* when going about its business. Moreover, their standards are very low: it is sufficient for the women that Euripides cease depicting them as they are (they would say slander them), without any greater demand for his being a better citizen. Unable to identify atheists, only atheistic acts, they merely

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[176] That is, the play uses masculinity as a trope for atheism. It is notable that the Kinsman is also interested in natural philosophy. He is very interested in Euripides' explanation of the natural causes of hearing and seeing, although, being a comic figure, he makes a hash of the teaching (*Women at the Thesmophoria*, 11-21).

demand that the difference between their claims to represent the common good and their individual acts be not examined too closely.

It is in *Frogs* that Aristophanes weighs Euripides according to the highest standard of the city and finds him wanting. Whereas the Thesmophorian women were a collective, Aeschylus is a flesh-and-blood poet who appears to champion the morality of the city, together with its gods – the exact antithesis of Euripides--without being ignorant of its problems. Moreover, the debate over who is the greater poet is presided over by no ordinary judge but by the god of theatre himself, Dionysus. It is impossible to imagine a setting where Euripides' erotic individualism and Aeschylus' public-spirited *thumos* could be more fairly debated and adjudicated.

Now, it might seem that the conclusion of *Frogs* removes any ambiguity as to question of the superiority of Aeschylus to Euripides and hence justice to injustice. Dionysus decides on Aeschylus. Does this mean that Aristophanes has vanquished once and for all Euripides and the Unjust logos he represents? Lest we jump to hasty conclusions, it is important to note that while the verdict of the debate is clear enough, the grounds of the verdict are obscure. For, in the beginning of the play, the soft and effeminate Dionysus is filled with such a passion for Euripides that he is willing to risk the terrors of Hades in order to retrieve Euripides from the dead, rather than put up with the drivel produced by the second-rate tragedians remaining in Athens. Dionysus does not even consider Aeschylus as a possibility for rescue, yet he ends up choosing Aeschylus over Euripides at the end. What made Dionysus change his mind? To answer this question, we must consider carefully how Aristophanes characterizes Dionysus by learning about him in the first part of the play.

Dionysus and Herakles

The play opens with Dionysus already on his way to Herakles' house in order to find out from the burly hero the best way to get to Hades.[177] Like Euripides (and unlike Strepsiades), Dionysus has already formulated his plan and merely seeks the means of carrying it into effect. However, whereas Euripides went to Agathon's to ask for his assistance and borrow his feminine accoutrements, and whereas Dicaeopolis needed to borrow the rags of Telephus from Euripides (*Acharnians*, 429-431), Dionysus already appears on stage in his Herakles suit. The god of the theatre needs no one to lend him outfits. Like the divine Clouds, he has the ability to appear in the form of his choice, an ability that mortal poets can only dream of possessing.[178] Nevertheless, although Dionysus is not recognized even by his own devotees when he descends into Hades, his costume does not for a moment deceive his brother Herakles. Herakles' immediate recognition of Dionysus is marked by uncontrollable laughter at the unexpected sight of the effeminate deity decked out in a lionskin and holding a great club in his delicate hands, and this is the first suggestion of a theological principle that will later become important in *Frogs*: only a god can recognize another god.

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[177] This discussion will use throughout Thomas Pangle's unpublished translation of *Frogs*. When necessary, it will provide the original Greek from *Aristophanes' Comediae*, ed. F.W. Hall and W.M. Geldart, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

[178] Mortal poets must depend on one another. In *Acharnians*, because comedy cannot provoke real pity, Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes has recourse to borrow Euripides' tragic techniques. Euripides, for his part, depends on the Kinsman to make his case before the Thesmophorian women.

Indeed, their divinity (both are sons of Zeus) is just about all that Herakles and Dionysus have in common. Aristophanes caricatures Herakles, the (literal) apotheosis of manliness in the Greek pantheon, as a kind of jock of mythological proportions. Adept at bashing heads in, eating vast quantities of food and satisfying other strong physical urges, Herakles approximates the low range of pleasures characteristic of the barbarian, such as we saw in the Scythian archer in *Women at the Thesmophoria*. His lack of refinement is reflected in the fact that he answers the door himself, with no servant boy to come and announce visitors (38-39). Where Euripides and Agathon are found in the midst of writing plays, and Socrates is found investigating the things in heaven, Herakles is apparently doing absolutely nothing. The lack of action at home reflects the lack of action upstairs, in the mental realm. Lack of intelligence, as it turns out, will be one of Euripides' principal lines of attack against Aeschylus' thumotic tragedy.

Dionysus' attempt to imitate his brother only serves to underscore the manifest contrast between the two gods. Where Herakles is the image of manliness, Dionysus is the consummate lover of pleasure and ease, appearing on stage in a Herakles costume worn incongruously over his usual *krokōtos* and soft women's boots (46-47).[179] His costume reflects his paradoxical mixture of effeminacy with Heraklean manliness, the latter serving as a tough cloak to cover his soft nature. Dionysus thus manages to unite within himself the two fundamental, antithetical principles of Aeschylus and Euripides: manly thumos on the one hand and soft hedonism on the other. The juxtaposition of the two principles affords Aristophanes many comic opportunities to undermine Dionysus' attempts at manly boasting with sexual innuendo that points to the softness underneath

[179] The androgynous Agathon, we recall, also wore a *krokōtos*. He has pretensions of appearing as Dionysus (*Women at the Thesmophoria*, 138).

it. Thus, Dionysus' discovery of Euripides takes place in the context of a manly boast that is belied by cowardice and softness. He claims to have caught a feverish passion for Euripidean tragedy as he read the *Andromeda* while serving on an Athenian trireme that was involved in a naval battle in which he claims to have sunk "twelve or thirteen" enemy ships (49-50).[180] However, Xanthius' indications that such a story is a lie is confirmed by the only example in the play of Dionysus actually exercising his boating skills, when he crosses the lake of the underworld with Charon, the undead boatman. Dionysus embarrasses himself by not even knowing where to sit on the boat, and then having to receive instructions from Charon about how to row: "How will I be able - / Inexperienced, not a seaman, not a Salaminian - / Nevertheless to row?" he asks (197-205). That Dionysus' manly boast to have discovered a love for Euripides during a naval battle proves to be a lie is perfectly in keeping with his passion for this particular tragic poet. Later we will see the consequences of Dionysus' taking on the principles that Euripides promotes in his tragedies.

Given Dionysus' innate softness, only a very powerful need could have incited the god of the theatre to take on the herculean effort of facing the terrors of the underworld in order to rescue Euripides. As he explains in terms intelligible to his brother, his "sudden longing" for Euripides is as powerful as Herakles' longing for pea soup when he is ravenously hungry (61-62).[181] This need

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[180] Cf. Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*, 263. The battle of Arginusae, which took place less than a year before *Frogs* was staged, was the last Athenian victory of the Peloponnesian War.

[181] In *Birds*, Peisthetairos bribes Herakles to make peace with the birds by promising him a sumptuous dinner. Poseidon, outraged, calls him "a simpleton and just a stomach" ("Birds" trans. Wayne Ambler and Thomas L. Pangle in *Aristophanes' Critique of the Gods* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2013).1603-1606. The characterization of Herakles in *Birds* is consistent with *Frogs*.

has come about as the result of the absolute dearth of talent on the tragic stage since the deaths of Euripides and Sophocles (72).[182] None of the current figures will do: younger poets like Xenocles and Pythangelus are mere "chatterboxes" and "spoilers of the art" who "piss" on Tragedy (86-87 and 93-95). Nevertheless, Herakles points out, Euripides is not Dionysus' only option, for Sophocles also died recently and is a much more respectable poet than Euripides. Dionysus not only admits the truth of this claim, but even argues that Euripides' badness speaks in his favor: Sophocles' good temper would render him "content" (εὔκολος) with his lot in Hades, whereas Euripides would do all he could to assist Dionysus in the break-out (82).[183] *Women at the Thesmophoria* furnishes ample proof of Euripides' ability as an escape-artist. More surprising, however, is the conspicuous silence of both deities in regard to Aeschylus, who suffers the worst insult of all by not even being considered or rejected.[184]

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[182] *Frogs* was presented at the Lenaean festival in 405. Euripides and Sophocles died in the winter of 407-406, only a few months apart.

[183] Henderson considers why Sophocles was not more prominent in *Frogs*, suggesting that "In contrast to Euripides, Sophocles had never been an attractive target in comedy for either personal caricature or poetic parody, whereas the contrast between Aeschylus and Euripides personally, poetically, and as representatives of their eras ideally suited Aristophanes' purposes" (*Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*, 8).

[184] Agathon is apparently not an option either, since he "went away and left me…Partying with the blessed" (83-85). Agathon died about four years after *Frogs* was produced. Cf. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 237.

Herakles asks about Sophocles because he has, despite his barbaric ignorance of the finer pleasures in life, strong reservations about Euripides (104-106). The Euripidean lines that thrill Dionysus, such as "Aether, bedroom of Zeus," "the foot of Time," and "The Mind is not willing to swear upon sacred victims of sacrifice, / But tongue swears falsely on its own, apart from Mind," are, for Herakles, "roguish tricks" (100-103). Indeed, Herakles not only expresses his private misgivings about these lines but even asserts that Dionysus should also share his opinion (104). Why would Herakles, the god least likely in the Greek pantheon to bother himself about literary criticism, have such decided objections to Euripides, objections, indeed, that are even vindicated by Aristophanes by the outcome of the play? As we saw, the only striking similarity between Herakles and Dionysus was their godhood, the fact that enabled Herakles to recognize Dionysus immediately in spite of his disguise. It seems likely that Herakles' objections to Euripides have nothing to do with literary criticism and everything to do with the fact that both Herakles and Dionysus are sons of Zeus and that Euripides is a notorious atheist. "Aether, bedroom of Zeus" points to the superiority of nature over the gods and recalls Socrates' teaching that ethereal vortex has replaced Zeus as prima causa (*Clouds* 423). The third line, an excuse for oath-breaking and one of Euripides' most notorious verses, mocks the sanctity of oaths and undermines reverence for the divinities that are supposed to guarantee punishment should oaths be broken.[185] Despite

[185] In *Women at the Thesmophoria* Euripides swears to the Kinsman by "Ether the home of Zeus" (272). The Kinsman is by no means reassured by such an oath and reminds him "that the mind swore…not merely the tongue" (275-276). Nevertheless, Euripides proves faithful to the Kinsman when put to the test, assuring him that "I will never give you up, so long as I draw breath" (926).

Herakles' ignorance, he is more clear-sighted than Dionysus, whose passion for Euripides has blinded to him as to the implications of... for himself.

However, it is the central line concerning "the foot of time" that indicates the paradox at the heart of Dionysus' passion for Euripides. The line is taken from Euripides' *Bacchae*, the tragedy that relates Dionysus' appearance in Greece from the far-east and the obstinate refusal of Pentheus, king of Thebes, to recognize the new god's divinity. Herakles' instinctive objection to this tragedy would appear to derive from Euripides' vivid portrayal of the excesses of religious ecstasy and the destructive potential of the Dionysian cult to the rational political order if it is not contained. In this way, *Bacchae* fits Aristophanes' general caricature of Euripidean tragedy as encouraging atheism. Ironically, however, the line that Dionysus quotes also serves as a sharp reminder of his identity as a god outside the comic context of satyr-plays and Aristophanean comedy, the majestic and terrifying Dionysus who demands the homage of mortals and punishes the impious.[186] The chorus remarks, just before the play's climax where the deranged king goes out on his fatal quest to spy on the Bacchic women, that Pentheus' impending punishment is justified and that all impious men will get their just deserts sooner or later: "The gods craftily conceal / the unhastening tread of time, / and they hunt down the impious man" (*Bacchae*, 888). This thought recalls the Thesmophorian women, who, after the discovery of the Kinsman's imposture, attempt to reestablish the laws of piety by proving that the gods *instantly* punish those

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Dionysus repeats the notorious line that the tongue and not the mind swore at the end of *Frogs*, when he decides in favor of Aeschylus (1471).

[186] Cf. Euripides *Bacchae*, trans. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm in *The Greek Plays* (New York: Modern Library, 2013), 741-788.

who commit sacrilege (*Women at the Thesmophoria*, 663-677). Thus, Dionysus quotes this line from Euripides, unconscious of his own position in Euripides' own thought. Euripides' poetic power has exerted such an influence over Dionysus that the god has forgotten who he is. The paradox of the first part of *Frogs* lies in the fact that Dionysus is infatuated with a poet the tendency of whose plays denies the god's own divinity. It takes the journey into the underworld and the crisis of the climax of part one to jolt Dionysus into consciousness of this paradox.

Although Dionysus is a god who can take on various disguises, he is by no means omniscient. He does not depend on Herakles for costumes, but he does depend on him for the knowledge he lacks. Having never been to Hades, he must find out from Herakles what to expect, since Herakles has actually descended there and returned to tell the tale.[187] In this respect, Dionysus is no different from the mortal race of human beings who also have no certain knowledge of Hades and must depend on rumor and speculation. Dionysus appears on stage in his Herakles costume precisely because such rumors have troubled even him. The god explains to his brother that "the reason why, wearing this costume, / I came imitating you, is so that those foreign hosts / Of yours you'd tell me about, if I should be in need – the ones / You dealt with when you went after Cerberus" (108-111). Dionysus expects to encounter terrifying infernal monsters resembling the many-headed, serpent-tailed hound of the underworld, Cerberus, whom Herakles defeated and retrieved in his final labor. A coward by nature, the god of the theatre plays to his particular strength by imitating Herakles in the hopes that the mere appearance of manliness will be sufficient to scare off any nasty fiends and avoid unpleasant confrontations.

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[187] For an account of Herakles' twelfth labor see Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83-84.

Aristophanes gives us the opportunity to test the veracity of Herakles' advice when Dionysus and Xanthius take their leave of Herakles and make their descent. Herakles' guidance was as follows: first, Dionysus will cross a great lake in a small boat (37-39); second, he will see a "myriad" of terrifying serpents and beasts (43-44); third, he will encounter an ordure-filled slough of despond in which various kinds of sinners, including swearers of false oaths and mother- or father- beaters are wallowing (46-52). Finally, Dionysus and Xanthius will encounter those initiated into the mysteries who will then explain to the pair what they need to do after that to reach the dwelling of Pluto (56-62). Now, as it turns out, Herakles' guidance is very patchy. They indeed find Charon, the boatman of the underworld, who takes Dionysus across the lake, (Xanthius, who did not fight in the naval battle, has to walk around the lake), and they find the blessed initiates who guide them to Pluto's door. However, Aristophanes causes us to doubt whether they really see the terrifying beasts and sinners in Hades, that is, all the frightening stories that prompted Dionysus to wear his disguise in the first place.

The least we can say about the monsters and the sinners is that they cannot be verified in Aristophanes' depiction; the most, that they positively do not exist. In either case, Aristophanes' artful ambiguity concerning the terrors of the underworld diminishes their powers of intimidation.[188] After the lake, Xanthius remarks that they best hurry since they have arrived at the region of the beasts (277-278). The journey, in fact, has been so easy up to this point (with the

[188] Of course, through the comic lens the underworld will necessarily appear as absurd. This fact in itself says nothing about Aristophanes' attitude to Greek religion. What is important is the choices he makes in representing Hades. It is significant, for example, that Herakles' descriptions are not fully verified.

only unpleasant encounter that with the frogs and the discomfort of having to row) that Dionysus feels secure enough to indulge in some risk-free boasting. Herakles had underestimated him as "being a fighter" (μάχιμον ὄντα) and "a lover of honor" (φιλοτιμούμενος) (280-281). We saw previously that Xanthius heckled Dionysus when he tried to boast that he had partaken in the naval battle. This time, he discovers an even more effective method of taking his master down a peg by playing a nasty practical joke. He claims to hear a sound from behind, and Dionysus, not even waiting to verify with his own eyes the source of the mysterious noise, cowers behind Xanthius. According to the slave (who remains suspiciously unperturbed), the sound emanates from none other than the terrifying Empusa, a shape-shifting monster of nightmares that has one bronze leg and another made of cow dung. Although the monster does nothing and leaves as quickly and as mysteriously as she appeared, it still takes three solemn oaths to coax the god from his hiding place (305-306). The comic slapstick of the Empusa episode serves as a serious representation of the general nature of frightening stories of the underworld, where those frightened must rely on the sole testimony of those, like Xanthius, who claim to know.[189] It is hardly a coincidence that Empusa happens to be the favorite hobgoblin of parents to scare children into behaving themselves.

[189] Cf Christopher Baldwin's point that "We *hear* of the punishments and terrors that await the unjust in the afterlife, but we never *see* them for ourselves and altogether lack any credible evidence of the truth of the stories told of the punishments and terrors that await the unjust in the afterlife," "Learning the Lesson of Dionysus: Aristophanes' Tragicomic Wisdom and Poetic Politics in the *Frogs*" in *The Political Theory of Aristophanes: Explorations in Poetic Wisdom* (Albany: New York State University, 2014), 188.

As with the monsters, there is strong reason to question whether Herakles was telling the truth when he claimed to have seen the hardened sinners wallowing in "ever-flowing shit" in Hades (146). Xanthius avoids answering the question as to whether he saw the parricides and swearers of false oaths, and Dionysus, when asked, points to the audience (274-277).[190] This comic ploy suggests that there are many sinners in the world above, but does not answer the decisive question about their existence and suffering in the world below, in the manner Herakles had described.

Frogs and Initiates

In fact, Dionysus does encounter creatures that wallow in the mud, but they were not at all mentioned by Herakles and do not match the description of the sinners. The "frogs" call themselves "Limnaian children of streams," (λιμναῖα κρηνῶν τέκνα) a double entendre referring at once to a festival of Dionysus that took place in a district in Athens called the Limnaia (literally "the marshes") where there was a sanctuary of Dionysus, and of course to frogs, the natural inhabitants of marshes (211). However, these devotees of Dionysus fail utterly to recognize their master, whom they address merely as a "busybody" (ὦ πολλὰ πράττων) (228). Charon introduces the frogs by referring to them paradoxically as frog-swans, a strange mixture of ugliness and beauty (207). When they were alive, they "sang out" with the "sacred Pots-worshippers" who passed by the sacred precinct on the third day of the Anthesteria festival, when the spirits of the dead were celebrated. The name "frog-swans" captures exactly the ambiguity of the frogs' music in worship of the god. For, according to the Frogs themselves, their music is swan-like, being triply blessed

[190] This joke resembles that in *Clouds*, when Just logos throws his cloak into the audience ("Clouds", 1103-1104).

by the three deities most renowned for their skill in music, the Muses, Pan, and Apollo; they themselves do not think their music is ugly (229-331). Yet, to Dionysus, to whom the music is supposedly dedicated, such music is horrible croaking. When he tells them to desist, they defy him by croaking all the more, and the god, momentarily forgetting the considerable discomfort of the rowing, attempts to out-croak them in turn. The outcome of the croaking contest terminates inconclusively as Charon announces their arrival at the other side of the lake and the frogs recede into the background. The episode is the only challenge that Dionysus faces until he arrives at the house of Pluto, and he has got through it easily, if not positively victorious.

In contrast to the horrible croaking of the frogs, the initiates whom Dionysus and Xanthius encounter just before they reach Pluto's house sing beautiful songs, even though they worship the same god. The first thing we hear of the frogs is their interminable "Brekekekex koax koax!" whereas the entry of the initiates is presaged by "an air of flutes" (313). The frogs' "varying chorale" consists of the unintelligible "pompholugopaphlasmasin" and excites nothing but disgust in the sensitive god, while the delightful Iacchus-hymn of the initiates causes the two travelers to pause and listen in wonder.[191] Such a marked contrast indicates that the chorus of frogs and the chorus of initiates reflect the duality in the underworld generally attributed to the good and the

[191] Richard H. Allison argues that "from close consideration of the actual wording of the scene, and of its setting and action…the frogs were indeed unseen and were only heard singing from somewhere offstage" ("Amphibian Ambiguities: Aristophanes and his Frogs" in *Greece and Rome*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1983, 8). Allison's argument fits very well with the point made here that the frightening things mentioned by Herakles are never seen.

wicked.[192] After all, the frogs appear in exactly the place where (according to Herakles) we should have expected to find the sinners, while the initiates who join in the "pure, sacred dance" (ὁσίοις μύσταις χορείαν) are obviously the comic approximation of those who dwell in the blessed regions (336). Moreover, the dual choruses never encounter one another – a point unique in the Aristophanean comedies we have – just as it would be impossible for the blessed to intermingle with the sinners in the afterlife.[193] Nevertheless, in spite of the difference in music, both the frogs and the initiates are worshippers of Dionysus, for Iacchus is nothing but a manifestation of Dionysus worshipped by the mystery cults.[194] Far from being punished or tortured, the frogs revel in the muck they live in and take joy in the music they produce while those, like Dionysus, who have to listen to them are the ones who suffer. The duality between the frogs and the initiates does not correspond, therefore, to the duality between the good and the wicked, or to the pious or the impious, but rather to the duality of good and bad poetry.

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[192] In *Gorgias* Socrates reserves a place of endless punishment for "those who have done the ultimate injustices and have become incurable through such unjust deeds" 525c. On the other hand, the souls who have "lived piously and with truth" (Socrates specifies a private man – including a philosopher!) will be sent by Rhadamanthus to the islands of the blessed (*Gorgias*, 526c-d). Cf. *Republic*, 619a-e.

[193] Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 241. Strauss asserts that "The duality of choruses corresponds to the duality of the terrors of Hades and the bliss in Hades" (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, 241).

[194] Pangle explains that the name Iacchus closely resembles "Bacchus" (see note 66, *Frogs*, 72).

The chorus of initiates reveals the standard which distinguishes them from the frogs by specifying who must be excluded from joining the mysteries. The frogs, on the other hand, had elicited no such discrimination. Now, it becomes apparent that the numerous exclusions mentioned by the chorus refer not only literally to the mysteries but also figuratively to comedy as an artform. In this way, the qualities that qualify one to partake in the mysteries happen to be the same qualities that make the best comic poet. This extended double-entendre would have been much more obvious to an ancient audience than to a modern one, since comedy was performed in two festivals in honor of Dionysus.[195] In other words, the performance of comedy actually formed part of the worship of the god of which the mysteries were also a part. The close connection between drama and religious worship enables Aristophanes to exploit the running ambiguity in the play between the underworld setting and the odd fact that the chorus frequently breaks the dramatic "fourth wall" by drawing attention to their actual identity as the Chorus in the midst of a performance.[196] This ambiguity also applies to the frogs, who behave in Hades in exactly the same manner as if they were still celebrating the Anthesteria in Athens. In this way, the setting itself points to the way in which the qualities necessary for initiation also illustrate the qualities necessary for good comedy.

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[195] For a useful discussion of these two festivals, see Edith Hall, "Comedy and Athenian festival culture" in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 306-321.

[196] Comedy has the ability to break the fourth wall, since drawing attention to the artificiality of the scene makes it all the more absurd. *Frogs* makes special use of this technique. The opening of the comedy, for example, begins with Xanthius asking whether he should "say one of the accustomed things…At which the spectators always laugh?" (1-2).

What then are the qualities necessary to be an initiate in the mysteries or a comic poet? The initiates must have pure judgment and have danced "the orgiastic rites of the well-born Muses" as well as been initiated in the "Bacchic rites of bull-eating Cratinus's language," that is, the language of comedy.[197] For, like comedy, the sacred mysteries involve mockery - even mockery of sacred things - but such mockery must take place within bounds: those who "delight in the words of buffoons spoken at inappropriate times" must be excluded (358). As a result, the Dionysian revelry paradoxically contains the comic subversion of the city's conventions for the purposes of justice, just as the mysteries permit the ecstatic release of passions, which would otherwise be a threat to the city, for pious ends. As a result, not only do the initiates have to have been inducted into the language of comedy, but they must also prove they are just citizens. In addition to the previous requirements, the initiates specify that those who do not "dissolve hateful civil strife" (στάσιν ἐχθρὰν) are not "good-tempered" (εὔκολός) citizens, who cause strife out of desiring private gains or taking bribes when the city is under threat must not be admitted (361). It is significant that, at this point, Dionysus takes no notice of the Chorus' reminder of the fundamental connection between poetry and justice. He comes out of hiding during the speech, but does not reveal his identity to his own worshippers. Even the prospect of joining the fun of the procession and poking

[197] Cratinus was a rival comic poet who enjoyed considerable success (his *Satyrs* won second place behind Aristophanes' *Knights*). The chorus of knights refers to Cratinus' success, stating that he "once coursed along with much praise /And flowed over the smooth plains, and, sweeping away oaks and plane trees and enemies, / He used to carry them from their place, roots and all" (526-528). It was not possible to go to a drinking party without singing one of the comic songs in his plays (529-530). Nevertheless, Aristophanes taunts Cratinus as a has-been (533).

fun at the principal political personalities of the year, or of ogling some nubile girls, does nothing to weaken his determination to find Euripides (416-420).

Pluto's House

The conclusion of the first part of the play brings the problem of Dionysus' identity to a climax. Having finally arrived at Pluto's door, Xanthius has to remind his master "to assume the form of Heracles" as well as "his garb" (463). Although Dionysus had been in his Herakles outfit all the time, he had not been trying to play the part. For this reason, the Chorus had seen the duo only as strangers and uninitiated, and not as Herakles with his attendant slave (458 and 459). Dionysus once again assumes the form of the mighty hero by banging on the door and shouting "boy," just as he had done at Herakles' house (464). However, whereas Herakles had immediately recognized his brother, without any words being spoken, Dionysus announces himself with comic over-acting to Aecus as "Herakles the tough" (Ἡρακλῆς ὁ καρτερός) (464). Aeacus' explosive reaction to this news proves that Dionysus' scheme to ward off danger by assuming the form of Herakles has backfired spectacularly.

Up until now Dionysus had pursued his plan and met with no setbacks, except for the minor inconvenience of the frogs. Now, however, he meets a serious reversal, not because of the monsters he had hoped to avoid with his costume, but precisely as a result of his costume. The moment he identifies himself as the manly hero, Aeacus subjects the pseudo-Herakles to such a torrent of abuse that he soils himself a second time.[198] Aeacus is furious because Herakles had come and "grabbed [Cerberus] by the throat and running off took him - / Whom I was guarding!" (468-469).

[198] The first was when he saw Empusa (308).

This compressed account of a very famous story comically deflates Herakles' most famous and impressive labor. Did the hero descend into the underworld and wrestle with the three-headed guardian of the gates of Hades, or did he make off with a hapless canine like a common thief? As we saw already, Herakles' other fearful descriptions of the terrors of the underworld were by no means confirmed by Dionysus and Xanthius' actual experience, and a large part of assuming the guise of Herakles consisted in inordinate boasting. Strange also is the fact that Aeacus was guarding Cerberus at the time of the theft, and not vice versa, for surely, according to the stories, Cerberus was much fiercer than Aeacus.[199] We find out later that Cerberus was not the only stolen item Herakles made off with in his infernal foray, nor was Aeacus the only victim. The two imposing female innkeepers accuse Dionysus-Herakles of having gobbled up "sixteen" loaves of bread, "twenty half-obol portions of stewed meat" together with a large quantity of garlic, pickled fish and cheese (551-560). The play shrinks the incredible feats of heroism that Herakles allegedly performed in the underworld to the dimensions of acts of petty theft that could have taken place at any roadside tavern. Nevertheless, Aeacus compensates for the humdrum nature of the theft

[199] In *Gorgias* Aeacus appears as a judge of the underworld, along with Rhadamanthus (526c-d). Apollodorus states that Aeacus was "Of all men…the most pious" and that after he died he was "honoured in the realm of Pluto…and guards the keys of Hades" (*The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126. This characterization of Aeacus fits Plato's use of him in *Gorgias*. Cerberus, according to Apollodorus, "had three dogs' heads, the tail of a dragon, and on his back, the heads of all kinds of snakes" (*The Library of Greek Mythology*, 83). Dover suggests that since the doorkeeper was a slave, the identity of Aeacus was a later interpolation (Kenneth Dover, *Aristophanes' Frogs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 55.

implied in his plain account with a very colorful series of threats, alluding to all sorts of horrible monsters that he will summon to destroy Herakles-Dionysus as soon as he can fetch them: the criminal's innards will be ripped out by the "hundred-headed Echidna"; his lungs will be wrenched by a "Tartessian lamprey"; and his "bleeding balls / along with [his] guts / Will be torn apart by Tiethrasian Gorgons" (472-478). Although Aristophanes' comedy diminishes the magnitude of Herakles' deeds, it offers a true-to-life imitation of the threats of punishment in the underworld. Whatever the reality might be, the threats of future punishment can always call upon the most horrifying images.

Once Dionysus realizes that he is in for a beating for appearing in the underworld as Herakles, he attempts to swap roles with Xanthius. In doing so, he makes clear that his passion for Euripides goes beyond mere admiration for his skill as a poet. He also takes on the hedonistic principle that had underpinned the Unjust Logos ("Clouds", 1071-1082). Indeed, Euripides himself had executed a similar tactic when he tricked the Kinsman into daring the perils of the Thesmophoria on his behalf, for the Kinsman had volunteered to bear the brunt of the women's wrath which should, according to justice, have been directed at Euripides. Likewise, in trading roles, Dionysus repeats this strategy by attempting to make Xanthius the object of Aeacus' wrath. However, Euripides carried out his clever maneuver on the basis of the hedonistic principle that one should pursue pleasure and avoid pain. While this strategy might work for a mortal, it has disastrous consequences for a god. The comic irony of the climax derives precisely from the

paradox that Dionysus' attempt to pursue the teaching of Euripides runs the risk of his own annihilation.[200]

In seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, Dionysus has to forget his own divinity in order to trade places with his slave. Xanthius, on the other hand, scorns the prospect of being unjustly punished in order to attain the place of his master and the concomitant right to lord it over Dionysus. Despite his low birth, he is much more conscious of Dionysus' dignity than the god himself is. Xanthius accordingly accepts Dionysus' proposal without hesitation. Of course, at this very moment, Aeacus disappears and is replaced by a maid offering Xanthius-Herakles delicious meals and freshly trimmed dancing girls in their bloom (514). With the pain having disappeared and the pleasure reappearing, Dionysus performs a volte-face and demands that they revert to their original roles. In doing so he commits a manifest injustice against Xanthius, who calls upon the

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[200] Nietzsche attributes to Euripides the responsibility for destroying tragedy as an artform. His analysis of Euripidean tragedy, which he labels contemptuously as "aesthetic Socratism," argues that Euripides destroyed tragedy by rationalizing it (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 78. Nietzsche also argues that Euripides recanted his Socratism in his final tragedy, *Bacchae*, a kind of artistic admission that he was wrong: "This is what we are told by a poet who opposed Dionysus with heroic valor throughout a long life – and who finally ended his career with a glorification of his adversary and with suicide, like a giddy man who, to escape the horrible vertigo he can no longer endure, casts himself from a tower" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 78). Nietzsche's remarks here, although beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail, resonate eerily with the potential for self-annihilation that results from Dionysus' love of the tragedian.

gods to witness his maltreatment, a futile gesture given that it was a god who was responsible for the injustice in the first place (528-529). Dionysus then compounds the injustice by insulting Xanthius, calling him "mindless" for supposing "that being a slave and a mortal, you will be the son of Alcmene?!" (531). Only in complete safety does he remember the distinction between mortals and gods. When, predictably, the nubile maid disappears and is replaced by two overbearing female inn-keepers calling on their respective patrons, Cleon and Hyperbolus (two Athenian demagogues) to punish Dionysus-Herakles in the most terrible ways imaginable, he crawls back to Xanthius. Xanthius naturally exacts stronger assurance for the favor, and Dionysus is obliged to swear oaths that he will not attempt to go back on the trade again. This time Aeacus returns in order to punish that "dog-stealer," not with the hellish monsters he had threatened to bring along, but with three reliable goons (605). The slave proves he has more mettle than his master by defying Aeacus and his toughs and by preparing to defend himself despite his slim chances. Dionysus encourages Aeacus to take vengeance on the criminal, giving Xanthius just enough time to conceive a cunning scheme to deflect Aeacus' wrath onto his erstwhile master. A law existed in Athens that permitted a citizen to have his slave "tested by torture" by an opponent in court "to see if testimony against the owner could be elicited."[201] Xanthius therefore proposes that Aeacus test slave-Dionysus in order to prove that he is not responsible for the theft that Herakles committed.

[201] Thomas Pangle notes that "In Athens, slaves were not allowed to testify in court as witnesses…but could be offered by a citizen-owner, to be 'tested by torture" (usually whipping) by the opponent to see if testimony against the owner could be elicited…" note 114, *Frogs*, 76.

Dionysus' Declaration

Dionysus now finds himself in an impossible situation. Instead of frightening off any potential terrors he had imagined to be lurking in Hades, his plan to descend into Hades in the guise of Herakles brings upon himself the physical punishment he had been trying to avoid. Although there is little doubt that he would have perjured himself a third time had he had the opportunity (Xanthius expects him to do that, in spite of the oath he swore), Xanthius' idea catches him by surprise, for he had not expected that he might be punished as Xanthius' slave. All that is left to Dionysus is the nuclear option: to cast aside his disguise and reveal his true identity, for no one could torture a god according to the law. He suddenly proclaims that he cannot be tested by torture because he is immortal:

> I declare, that I am immortal – Dionysus son of Zeus;
>
> And THIS is a slave! (631-632).

This climactic moment draws its comedy from its parallel in *Bacchae* when Dionysus casts off his disguise and reveals his true identity to Cadmus (*Bacchae* 1320ff.). However, whereas in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus proclaims his cruel punishment of the house of Cadmus for failing to venerate him, in *Frogs* Aristophanes subverts our expectations when Aeacus refuses to take seriously the god's claim.[202] Indeed, Xanthius takes advantage of the situation to suggest to Aeacus that he should beat Dionysus all the more, "For if he is a god, he won't feel it" (633-634). This comically anti-climactic climax is the end result of Dionysus' Euripidizing, of his own failure to take seriously the distinction between mortal and god is it this, or rather his failure to take seriously

[202] In *Bacchae* the punishment is that Pentheus is killed by his mother-in-law Agave, Cadmus' daughter (*Bacchae*, 1043-1152).

enough the atheistic implications of Eu'r poetry? . All Dionysus can do is respond that, since Xanthius also claims to be a god, he should be beaten an equal number of strokes (635-636). Xanthius accepts this proposal and stipulates that whoever cries out first should be considered the mortal, for he reckons that he will be able to endure the pain better than his soft master. Aeacus the judge is, of course, more delighted than ever at being given the opportunity to beat not just one, but two victims, calling Xanthius a "magnanimous gentleman" (γεννάδας ἀνήρ) who goes "the way of justice" (χωρεῖς γὰρ ἐς τὸ δίκαιον) (640-641).

The outcome of the beating test is inconclusive. For, as it turns out, both Xanthius and Dionysus feel about equal levels of pain. Hence Aeacus cannot distinguish between a "real" god and a slave who claims to be a god. It is patently untrue that a "god" feels no pain. As a result, Aeacus has to leave the decision to "the master himself," Pluto, and "Pherephatta" (Persephone), "since they're gods too" (672-673). The first part of the play finishes with the theological principle alluded to at the beginning: that only a god can recognize a god. Aeacus' refusal to believe Dionysus' claim when he proclaims his identity and the comic slapstick of the god and the slave trading blows alert us to the serious corollary of this theological principle. Dionysus must rely on opinion for mortals to know that he is a god, and cannot depend on automatic, spontaneous recognition, as was the case with his (divine) brother Herakles. Of course, this is tantamount to recognizing that the gods must depend on the poets in order for them to be recognized, that is, believed in, by mortals, for the poets are the masters of opinion in the city. The stakes could not be higher for the epic confrontation between Aeschylus and Euripides in the second part of the play.

Chapter 4: Frogs (Part II)

Part One of *Frogs* had followed the descent of Dionysus and Xanthius into the underworld in order to rescue Euripides and endow Athens once again with a true tragic genius. The decision of the god of the theatre to rescue Euripides in particular was based partly on the sound practical consideration that he (unlike Sophocles) was a rascal and would be willing to aid and abet his escape from the underworld. However, the god's chief consideration arose from a passionate preference for Euripides above all poets, a passion so intense that it temporarily blinded him to Euripides' shortcomings, above all, his notorious atheism. The catalyst for the action of Part One of the comedy is Euripides' peculiar poetic attractiveness to Dionysus personally and not as a result of any consideration of the tragic poet's potential contribution to the common good of Athens, even though Athens happened to be lacking a good tragedian. In other words, the emphasis in Part One is squarely on the private (Dionysus' preference for Euripides), not on the political (whether Euripides will benefit Athens). In the second part of the play, the political makes a dramatic return and, by the end, wholly eclipses the private as the standard for judging the rival tragedians. Our study of the remainder of the play will endeavour to explain this development from the private to the political.[203]

In doing so, one must bear in mind a political fact of singular significance that must have loomed in the minds of Aristophanes' audience: Athens faced the very real prospect of imminent annihilation as a political power in Greece. In 405, the year in which *Frogs* was performed, the

[203] Cf. Baldwin, "Learning the Lesson of Dionysus," 184.

political and military situation in Athens was nothing short of catastrophic.[204] Having lost most of the navy after the terrible defeat at Syracuse in 413, Athens was compelled to draw on her last remaining strength in manpower and ships to repel the victorious Lacedemonians and their Persian allies. Her empire was in tatters, her resources were depleted, and there were so few citizens left to man the triremes that the city was forced to replace them with slaves. This last-ditch effort bore fruit in an Athenian naval victory at the battle of Arginusae in 406, a piece of good fortune that briefly delayed the final collapse two years later.[205] Nevertheless the Athens of 405, exhausted, politically divided and on the brink of collapse, bore little resemblance to the Athens of the Periclean golden age.

Parabasis

The advice the Chorus offers in the parabasis (686-738) reflects strongly this sense of imminent catastrophe and foregrounds the emergence of the political question of the good of Athens at the end of the play. It offers "fine advice and teaching" (ξυμπαραινεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν) to the city aimed at rectifying a terrible rift among the citizen body that threatens disaster for the city (687). For, as is often the case in such dire circumstances, military disaster and political disunity go hand in hand. Athens had already experienced two revolutions over the last six years that reawakened the latent antipathy between rich and poor and transformed a relatively unified regime

[204] Victor Ehrenberg offers a discussion of the dire situation in 405 in *From Solon to Socrates*, 263-265.

[205] The question of the best regime (considered in *Birds* for example) is subordinated to the problem of survival in *Frogs*.

into warring factions that had been the chief weakness of other Greek cities.[206] In 411, the year that Aristophanes wrote *Lysistrata*, the democracy was overthrown by an oligarchic party known as the "Four Hundred."[207] Having dissolved the assembly and the council, the oligarchs appointed a bodyguard of some one hundred and twenty youth in order to suppress any perceived opposition, especially among the supporters of the democratic regime. Yet the oppressive rule of the oligarchs lasted only four months before they themselves were ousted and a more moderate government, "the Five Thousand," took over. Although this new more democratic government alleviated somewhat the political crisis in Athens, the resentment caused by the revolution lingered on to poison future action. As a result, the social turmoil generated by the revolution of the Four Hundred forms the background of the political issue that the Chorus in *Frogs* addresses and attempts to alleviate. It is something akin to persuading a mutinous crew of a ship to patch up their differences moments before the ship founders on the reef.

The Chorus attempts to heal the rift between democratic and oligarchic factions in order to foster sufficient political unity to give the city the best chance of surviving the perils of the next few years of war. Ironically enough, the very victory at Arginusae in 406, while giving Athens a military reprieve, exacerbated the tensions already present, since the wealthy, land-owning *kaloikagathoi* resented sharing power with the slaves who were enfranchised for their part in the naval victory. The democrats, in their turn, resented and feared the wealthy for their support for or complicity in the oppressive rule of the Four Hundred. The Chorus attempts to adjudicate the

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[206] The Greek *polis* was generally divided between democratic and oligarchic factions, as is made clear (to give but one example) in the third book of Aristotle's *Politics*.

[207] See Thucydides 8.66 for a detailed account of this event.

dispute by urging the oligarchs, those "wisest by nature" (ὦ σοφώτατοι φύσει), "to relax your anger…and readily accept as kinsmen and as citizens in good standing everyone who fights on our ships," while imploring the democrats to forgive "this one misadventure" (τὴν μίαν ταύτην…ξυμφορὰν) of the oligarchic coup and to reconcile themselves with those "who have fought many a sea battle at your side, as have their fathers, and who are your blood relations" (693-699). The Chorus admits plainly that the raising of slaves to citizen status is "shameful" (αἰσχρόν) according to ordinary standards, while admitting that such a move was "the only intelligent action" (μόνα γὰρ αὐτὰ νοῦν ἔχοντ᾽) performed by Athens in recent times (696).

The simplicity of the appeal for reconciliation, however, belies the difficulty of ever achieving it, for political unity is only the necessary, not the sufficient, condition to deliver Athens from her woeful situation. Even if the city were properly unified, it would still have to be ruled well. It is apparent from the Chorus Leader's remarks that the overthrow of the Four Hundred has not solved the problem of competent rule, for good rule is impossible when scurrilous characters are in charge. He divides the citizen body into the tried-and-true gold coins and "these crummy coppers, struck yesterday or the day before with a stamp of the lowest quality" (725-726). The former consists of those "whom we know to be of good stock and / Sensibly moderate, real men, and just, and noble and good, / And reared in wrestling schools and choruses and music," while the latter comprise the "coppers and aliens and redheads, / And the vile born from the vile…/ The latest arrivals! (727-731).[208] Of course, the nasty coins are the ones that have prevailed – the current

[208] Cf. James Redfield's observation that "the theme of this *parabasis* is the decline of politics as a result of the rise of the new politicians. As bad money drives out good, so the new technical politicians have driven out the old politics of honor. Aristophanes proposes a general amnesty –

demagogue, Cleigenes, "the basest bathman of all," probably would have made Cleon seem like a great statesman.[209] It is, therefore, incumbent on the Athenian citizen body to make use of these better men, even if the situation is so desperate that no amount of good rule can save them in the end: "if you do in some way fall, you will seem to the wise / To have suffered, if you do suffer something, / By hanging from a worthy tree" (736-738).[210]

The Slaves

Although the advice of the Chorus seems remote from the action of Part One, the festering rift in the Athenians citizenry had been foreshadowed in the story arc of Dionysus and Xanthius. We noted already that the comic duo represents at the same time the two dualities of master and slave and god and mortal. However, they also represent the duality of citizen and non-citizen. Dionysus conceives his love for Euripides while (allegedly) serving as a crewman aboard an Athenian trireme that fought in the naval engagement at Arginusae (48-50). While being a god, he

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but more than that he proposes a change of heart. He wants to revive the old politics of the great houses with their tradition of service to the city, to put an end to civil faction and restore to the city the unity of the Persian wars" ("Comedy, Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes' 'Frogs'", 116).

[209] See also the list of shady characters Aristophanes wishes to consign to Hades at the end of *Frogs* (1504-1514).

[210] Cf. Strauss: "Aristophanes gives no assurance on practical grounds that Athens will gain even from giving power to the 'better types'; but it is better to go down nobly than shamefully (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, 247).

is also an Athenian citizen.[211] Xanthius, on the other hand, is not permitted to cross the lake of the underworld with Charon and Dionysus since he is not a citizen and is obliged to walk around the edge of the lake, meeting his master in the region on the other side where the monsters were supposed to dwell. Xanthius had missed the naval battle because of "eye trouble" and so had not been enfranchised (192).

The political turmoil in Athens caused by the promotion of slaves to citizenship is reflected in the comic mixing of citizen and non-citizen, master and slave, and god and mortal in the first half of *Frogs*. The play opens with the god Dionysus walking while Xanthius, his slave, rides a donkey and complains of the load he bears (12-24).[212] When Dionysus suggests that Xanthius should carry his donkey, the insolent slave expresses his regret that he had not fought in the sea battle, for if he had he would have been able to tell Dionysus where to shove it (31-32). This confusion of status reaches its highest pitch in the climax of Part One where Xanthius changes places with Dionysus, exchanging not only his status of slave for that of master but also of mortal for god. The audience watching *Frogs* in 405 would have perceived immediately the resonances between this scene and the enfranchisement of the slaves.

What is not clear, however, is whether such confusion and mixing of stations is due to the malevolent effect of Euripides and his ilk on politics or whether it reflects the peculiar

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[211] This is also true of Amphitheus, the divine messenger who enables Dikaeopolis to make peace with the Spartans (44-55).

[212] Xanthius' regrets not fighting in the sea battle, for if he had he could tell Dionysus "to go scream somewhere" (33-34). There's a comic suggestion of taking the reversal one step further whereby Xanthius would have to carry his donkey.

characteristic of the god of the theatre to revel in reversals and dissolve the established social boundaries. For we must not forget that Dionysus, "son of Winejar" (υἱὸς Σταμνίου), is the god of the Mysteries where initiates partake in ecstatic rituals that dissolve the frontiers of the known, permitting the reveler to lose himself in orgiastic oneness with the all, where the terms slave, master, citizen, metic no longer mean anything (22).[213] Something of Dionysus' permissiveness can be seen when Xanthius talks to Aeacus, the slave of Pluto, while Dionysus is offstage at the beginning of the second part of the play. If Aeacus is impressed that Xanthius managed so deviously to trick his master into receiving a beating, he is even more amazed that he got away with it without being punished. The slave of Pluto knows all too well what the awful chthonic god would do to him if he had pulled the same stunt. While members of the same divine order, Pluto and Dionysus sit on opposite ends of the spectrum, the one as rigid and immovable as the necessity of death, the other joyous, careless, chaotic, free, alive. No wonder that Dionysus can, without contradiction, be a great god at the same time as he can be presented on the comic stage as the butt of vulgar jokes without denigrating his divinity. On the other hand, Pluto, even in an Aristophanean play, is not at all a funny character. The riotous humor of Aristophanean comedy cannot disguise the adamantine tenor of Pluto's voice.

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[213] "Under the charm of the Dionysian, not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* 45-46). Cf. F. M. Cornford's distinction between the Homeric religion and mystery cults (F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation*, 160-263).

These facets of Dionysus' character allow us to see why the god of the theatre might have been so powerfully attracted to Euripides. For Euripides, whose mother (Aristophanes never tires of reminding us) allegedly was a low-born herb seller, also dissolves the boundaries between high and low.[214] Like Dionysus, Euripides too untethers the passions from the oppressive burdens of law with its threat of divine punishment that gives it such force. Nevertheless, so deep a sympathy between Dionysus and Euripides can never transform itself into complete identification, for the release of the passions in one case can be salutary, in the other wholly destructive. The Dionysian revelry (like the Aristophanean comedy) has the peculiar quality that it can harness such destructive forces while keeping them within limits.[215] Euripides, on the other hand, rooted in the scientific teaching, threatens to unleash such forces permanently, annihilating Pluto and Dionysus in the process. For, unlike Dionysus, who ultimately has his being in the divine order of Zeus, Euripides promises to overthrow the divine order permanently on the basis of the natural teaching. The two slaves show plainly enough the support such a promise can harness. Despite Pluto's harshness and Dionysus' laxity, their two slaves express a common loathing toward their respective masters, precisely on this account. The Slave of Pluto confesses that "I seem to myself

[214] Aristophanes repeats the joke that Euripides' mother was an herb-seller in *Women at the Thesmophoria* 387 and 455-456, *Acharnians* 468-469 and *Knights* 19. There is no evidence whatsoever that Euripides' mother was so (cf. Thomas Pangle, *Frogs*, 24 n. 63). It may be that the joke has a similar meaning to the taunt in English that "your mom wears army boots," implying that the person insulted comes from an impecunious family. Aristophanes makes fun of Euripides for appealing to low-born scoundrels.

[215] Although in *Frogs* Dionysus risks forgetting his true identity.

to be admitted to the highest mysteries, / When I curse in secret the master!" (746-747). No wonder that Aeacus had jumped at the opportunity to give Xanthius-Dionysus and Dionysus a thorough flogging, and that his desire to flog far outweighed his desire to know which of them was actually a god. The attitude of slaves toward masters had much in common with that of mortals to gods. Masters, like gods, place onerous burdens – the fear of harsh punishment for disobedience – on the shoulders of those who serve them. Euripides' seductive charm promises to relieve such burdens permanently and completely.

Euripides' Arrival in Hades

As they are talking, Xanthius hears a huge commotion going on outside. The Slave of Pluto informs him that a great affair is afoot, as Euripides has recently arrived in the underworld and is in the process of usurping Aeschylus' place as the greatest of the tragedians. He explains that "A certain law" (νόμος τις) exists in Hades whereby the best artist "takes his meals in the Prytaneum / And a seat right after Pluto, until a greater artist should come and supplant him" (761-764). This law is, of course, a comic facsimile of a similar law Athens, with the difference that in Athens the prize was sought after and frequently won by athletes, military men and politicians, not just poets.[216] Where in Athens, the paths to glory are various, in Hades, glory appears restricted solely

[216] In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates proposes to the Athenians that, since he is their benefactor, "There is nothing more fitting, men of Athens, than for such a man to be given his meals in the Prytaneum, much more so than if any of you has won a victory at Olympia with a horse or a two- or four-horse chariot" (36b-c).

to poetic excellence.[217] Hades, it seems, is the special domain of tragedy. Although there is an important parallel between Athenian politics and Euripides' attempted coup in the underworld, the parallel is not exact: in Athens the conflict is political, a contest of two factions for the rule of the city. But in Hades, where Pluto rules autocratically, there is no politics. The equivalent of the political debate in Athens is a debate in Hades over who should be entitled to wear the tragic crown. We had seen already in Part One that in Aristophanes' imaginative depiction of the denizens of the underworld, the sinners and the blessed that we expected to see from Herakles' report corresponded much more closely to good and bad poets. By analogy, the politics of Hades is really the politics of determining which poet is superior to the other – no mean question. Thus, Aeschylus' reign in Hades up to the point when Euripides challenges him in the underworld corresponds to the opinion that Aeschylus is the greatest of the tragedians, alive or dead. Aeschylus, after all, had been granted the honor after his death of having his tragedies performed.[218]

Yet, if Hades is the peculiar place where the struggle over the greatest poet is carried out, there still remains the question of who decides. The great ruckus that Xanthius hears has been caused by Euripides' attempt to supplant Aeschylus through unscrupulous democratic means, that

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[217] Strauss points out that "In Hades, as distinguished from Athens, the highest goal of ambition is then pre-eminence in arts like tragedy. This is all the more remarkable since the rulers in Hades admittedly understand nothing of these arts": *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 250.

[218] Pangle notes that a decree was "passed after the death of Aeschylus (around 457) authorizing the continued official production of his plays at major festivals in competition with living authors" (*Frogs*, note. 159, 80).

is, through a popular coup. He has, predictably, garnered the support of all the worst types, the "*poneroi*," the "demos of scoundrels" (ὁ τῶν πανούργων) composed of "thieves," "clothes-snatchers," "parricides" and "burglars;" those, in other words, who constitute the natural majority in Hades (ὅπερ ἔστ᾽ ἐν Ἅιδου πλῆθος) (771-773). Resisting them are the few but staunch supporters of Aeschylus, the "fine ones,", (ὀλίγον τὸ χρηστόν) including (as the Chorus flatteringly indicates), the audience watching the comedy (783).[219] Just as in Athens, the war between the "base coppers" and the "gold coins" continues down below. However, although Pluto rules absolutely over the denizens of Hades, he has no special competence to decide on the question of whether Euripides or Aeschylus is the superior poet. As a result, only the miraculous arrival of an expert in poetics could avert a conflict that must otherwise be decided by brute force.

Dionysus the Judge

Dionysus' abrupt arrival on the stage supplies just this miracle by putting an immediate end to the struggle of the "many" against the "few" and replacing it with the arbitration of a single competent judge, appointed by Pluto on account of his "unsurpassed experience in the art" (τῆς τέχνης ἔμπειρος) (811-812). This development is so miraculous that it would be the equivalent of a philosopher-king arriving in the nick of time to save Athens from imminent destruction. What is even more miraculous is the fact that both parties, despite their utter opposition to each other, agree to submit their claims to Dionysus' judgment. The universal recognition of Dionysus' expertise is surely the result of Pluto's declaration of Dionysus' identity after the beating he and Xanthius

[219] The indication that the audience can be identified with the few fine ones has important implications when considering the Chorus' attitude to Euripides and Aeschylus during the contest.

received, a vital link connecting the action of the two parts of the play together. However, the contending poets accept Dionysus for different reasons.

The recognition of Dionysus' divinity forces Aeschylus, who hardly deigns to respond to Euripides' challenge at first, to accept - albeit grudgingly - the formal challenge of the competition under Dionysus' arbitration (870). The old Marathon veteran, who swears by Demeter and who claims to be the champion of the city's gods, could hardly refuse to recognize the authority of a god. Euripides, on the other hand, who swears by the senses and the natural elements, would surely have no scruples in treating a god with contempt were it in his interests to do so. Moreover, he appears not to need any supernatural assistance in his attempted coup, being already on the verge of winning the democratic battle through his own efforts, by *force majeure*. However, although Euripides seems perfectly capable of toppling old Aeschylus from the seat of tragedy in Hades, he has no power to return to the living world by his own efforts – only Dionysus has the power to do that.

In fact, Dionysus offers to do this very thing, in accordance with his original intention. Euripides' first line in the play is the tail end of a conversation he is having with Dionysus while Xanthius and the slave are whispering behind their masters' backs (830-831). Judging by the final remark that we do hear from Euripides, we can make an educated guess as to what the deal was. Euripides refuses Dionysus' advice to give up his attempt on Aeschylus' title as master tragedian in Hades: Dionysus must first have suggested that Euripides give up his pretensions for the title in Hades and instead come up with him to Athens. Euripides himself confirms this proposal when he reminds Dionysus at the end of the play that he had sworn by the gods "that you would take ME home" (1470). Dionysus' proposal means that Euripides would once again exist for a time as a living poet in Athens, while Aeschylus continued to reign supreme below. Euripides thinks he can

have his cake and eat it too—that he can both unseat Aeschylus and then be delivered by Dionysus to the world of the living in Athens. Yet his ambition to be the greatest poet above and below forces Euripides to take a gamble. He could (it seems) have easily beaten Aeschylus by appealing to the demos, or he could have given up his pretensions for the tragic crown and gone with Dionysus immediately. In order to win both he chooses to confront Aeschylus on grounds that no longer make his victory inevitable: he must confront Aeschylus in a formal contest with the best elements of the city as the audience.

Prayers and Insults

The contest, which constitutes the rest of the action of the play, takes place in three phases after a preliminary skirmish of insults and the customary prayers to the deities: each poet offers an account of himself as poet (consisting of an attack and a defense) (907-1098); an account of the kind of poetry they make (the aesthetics, so to speak) (1119-1410); and finally, political advice about how to extricate Athens from its perilous situation (1417-1466). The contest is about as comprehensive as could be imagined. It is comprehensive too in that it involves tragedians not merely different, but wholly antithetical to one another, as antithetical, indeed, as the Just and Unjust logos. As a result, the contest weighs the virtues of two tragedians who do not only write in different styles, but who take tragedy in opposite directions.

The source of the difference between the two tragedians is made in clear in the prayers that they offer to their respective deities. Aeschylus prays that he may be worthy of the mysteries of Demeter, the goddess who "has bred [his] mind" (ἡ θρέψασα τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα) while Euripides

prays to his own strange quaternity of "private gods" (ἰδιώταις θεοῖς)[220]: "Aether" (αἰθὴρ), "Axis of Tongue" (γλώσσης στρόφιγξ), "Intelligence" (ξύνεσι) and "keen smelling Nostrils" (μυκτῆρες ὀσφραντήριοι) (886-894). Aeschylus' chosen goddess, Demeter, is both a goddess adored in the mysteries and part of the conventional Olympian pantheon, while Euripides' gods are purely private (ἰδιώταις), a "new coinage" that is really a circumlocution for natural entities. Like Socrates, Euripides uses the term "gods" only figuratively, useful for convincing ignoramuses like Strepsiades who lack the intellect to conceive of a world without gods.[221] Naturally, Euripides' element is air, for intelligence must be swift and unencumbered. Aeschylus, the poet most adept at crafting ponderous, sesquipedalian phrases, has for his natural element the earth. The mysteries of Demeter, involving her descent into the underworld in search of her daughter, are therefore heavy and earthy, impenetrable by airy intelligence.

The Chorus, who serve Dionysus and observe the dispute, must pray to deities that serve as the middle ground between the antithetical positions of Aeschylus and Euripides. They therefore pray to the Muses who are both the "nine virgin daughters of Zeus" (ἐννέα παρθένοι ἀγναὶ) and those who "oversee the quick reasoning, intelligent minds / Of maxim-minting men, when they enter into strife" (875-877). These deities recall the Clouds who appeared in very muse-like forms, as nine maids when Socrates first introduced them to Strepsiades.[222] To what extent the prayers of the chorus may be interpreted as a pious prayer to the nine daughters of Zeus, and to what extent they are mere figurative representations of intelligence (à la Euripides), is anyone's guess. Yet the

[220] The word private here evokes Euripides' concern with the private over the common good.

[221] *Clouds* 381-382. Etc.

[222] See *Clouds*, 269-290

ambiguity may be precisely the point: both Euripides and Aeschylus, despite their antithetical positions, are able to accept this arbitration according to their own interpretations of the Muses.

The fundamental principle of each poet determines the quality of their poetry and their political advice. There is, in other words, a crucial relationship between the "prayers" each tragedian makes and the nature of their tragedy, including the quality of its poetics and political standpoint. In Euripides' case, this direct relationship is very clear. He says explicitly that he has introduced "intelligence" into tragedy:

> By applying subtle rulers [i.e. measures] and squaring off insertions of words,
>
> To use intelligence [*voεῖv*], to see, to understand, to twist and turn, to be erotically
>
> In love,
>
> To be artful, and to be suspicious, to think of all sides of everything (956-958).

Euripidean intelligence benefits the Athenians by opening their eyes to their true interests which prove to be, not the greater good of Athens per se but their individual good. The means by which he achieves this feat is by insinuating a kind of rhetorical education reminiscent of the Unjust Logos in *Clouds*. Like the Unjust Logos, Athenians learn how to become cunning wordsmiths, precise in their language, subtle in their meaning and capable of twisting any argument to their advantage. It would appear from this point of similarity that there is no essential difference between Unjust logos and Euripides. Yet, there is indeed one very important difference that distinguishes the poet from the logos. The Unjust logos had been extremely frank about the tyrannous possibilities it affords, and it had spoken directly to the appetites of its potential follower,

Pheidippides.[223] It had presented itself as the best means by which one could acquire the greatest pleasures – a veritable ring of Gyges.[224] Like the magic ring, the Unjust logos had promised its acolyte untold pleasures by means of conferring the power of invisibility, rendering the wearer impervious to punishment by means of cunning arguments that could defeat all lawsuits.[225] Although such a possibility is hinted at when Euripides mentions that he has taught the Athenians "to be erotically in love," he never dares to make the possibility of tyranny explicit, as the Just logos had done.

Instead, Euripides attempts to present himself as a public benefactor by claiming that teaching "intelligence" to the Athenians has had not just a benign but also a beneficial result. The private good that he alludes to turns out not to be the life of the tyrant, but rather the good administrator of the household. The private good, in Euripides' presentation here, becomes prudent household management. Thus, the rhetorical "twisting and turning" that Euripidean tragedy

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[223] Unjust logos: "For consider, lad, all that moderation involves, and how many pleasures you're going to be deprived of: boys, women, cottabus, relishes, drinking, boisterous laughter. Yet what is living worth to you if you're deprived of these things? (*Clouds*, 1071-1074). The Clouds even offer Strepsiades the ability to win most or all of the great proposals in the assembly (*Clouds* 431-433). He refuses because his imagination is so small that the most he can imagine is cheating his creditors. The Clouds (and the Unjust logos) show that a man with more potent imagination could rule all of Athens, or even rival the Great King.

[224] See Plato, *Republic*, 2:359a-2:360d.

[225] The chief crime of the wearer in Plato's account (a humble shepherd) had been to seduce the king's wife and murder the king.

teaches, has wisened up Athenian citizens to the devious tricks their domestics pull on them. Euripides boasts that he has introduced "familiar household affairs, with which we deal and associate," "also their houses / They administer better than before, And they inquire, "How's this going? / Where's this that belongs to me? Who took this?" (974-979). No longer will they sit "like gaping Mammakuthoi" while their domestics rob them blind as they had done under Aeschylus' tutelage (989-991).[226]

On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the tyrannous life advocated by the Unjust Logos is not implicit in Euripides' argument. The central benefit in the list Euripides gives ("to see, to understand, to twist and turn, to be erotically / In love, to be artful, and to be suspicious, to think of all sides of everything") is "to be erotically in love." This is also the point that Pheidippides had learnt in *Clouds* when he outraged his father by recalling a Euripidean story about brother-

[226] There is an analogue here with *Wasps* where Bdelycleon sets up a court inside his own house so that his father, Philocleon can judge the misdeeds of his domestics (a dog called Labes) (*Wasps*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 1998, 826-862). Euripides turns politics into household management. See G. O. Hutchinson, "House Politics and City Politics in Aristophanes", for a discussion about the relationship between the household and the polis. He points out that "in Aristophanes the two structures are not only related but opposed…Euripides claims that in his dramas he made all talk volubly, wife, slave, master, young woman and old woman…Whatever the ideological implications, we see here extended to the hierarchy of the household the equality of the assembly in which any adult male citizen can talk. There is an implicit contrast between the structures in their normal condition" ("House Politics and City Politics in Aristophanes" in *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2011, 49).

sister incest.[227] Later, Aeschylus will bring up two other notorious characters of Euripidean tragedy, Sthenesboea and Phaedra, both of whom conceived an immense passion for a forbidden object and so attempted to break the law. The very portrayal of such characters exercises a weakening effect on *nomos* by reminding the audience of the dormant or at any rate suppressed desires controlled by law.

Nor is Euripides' claim that he has improved the Athenian character especially reassuring when we consider the biographies of the politicians he cites as his followers. For, if the politicians in the Aeschylean camp, Phormisius and Magnaetus "the nut" could be described as "Trumpeters with beards like lances" and "flesh-ripping pine benders" (that is, warrior-jocks adept at smashing skulls but not off the charts on the IQ scores), Euripides' followers such as Cleitophon and "the artful Theramanes" were political turncoats, adept at changing their policy as it suited their self-interest (965-967). Cleitophon supported the oligarchic coup of the Four Hundred, but then changed sides when the political winds shifted and the oligarchy was overthrown (967). Theramenes likewise (nicknamed "Buskin" after a kind of shoe that fits either foot) was renowned "for his knack of landing on his feet in any situation" and supported and then opposed the oligarchy (967-968). In addition, Theramenes, who was involved in the naval action at Arginusae, managed to shift the blame to his colleagues for failing to inter the dead.[228]

Euripides thus involves himself in a paradox that sows the seeds of his undoing: in submitting himself to the judgment of the best portion of the city at a moment of intense danger,

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[227] The play in question was the *Aeolus* (now lost).

[228] Despite achieving victory, the Athenian generals responsible for the naval battle were tried and executed for failing to inter the bodies of the dead crewmen.

he must present himself as a public benefactor at the same time as the principles underpinning his tragedy fail to recognize the demands of the common good. He must resort to similar tactics practiced by the rhetoricians in Plato's *Gorgias* who claim to be teachers of justice all the while winking to their ambitious followers that their tuition will fulfill all their most tyrannous dreams.[229] Euripides would have avoided this difficulty had he been content to stay in Hades and overthrow Aeschylus with the demos of Hades while foregoing his resurrection in Athens. Instead, by attempting to achieve both goals simultaneously, he renders himself vulnerable to Aeschylus, who cleverly exploits Euripides' paradox to the utmost. He cannot, for example, give any adequate response to Aeschylus' challenge when he is asked "on account of what ought a real man who is a poet (ἄνδρα ποιητήν)…be admired." Euripides' cagey reply—"Adeptness and advice, by which we make better / The humans in the cities" (δεξιότητος καὶ νουθεσίας, ὅτι βελτίους τε ποιοῦμεν / τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν) (1010)—proves grossly insufficient as an answer to Aeschylus' challenge. After all, "adeptness and advice" is vague, Aeschylus' emphasis on manliness (ἄνδρα) is reduced to mere human beings (ἀνθρώπους) and the specific benefit to the city of Athens is reduced to the vague formulation "ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν" – in the cities – in any city. When Aeschylus easily responds by asking Euripides what he deserves if, instead of these things, he has made the citizens worse, Dionysus has to intervene in order to save him from embarrassment (1013).[230] At a clear disadvantage in the ability to present himself as a public benefactor, Euripides is compelled to try to overcome his opponent through his superior intelligence, that is, through cunning. It

[229] Cf. *Gorgias*, 482c-486d.

[230] Cf. 951-954 where Euripides boasts of democratizing tragedy and is advised to avoid this topic.

remains to be seen whether Euripides' confidence that his cunning is superior to that of his antagonist is justified.

Aeschylus

Whereas Euripides presents himself as the poetic embodiment of "intelligence," Aeschylus appears as the poet of *thumos*, of spirited anger, a strange kind of Achilles-turned-poet. The Chorus makes this association abundantly clear when it describes the poet's reaction to Euripides' impudent challenge by using Aeschylus' own poetic diction, reminiscent of Homeric verse. Parodying the tragedian's manner of piling periphrasis upon periphrasis, it predicts that "there'll be terrible wrath in the Mighty Thunderer / When he sees the sharp glibness in the tooth being whetted / By his rival in art" (814-816). "Then," continues the Chorus, "indeed with terrible fury / Will his eyes whirl about! / And there will be helmet-glinting strifes of horse-hair crested speeches, / And splinters of linchpins and parings of artworks – Of the mortal defending himself against the thought-constructing man's Centaurian utterances!" (816-821). Aeschylus does not disappoint expectations. After failing to intimidate Euripides with haughty silence, he appears to lose all restraint, letting loose such a terrible ejaculation of insults that Dionysus implores him to stop lest "anger heat your innards to a rage" (844). So overbearing is Aeschylus' wrath that it appears to risk scuttling the debate before it even begins, for debate that requires the parry and thrust of refutation and counter-refutation is impossible if one of the contestants immediately "catches fire like an oak, roaring" at any provocation (858-859).

Aeschylus' thumotic response to Euripides's intrusion also represents the nature of Aeschylean tragedy, the personality of the poet reflecting the content of the poetry. We had seen something similar in *Women at the Thesmophoria* when Aristophanes drew a comic parallel

between the effeminate Agathon, with his obsession with cosmetics and feminine attire, and his poetics of beauty. The thumotic Aeschylus, in turn, specializes in "making a drama full of Ares" (δρᾶμα ποιήσας Ἄρεως μεστόν), for thumos is the quality most necessary in war (1021). His *Seven Against Thebes* thus endows the spectators with "an erotic passion to be in battle" (ἄν τις ἀνὴρ ἠράσθη δάιος εἶναι) and his *Persians*, "victory always over the opponents" (νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους) (1027). Although Dionysus jokes that the efficacy of Aeschylus's poetry could not have been very high since a certain Pantacles had attempted to fasten on his helmet the wrong way (1037-1039),[231] the real meaning of that poetry lies in its forming the ideal pattern for thumotic characters such as Magnetus the Nut or Lamachos. Like Homer, he furnishes the youth with captivating images that help transform them into patriotic warriors.

Yet if Aeschylus were merely another Magnetus the Nut or a Lamachos, one would expect Euripides, with his greater wit and cunning, to prevail easily over him. Aeschylus would be something like Aristophanes' representation of Lamachos in *Acharnians*: a brain-dead, fire-eating warmonger (*Acharnians*, 1174-1195). However, it soon becomes apparent once the bluster subsides that there is much more to Aeschylus than meets the eye. In fact, Euripides, despite his reputation for "cunning" and "twisting and turning," seems like an open book compared to his mysterious counterpart. For Euripides was explicit about the connection between his philosophical education and his tragedy, but Aeschylus is not at all clear about how his education in the Mysteries

[231] Plato has his Socrates make a similar joke in *Ion*: Ion would be the greatest general since Homer speaks of generalship and Ion has mastered all of Homer ("Ion", trans. Paul Woodruff in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 541a-b.

of the goddess could have produced his thumotic tragedies. What, then, lies behind Aeschylus' tragic mask?

In order to understand Aeschylus as presented by Aristophanes, it is necessary to think about what the mystery religion of Demeter has in common with the thumotic worldview that sees unthinking dedication to the city through military victory as the ultimate virtue. The most obvious link is that the celebration of Demeter was associated with the countryside and the conservative, waspish, land-owning hoplite class of which Aristophanes himself was evidently a part.[232] Yet a deeper connection may be adduced by looking at the most thumotic character (apart from Aeschylus himself) who is represented in *Frogs*: Herakles. Herakles, of course, is not a casual representation of a thumotic character, but rather the most thumotic god in the Greek pantheon. It is no coincidence that Herakles also happened to be the source of Dionysus' knowledge of the underworld. For, as we have seen, Dionysus would never have donned his absurd lionskin costume if he had not first been terrified by fearful rumors of the nasty things that lurk in shady regions no living man has seen. For Herakles' exploits to have sense and meaning, it is absolutely necessary for the underworld to exist. The thumotic man and the gods of the city go hand in hand.

The trouble is that such claims about the existence of the underworld can always be called into question by philosophic types like Socrates and Euripides. Indeed, such stories appear to resemble boasting, the very thing that Euripides accused Aeschylus of doing.[233] We recall that the frightening parts of the underworld mentioned by Herakles – the "myriad" of "serpents and beasts"

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[232] Cf. Victor Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes: A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy* (Methuen & Co LtD, London: 1974).

[233] Euripides calls him a "boaster and imposter" ("ἀλαζὼν καὶ φέναξ") (909).

or the pits of despair wallowing with sinners – were never seen or verified by Dionysus and Xanthius, let alone presented to the audience. Neither were Aeacus's threats involving the "dark-hearted rock of the Styx" or the "blood-dripping peak of Acheron," "the dogs of Cocytus," the "hundred-headed Echidna," the "Tartessian lamprey" or even the "Teithrasian Gorgons" (467-477). Yet it is precisely the existence of these hideous creatures that makes Herakles' manliness so impressive. In the absence of eye-witness testimony, such stories require awe-inspiring speech and manly assertion to endow them with the appearance of veracity they need. No wonder that Aeschylus' chosen mode of poetics is awe-inspiring displays or ominous silence, but never dialectic.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from this that Aeschylus is merely a pious spokesman of the gods of the city, as Just logos indeed had been in *Clouds*, tempting though it may be to see him that way at first. After all, Aeschylus frames himself as a poet following in the footsteps of the greatest poetic benefactors of Greece: of Orpheus who "revealed mystery rites to us"; of Musaeus who taught oracles and cures from diseases; of Hesiod who divulged the "workings of the earth, seasons of crops, ploughing"; and finally and greatest of all, "the divine Homer" who taught the "fine things": "Battle tactics, virtues, the weapons, of real men" (1033-1036). Of course, it is on this last, most divine poet that Aeschylus models himself. Just as spirited youths measure themselves against Patrocluses and lion-hearted Teucers when they hear the bugle-call, so Aeschylus measures himself against the poetic model set by the divine Homer. Yet although Aeschylus is clearly indebted to Homer, is he bound to the poetic tradition, as the Just logos had been in *Clouds*? The problem with being a mere defender of the tradition, as Socrates demonstrates so memorably in the *Republic*, is that the tradition cannot defended itself rationally, for (among perhaps other reasons) there is a fundamental disjunction between what the tradition

says is moral and the behavior of the gods themselves.[234] Thus, the Just logos entangled itself in such contradictions and was destroyed by the Unjust Logos in the forum of rational debate: if cold baths are the hallmark of the manly, then why are warm baths named after Herakles?

Aeschylus proves he is more than he seems by never falling into such a trap. When he accuses Euripides of including scurrilous women in his tragedies, Euripides parries with the assertion that he had found such stories already in the poetic tradition. Aeschylus responds by asserting simply but profoundly that

> the poet needs to hide what's wicked,
>
> And not to stage or teach it! For children
>
> Have schoolteachers who explain things, but for young adults, it's the poets.
>
> It is therefore essential that we speak fine (χρηστὰ) things! (1053-1056)

Plato's Socrates (who in the *Republic* wanted to completely reinvent Homer) would not have spoken much differently.[235] While presenting himself as the inheritor and custodian of the great poetic tradition, and particularly as a student of Homer, Aeschylus in fact places himself above it. He tacitly admits that the traditional poets, including the divine Homer himself, are insufficient and require careful doctoring in order to be presentable to the impressionable minds

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[234] See Book III of *Republic*.

[235] Socrates: "We'll ask Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we delete these passages and all similar ones. It isn't that they aren't poetic and pleasing to the majority of hearers but that, the more poetic they are, the less they should be heard by children or by men who are supposed to be free and to fear slaver more than death." Plato, *Republic*, 387a-b.

of youths. That is as much to say that Aeschylus, and not Homer, is the authority and that he self-consciously presents his plays not as merely "artistic" triumphs but also and above all as didactic ones. Not fealty to the tradition, then, but a superintending intelligence and judgment are at work in his plays—or so he claims.

As the authority, then, Aeschylus must carefully edit the parts of the tradition that swerve too closely to portraying eros in its splendor and hence the dangers to law posed by eros. It is here where the chief disagreement between the tragedians lies. Aeschylus boasts that he has never poetically shaped an erotic woman in his life – there is no trace of eros in Aeschylus' tragedies – while, of course, Euripidean tragedy is full of it. The essence of the disagreement is not about the veracity of such representations, but about their political effects on the minds of the young. For Euripides, it is essential to represent human nature clearly and unabashedly; anything else is obscure and vain. For Aeschylus, on the other hand, the inclusion of erotic characters such as Sthenesboea and Phaedra is politically irresponsible. Including eros means representing what should never be publicly shown: "displaying procurers", "having babies in temples" and "intercourse with brothers" (1079-1081). Aeschylus does not hesitate to hit Euripides below the belt by associating Euripides' immoral characters with his wife's own notorious infidelity (1047-1048). In so doing, on stage, Aeschylus shows that he is above any simple obedience to rules: he can use Euripidean tactics to defeat Euripides. Instead, only noble characters should be reproduced, for "from grand judgments and thoughts are born equivalent phrases" (1059). There is then the intriguing question of AR's intention in stating or having stated so plainly the need for a responsible, didactic poetry: to this extent Ar pulls back the veil Obscure, awe-inspiring language is justified by the political necessity of presenting morally and politically salutary models of conduct for the young.

Round Two

At this point, the debate is paused while the Chorus remarks on the difficulty in judging such a close competition, for "When the one strives violently," "the other is able to turn around, and drive home vigorously" (1101-1103). Despite being polar opposites in their approach to tragedy, Euripides and Aeschylus appear more or less neck and neck in the opening of the competition. Yet even this fact begins to look ominous for Euripides. Euripides had, after all, given the impression that Aeschylus was a numbskull, like his characters and like the generation he represented – the kind of man who had "knowledge of nothing except to call for barley cake and to say 'Hruppapai'" (1071-1072).[236] Yet far from proving incapable of taking on the wily poet in a contest of wisdom, Aeschylus is able at least to match him. One might even say that he holds an edge, for the old tragedian gives an adequate answer for his use of "mountainous" language, while Euripides is unable to respond to the charge that he could not contribute to the common good of the city. In the next phase of the contest over who poeticizes best, Aeschylus surprises us even more by eclipsing Euripides.

The contest now turns from the principles of the poets to the beauty of each poet's style of tragedy. Here Aeschylus emerges as the clearly dominant figure. The contest consists of three parts: prologues (1119-1248), choral songs (1149-1366), and the relative "weight" of each poet's phraseology (1367-1410). In the first phase of combat, the two tragedians appear roughly equal (or about equally battered by each other's arguments). Euripides, impetuous and eager for the fray, opens with a devastating salvo that exposes Aeschylus' prologues as being incoherent and full of

[236] And to fart on the heads of those rowers beneath them (a vulgar joke referring to the robust pride of the oligarchic class) (1974-1075).

tautology (1122). Upon entering his royal estate, Orestes claims both to "come back" and "to return" in the same line of verse (1156-1157), and, standing at the tomb of Agamemnon, calls on his father "to hearken" and "to hear" (1173-1174). Aeschylus attempts to parry these attacks with pedantic distinctions worthy of an academic, but he fails to convince. Nevertheless, the old tragedian quickly regains his footing and even takes the initiative. After a tit-for-tat rejoinder accusing Euripides of incoherence,[237] Aeschylus invents an original conceit that exposes Euripides' scansion as being plain and monotonous. Take any line of a Euripidean tragedy, he deviously points out, and one can insert a "little oil flask" (ληκύθιον) that fits perfectly with the metrical rhythm. After Euripides receives a thorough flogging with this line of attack, Dionysus intervenes to stop Aeschylus from proceeding any further: "little oil flasks" seem to grow on Euripides' prologues "like sties on the eyes" (1246-1247).[238] With a helping nudge from Dionysus, Euripides now imitates Aeschylus' conceit and turns it against the author. Where Aeschylus had inserted "*lekathion*" interchangeably in Euripides' metrical phrases, Euripides takes revenge by inserting the same monotonous choral phrase "Alas the blow! – do you not draw near with succor?" after any random line, in order to prove that all of Aeschylus' choral songs can be condensed into one dreary phrase (1262-5). He follows up with another vicious attack, this time on Aeschylus' harp lyrics where the music contributes to the sham solemnity of the tragedy. Euripides' vocal

[237] Euripides had claimed that the most miserable man in the world, Oedipus, had started life happy (1187).

[238] There is an irony here that Euripides perhaps could have defended himself in the final line of attack if Dionysus had not intervened, for the line that Dionysus interrupts Euripides reciting would not permit "*lekathion*" to fit.

imitation creates a ludicrous effect, juxtaposing such lines as "Hot the twin-throned rule over the Achaeans, the flowering youth of Greece," with the "Phlattothrattophlattothrat" of the lyre (1285-1295).

Aeschylus now ups the ante, surpassing himself with two novel parodies of Euripides (the first at 1309-1324, the second at 1331-1363). He first caricatures Euripides' use of irregular meter and disjointed imagery in his choral songs and then another devastating attack on his solos. In the latter, Aeschylus invents a ridiculous situation in which a woman uses all the pathos of tragic language to express the common occurrence of having a nightmare and discovering that a chicken is missing from the roost. The parody underlines Euripides' characteristic tendency to democratize tragedy and mix it with tragic pathos. Euripides has absolutely no answer to this attack: he offers no parody of his own of Aeschylus' stylistic peculiarities, although Aristophanes himself had shown that this was possible.[239] Euripides' silence permits Aeschylus to take the initiative and deliver the knockout punch.

Whereas Euripides had spoken first in the first two phases of the contest, Aeschylus now proposes something altogether novel and ingenuous: go to the scales and weigh the phrases of the poetry. This conceit is so remarkable that the chorus exclaims it to be a "marvel…An innovation, full of strangeness, / Which who else would have thought up?" (1371-1373).[240] Euripides is not given the opportunity to respond, but it is obvious that there is no way for him to win. Euripides' principle, we recall, had been the lightest of elements, "aether," whereas Aeschylus' had been the

[239] Cf. 814-829, a parody of Aeschylean bombast.

[240] There is an additional meaning to the weighing contest. Aeschylus wrote a play called the *Weighing of the Souls*.

hard earth. As a result, every Aeschylean phrase easily "outweighs" Euripides' light, winged words. His "River Spercheius" beats Euripides' ship; his line that "alone of the gods Death has no *eros* for gifts" smashes Euripides' "There is no other temple of Persuasion except *logos*" since Persuasion is light while death is the weightiest evil. Even Dionysus' prodding fails to help Euripides think of a way out of the rut he finds himself in.[241] Having racked his brains, he lamely comes up with a line involving a "wooden handle heavy with iron," while Aeschylus triumphantly beats him with two chariots and two corpses piled on top of another, so heavy that it could not be lifted by a hundred muscly Egyptians. Aeschylus' triumph is all but complete.

Dionysus Equivocates

If Dionysus had been an impartial judge the debate would have stopped and Aeschylus declared the winner there and then. True, Aeschylus rigged the final part of the debate over poetics so that Euripides had no chance of winning, but then such a devious trick was never out of bounds in a contest of cleverness.[242] The same tricks had been equally available to the crafty Euripides who would never have hesitated to employ them had he the resources to invent them. What is remarkable is that Dionysus, who had been giving Euripides a helping hand the whole time, declares flatly that he will not make a decision *in spite* of Aeschylus' evident superiority in the debate, for

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[241] He is completely at a loss: "Come, where indeed is there such a thing of mine? Where?" he asks himself (1399).

[242] Euripides had attempted something similar when he roused the demos of Hades against Aeschylus before the contest began (771-778).

These men are my friends, and I won't judge them.

Because I wouldn't be at enmity with either,

For the one I consider wise, and I am delighted by the other. (1411-1413)

Dionysus flatly declares the outcome of the contest to be irrelevant, for even if one contestant should overcome the other, he cannot bring himself to decide in favor of one at the expense of the other. Tragedy, it seems, requires both extremes, the Euripidean and the Aeschylean, and would be somehow incomplete without both. But whatever the extremes are, they are different from our initial assumptions when Euripides had claimed that he was wise while Aeschylus was a dolt. Dionysus' statement reflects the extent to which the tables have been turned. After we have witnessed the outcome of the second set of exchanges, it is difficult to assign the predicate "wise" to Euripides, after he had been so manifestly outfoxed by his opponent. That Euripides is "delightful," on the other hand, is evident through Dionysus' attachment to the poet in spite of the outcome of the debate.

Had he been left to himself, Dionysus would never have made a decision, but Pluto intervenes for a second time with the voice of cold necessity: whoever Dionysus chooses will return with him to the living world. The god of the theatre now changes his tone. Although at the beginning of the play he had come to the underworld disguised on account of a private mission to acquire a private pleasure – a love for Euripides he had conceived while avoiding his duty on the ship—he now presents himself as a public benefactor. He had come down for a poet, yes, but "For,

what end? / So that the city, being saved, would carry on the choruses" (1418-1420).[243] In an effort to delay the outcome once more, Dionysus now proposes that they debate, not a question concerning poetics, since Aeschylus had outwitted Euripides in this respect, but one about politics. Now he proposes that "whichever one of you would be going to advise the city / In some fine fashion, this one I intend to take" (1420-1421). The necessity of saving Athens from her plight now comes into the foreground.

Political Advice

The final round of the debate comprises two parts: first the specific question of what to do with Alcibiades; second, a general political judgement about what can be done to the save the city. The question about Alcibiades is not merely casual. Alcibiades was the last great Athenian politician with a monumental capacity to affect the outcome of the Peloponnesian war who might be able to prevent or delay the city's eventual defeat, even at this point in the war.[244] In order to

[243] Dionysus lies about his original motive, which had merely been a personal preference for Euripides. He seems to execute the same maneuver as the Clouds who had first supported Socrates' individualistic philosophy and then changed sides to claim that they had been deceiving Strepsiades all along ("Clouds", 1458-1461).

[244] Plutarch's reflections on Alcibiades in his *Life of Alcibiades* are instructive: "Certainly, if ever man was ruined by his own glory, it was Alcibiades. For his continual success had produced such an idea of his courage and conduct, that if he failed in anything he understood, it was imputed to his neglect, and no one would believe it was through want of power…For they thought nothing was too hard for him, if he went about it in good earnest" (Plutarch, *Lives*, Vol. I, trans. John

appreciate the singular political significance of Alcibiades, it helps to recall his enormous individual effect on the course of the war. Alcibiades bears the chief responsibility for inflaming Athenian ambition to conquer Syracuse, departing from Pericles' moderate policy to avoid imperial projects at all costs.[245] Even so, it is quite possible that Alcibiades could have succeeded in taking Syracuse had he not been accused of mutilating the Hermae and been recalled.[246] Defecting to the Spartans, Alcibiades proved that he could be as much a nightmare to Athens as the harbinger of Athenian victory. He induced the Spartans to reinforce the Syracusans, helped forge an alliance between Sparta and Persia, and fortified Decelea with Peloponnesian troops. Then, defecting again from the Spartans to the Persians (after having an affair with the wife of one of the Spartan kings), Alcibiades immediately gained favor with Tissaphernes, governor of Sardis,

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Dryden (The Modern Library, New York: 2001), 287). Plutarch compares Alcibiades to Coriolanus and remarks of both men: "That so long as they remained and held command in their respective countries they eminently sustained, and when they were driven into exile yet more eminently damaged, the fortunes of those countries…" (Plutarch, *Lives*, Vol. I*,* 322).

[245] Plutarch says that the Athenians always had an eye on Sicily but that "Alcibiades was the person who inflamed this desire of theirs to the height" (Plutarch, *Lives*, 270).

[246] The main cause for the scale of the Athenian disaster was Nicias' superstition that led him to a fatal delay (due to an eclipse of the moon) that made it impossible for the Athenians to evacuate. There is no way that, even supposing that Alcibiades had found himself in the tight situation that Nicias found himself that a superstitious regard for the eclipse would have stopped him.

and gave him the single best piece of political advice for the Persian conduct of the war: let the Athenians and Spartans wear themselves out – a policy that Tissaphernes followed successfully.[247]

Alcibiades also played a pivotal role in the revolution of the Four Hundred, the political event alluded to in the parabasis of *Frogs*. Alcibiades leveraged his influence with Tissaphernes to encourage key individuals in the Athenian fleet at Samos to revolt. There was, after all, much disaffection with the democratic regime after the Sicilian catastrophe and the prospect of receiving aid from the Great King after so many losses lent powerful incentive to bring about a revolution. Nevertheless, when the Four Hundred seized power they excluded Alcibiades and offended the leaders of the fleet at Samos.[248] Alcibiades made himself head of the opposing (hence democratic) party who now wished to overthrow the oligarchy. Yet some of the generals at Samos were so incensed that a serious proposal was made to invade Athens with the fleet. Had they done so, they would almost certainly have lost their remaining imperial assets and possibly brought the war to a premature end. Incredibly, Alcibiades restrained these generals, thus saving Athens from civil war.[249]

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[247] Cf. Plutarch, *Lives*, 277. Thanks to this astute policy, the Persians were the true winners of the Peloponnesian war.

[248] The oligarchic leaders of the Four Hundred wished to make peace with the Spartans. Alcibiades would have frustrated this design and so he was excluded (cf. Plutarch, *Lives*, 278-279).

[249] Plutarch's remarkable assertion that: "…as became a great captain, he opposed himself to the precipitate resolutions which their rage led them to, and, by restraining them from the great error they were about to commit, unequivocally saved the commonwealth" (Plutarch, *Lives*, 279).

In 404, the year *Frogs* was performed, Alcibiades was again out of favor with the Athenians. He had left the fleet in the hands of his lieutenant, Antiochus, while searching for more funds with which to maintain the sailors. While he was away Antiochus disregarded Alcibiades' own warning for caution and rashly challenged the Spartans, losing precious ships and men in the process. As Plutarch observes: Alcibiades "was rejected without any fault committed by himself, and only because [the Athenians] were incensed against his subordinate for having shamefully lost a few ships, they much more shamefully deprived the commonwealth of its most valiant and accomplished general."[250] Now, as the Athenian citizens watching the performance of Aristophanes' play are faced with the question of what to do with Alcibiades, the last remains of the Athenian fleet are lying off Aegospotami, opposite the larger Spartan fleet. Hindsight gives us some perspective on just how tenuous their situation was. Alcibiades sent the Athenians a messenger, warning them that the fleet was in dire peril.[251] Yet his advice was ignored and Athens lost the war when Lysander conducted a surprise attack on the Athenian fleet and destroyed it a year after the performance of *Frogs*.

The above gives us some perspective on the significance of Dionysus' question and some means to judge the cogency of the tragedians' advice. The results of the final phase of the combat are surprising indeed: Euripides turns out to be the obfuscator while Aeschylus' advice is clear and even farsighted. How can this be? Euripides declares that he "hates the citizen who will be manifestly slow to benefit the fatherland, Quick to do great harm, And resourceful for himself, but without devices for the city" (1427-1429). His advice here reminds us of his previous attempt to

[250] Plutarch, *Lives*, 289.

[251] Cf. Plutarch, *Lives*, 289.

portray himself as a benefactor to the city while denying the common good of the city. Here he presents himself as a patriotic defender of the city against the enterprises of a crafty individual without saying anything substantive. After all, Euripides' advice raises the question of whether Alcibiades can be regarded as "resourceful for himself" or whether he (also) has devices for the city. Nevertheless, the answer is worthy of a crafty politician, eager to avoid the consequences of a wrong step. Dionysus praises him for such craftiness.

Aeschylus, on the other hand, gives advice that is not only clear but farsighted: "A lion cub ought not to be reared in the city; / But if some city does rear one, then submit to its ways" (1431-1432). No ambiguity here – it is obvious that Alcibiades is the lion, a man endowed with such political talents and such personal qualities that his individual fortune is bound up with the fate of cities, even the fate of the war.[252] Surely it is true that placing the fortune of a city as great as Athens in the hands of any individual is unfortunate, but when such an individual appears by chance it is necessary to "submit to his ways" or be destroyed.[253] In other words, Aeschylus

[252] The metaphor also reflects Alcibiades' stature above his fellow citizens and his unquenchable thirst for esteem that was the motivating force for the disasters and confusions that occurred. One might say that the inner tragedy of Athenians politics was to produce and simultaneously destroy individuals of unparalleled talent.

[253] Strikingly, Plutarch supports Aeschylus' assessment of Alcibiades. Even after the final Athenian defeat, some maintained hopes that Alcibiades would be able to restore the situation. The Spartans seemed to have agreed with this view, for they lost no time in conspiring with the Persians to assassinate him (cf. Plutarch, *Lives*, 289).

squarely counsels Athens to recall Alcibiades and put him in charge once again of the fleet.[254] Dionysus is impressed with both responses: "for the one speaks wisely, the other clearly" (ὁ μὲν σοφῶς γὰρ εἶπεν, ὁ δ' ἕτερος σαφῶς) (1434).[255]

The next and last question puts to rest any lingering doubt as to which of the poets the predicates "wisely" and "clearly" refer. When Dionysus asks each of the poets to render one final judgment concerning the fate of the city, Euripides attempts to take center stage, but produces answers that appear first whimsical and then enigmatic: one could attach a thin man who is light enough to fly to a fat man who can then spray vinegar in the eyes of the opponents during a naval battle; if things are going so badly now, the city should do the opposite and things will surely go well. When Dionysus presses him to be clearer (1445), Euripides says that the citizens who are now trusted should be dismissed while they should employ those formerly unused (1446-1448). As with his answer concerning Alcibiades, Dionysus praises him for having a "most wise nature" (ὦ σοφωτάτη φύσις), but it is unclear how this piece of cleverness could ever be converted into action, let alone action that might be of real benefit to Athens.

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[254] It is worth noting that Aeschylus' advice seems to have been absolutely sound. Had the Athenians recalled Alcibiades from Thrace he may have averted the disaster that at overcame the fleet. Christopher Baldwin has a different view, arguing that Euripides' advice "proves to be politically cautious and moderate" ("Learning the Lesson of Dionysus", 192). One might say that Euripides is cautious in the sense that he says nothing that could reflect badly on him if his advice proves to be wrong.

[255] There is a difficulty in distinguishing the two, underlined by the alliteration of "*saphos*" (clear) with "*sophos*" (wise).

Aeschylus, on the other hand, has the disadvantage of missing out on the latest news in Athens, which evidently does not reach Hades. He is compelled to ask whether the city is employing the fine citizens, the "men of gold," to whom the chorus had alluded in the parabasis (1444-1447). Dionysus informs him that the fine ones are out of favor but that the city is forced to employ scoundrels. "How then would someone save such a city," asks Aeschylus, "If she'll wear neither good cloak nor goatskin?" (1458-1460). Like the Just Logos that threw its cloak to the audience in order to defect to the other side, the city is without a cloak ("Clouds", 1103). Pressed by Dionysus to say something more, Aeschylus offers a piece of advice that recalls Pericles's original policy when hostilities between the Athenians and Spartans began: trust in Athens' naval power; give up the countryside.[256]

Final Judgment

Pluto intervenes for the final time: no more delays; Dionysus must make a decision. Nevertheless, he hesitates on the brink: "I will choose whomever the soul wishes" (αἱρήσομαι γὰρ ὅνπερ ἡ ψυχὴ θέλει.) (1470). It is almost as if the foregoing debate had never happened. Dionysus appears to be poised between Aeschylus' superior performance before the tribunal of the city and his passionate attachment to Euripides. The two are so perfectly balanced despite their contrary tendencies that only the impetuous interjection of Euripides himself forces Dionysus into a final decision. At the very moment of decision, Euripides audaciously reminds Dionysus "by the gods to whom you swore, / That you would take me home, choose the friends!" (1469-1470). Such an exhortation is sufficient to jolt the wavering god into action. He decides in Aeschylus' favor. For

[256] Thucydides, 1.140-1.146

the thought of this arrogant atheist reminding the god to abide by an oath he swore proves too much even for Dionysus. What hypocrisy, to recall the sanctity of oaths at the moment Euripides needs it most while openly denying the existence of the gods! What hubris to attempt to deprive the god of the theatre of his freedom to decide! Finally, what injustice – for Dionysus had wished to take Euripides back to Athens, but he had made no promise in advance about the competition in Hades. It was Euripides, not Dionysus, who had decided at the beginning to challenge Aeschylus in Hades, and it was Pluto who bound the decision of who should win the competition to the question of who should be resurrected. Euripides either forgets or chooses to ignore the harsh necessity imposed by Pluto.

In the moment of decision, Dionysus delivers Euripides his poetic justice. He reminds him of his perfidy by forcing Euripides to take his own medicine: "It was the tongue that swore," he says (1471).[257] When Euripides complains of the shameful deed committed against him, Dionysus reminds him of his own line: "What's shameful, if it doesn't seem so to the spectators?" (1475). And when Euripides asks the god how he can overlook his staying dead, Dionysus ripostes with "Who knows if to live is to die"? The tragedian has nothing to reply, and Dionysus and Aeschylus leave the stage to dine in Pluto's house before the journey back to Athens.

The final lines of the Chorus that close the play remind of the radical transformation that has taken place before our eyes:

> Blessed is the man having
>
> Precise intelligence (ξύνεσιν ἠκριβωμένην)

[257] One of Euripides' most notorious lines (repeated in *Women at the Thesmophoria*, 275-276).

This is to be learned from many things;

For this one, having appeared to think well, (εὖ φρονεῖν δοκήσας)

Is going back home again,

To the benefit of the citizens,

And to the benefit of his own

Relatives and friends,

Through being intelligent (διὰ τὸ συνετὸς εἶναι).[258] (1482-1490)

Who would have thought that "precise intelligence," "thinking well," and "being intelligent" would refer not to Euripides, the poet who attempted to make intelligence his principle, but to Aeschylus the god nourished by the Mysteries – the poet charged with forming the pattern for the apparently mindless devotion to the city! What Euripides had understood to be intelligence, that is, the Socratic teaching we had seen in the *Clouds*, proves not to be intelligence well understood. For the man who benefits his citizens, relatives, and friends is truly intelligent, while he who sits chattering with Socrates, "casting aside music / And leaving aside the greatest things of the tragic art," is really the action "of a man whose lost his wits." [259]

[258] It is important to note the difference between the different kinds of intelligence conveyed in "ξύνεσιν ἠκριβωμένην" and that of "σοφός". The former suggests sagacity while the latter skill or cunning in a craft.

[259] Christopher Baldwin suggests that Dionysus might have preferred Euripides had the political situation not been so dire (cf. "Learning the Lesson of Dionysus," 194).

Yet before we write off Euripides completely, we must remember that the Chorus is neither Dionysus nor, still less, Aristophanes. They had, in fact, represented the "gold coins" alluded to in the parabasis – those citizens, possibly implicated in the oligarchic revolution, who would have supported Aeschylus from the beginning. The Chorus, in other words, is hardly a neutral judge of the dispute. Euripides fails primarily through overestimating his capacity to achieve victory in the forum of the gold coins when he could easily have beaten Aeschylus by means of the demos of Hades. His hubris is his own tragic flaw. But to do him justice, he does not fail by much and not as a result of his performance in the competition, but as a result of his impetuosity and arrogance. For the most remarkable fact of the contest is Dionysus' persistent efforts to support Euripides and give him an edge over his opponent *in spite* of Aeschylus' evident superiority in the public forum. Aristophanes' subtle homage to the recently dead tragedian consists precisely in Dionysus' attachment to him in spite of the insurmountable difficulty in defending him publicly against a poet far more adept at wearing cloaks, and at the direst moment in the war when Athens was most in need of one.

Another way of stating the point is that Aristophanes both acknowledges Euripides' true greatness while showing that such greatness cannot be stated publicly. Nothing else could explain the theatre god's overwhelming passion for Euripides, conceived in private and the cause of Dionysus' original mission in Part One to rescue Euripides while hiding his true identity. One can reasonably guess that, at the heart of Euripides' appeal for Dionysus, is his superior understanding of eros, and perhaps more broadly of the passions that animate human beings, the source of human life that transgress the laws and even defy the will of the gods. Seen from this perspective, the measured, military music of Aeschylean verse seems somewhat prosaic in comparison to the bright music of passion that Euripides offers. We recall that underneath Dionysus' Herakles suit was an

effeminate *krokotos*, a representation of the erotic nature hidden beneath the lionskin. We recall, too, that Aristophanes, Dionysus's greatest worshipper, pays his full respects to eros in more than one of his comedies.

The chief disagreement between Euripides and Aristophanes lies not so much in the status of eros, but in its public presentation and, more narrowly, in Euripides' attempt to dispense with any need for concealing it. It is for this crime most of all that Aristophanes punishes and publicly shames him. For, as we saw, the center of the problem for Euripides is that the Socratic basis of Euripides' tragedy prevents him from taking seriously enough the political, the common good. Yet, unlike Socrates, who was uninterested in or incapable of presenting a public front, and unlike the Unjust logos who could appeal only to private passions, Euripides is a poet with the Athenian demos as his audience. Accordingly, he attempts to present himself as a benefactor to the Athenians by claiming to teach them their true interests, that is, the management of their own households. Yet in making such a claim he demonstrates that he has absolutely no basis for conceiving of the unit greater than the family, the *polis*. When Aeschylus attacks him in the name of the *polis* he has no coherent answer. And when the time comes to present advice to Athens in her predicament concerning Alcibiades and the general conduct of the war, the poet who boasted so much of his unparalleled clarity in speaking about human nature in turn becomes vague, flippant, and obscure.[260]

[260] Cf. Charlesworth's observation that Euripides' "verdict on Alcibiades, though pungent and antithetical, is of little practical use or meaning, whereas Aeschylus is perfectly clear and explicit" ("Aristophanes and Aeschylus," 6).

Aeschylus, on the other hand, manifests his superiority to Euripides chiefly in the business of cloak-wearing. He is such an adept that he first appears to us in the guise of his poetic creations, of the thumotic "lion-hearted Teucer" or Lamachus: all anger and impetuosity. If he were truly the same as such characters the competition would have been over before it had begun. Yet under the pressure of Euripides' challenge Aeschylus is compelled to take recourse to tactics beyond awe-filled intimidation; he is forced gradually to remove the cloak, revealing a perplexing and complex figure underneath. The devotee of the Demeter mystery cult turns out to be capable of outmatching the subtle Euripides in dialectic. The self-avowed student of Homer admits that the traditional understanding of the gods is insufficient and should be doctored on his own authority.[261] The crafter of sesquipedalian phrases touting the nobility and virtue of heroes manages to outdo

[261] M. P. Charlesworth recalls that Aeschylus was once "suspected and even accused of divulging the mysteries" (M. P. Charlesworth, "Aristophanes and Aeschylus" in *The Classical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1926, 3). Charlesworth refers to Aristotle who describes various excuses for committing faux pas in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "But of what he is doing a man might be ignorant, as for instance people say "it slipped out of their mouths as they were speaking", or "they did not know it was a secret", as Aeschylus said of the mysteries…(1111a). Charlesworth says that, according to Clement of Alexandria, the tragedian was acquitted on the grounds that he had never been initiated. If true, there is an added level of comedy to Aeschylus claiming to have had his mind nourished by the mysteries of Demeter. Nietzsche also charges Aeschylus with impiety for "the center and main axiom of the Aeschylean view of the world which envisages Moira enthroned above gods and men as eternal justice" (*Birth of Tragedy*, 68).

Euripides in parody and satire. Finally, and most significantly, Aeschylus and not Euripides proves wholly competent to advise the city in its peril.

One might even say that the difference between Euripides and Aeschylus lies more in the color of their cloaks than in their vital natures. Both are poets who compete in a monumental agon, before the judgment of the men of Athens, seeking supremacy, not just over their fellow poets who are dead, but over those still living. The stakes in such an agon are nothing other than the power of determining the morality of the city, of shaping the characters of the best citizens and receiving the glory that only the greatest benefactors can be worthy of. Seen in this light, Aeschylus and Euripides share a similar goal as poets while differing in their means. One conceals himself as a student of Homer, shaping the thumotic warriors single-mindedly dedicated to the city while himself standing just outside or above the morality he advocates. The other dispenses with morality and the city to proclaim popular enlightenment and freedom from the oppressive weight of divine punishment.

Aristophanes shows that Aeschylus is necessary to the city while Euripides, in spite of his brilliance, is detrimental to it. Aeschylus is even more necessary when Athens's survival is called into question.[262] As Aeschylus says in one of his profoundest lines: "how can one save a such a city, / If she'll wear neither good cloak nor goatskin?" (1458-1459). The city always needs a moral cloak even when it is clear to the wise that the cloak is merely a cloak, that it does not represent the reality of things. Nevertheless, as essential as Aeschylus is, Aristophanes reminds us that with

[262] Cf. Arlene Saxonhouse: "The defense of the city which denies attention to the private and personal is nevertheless necessary to preserve the private and the personal", "Men, Women, War, and Politics: Family and Polis in Aristophanes and Euripides," 67.

Aeschylus comes the heavy burden that the gods place on the back of their mortal subjects, for Aeschylus upholds the divine order with Zeus, “our shared flogging god,” at its head. The city, as Aristophanes’ comedy shows, can never escape the tragic paradox of depending for its existence on a divine order that cannot otherwise be rationally defended.

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis has been to deepen our understanding of Aristophanes' critique of philosophic wisdom by considering the comic poet's portrayals of Socrates in *Clouds* and Euripides in *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Frogs*. It has claimed that an understanding of Aristophanes' representation of philosophy is incomplete without considering his complex and multi-faceted appraisal of Euripides, that strange hybrid of philosopher and poet, a tragedian who evidently converts his audience into atheists and whose erotic knowledge of the human soul rivals that of the comic poet himself. Having considered these three plays in detail, we are in a position to compare the two figures from a more general perspective.

First, it is not possible to gauge the effect of philosophy on the city merely from Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in *Clouds*. The most significant feature of the eccentric philosopher in that play had been his isolation from, not his engagement with, the city. Unlike *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Frogs*, the scope of *Clouds* remains thoroughly in the domain of the private sphere: it is a private individual, Strepsiades, who seeks out a private Socrates. Moreover, Strepsiades is not an Athenian everyman, but an odd individual in his own right, a fellow who uncomfortably straddles the wealthy and poor classes and whose familial woes stem in large part from the contradictions that arise from this combination. Socrates, for his part, presents himself as wholly aloof from the concerns of the city. His earnest desire, as Aristophanes memorably shows when Socrates first appears in his basket, is to abstract himself entirely from his body, achieving the impossible apotheosis into a bodiless god of the intellect; airy, ethereal thought thinking itself. Although it is true that the philosopher must sometimes come down to earth in search of new proselytes and steal the occasional cloak to put bread on the table, he hardly evinces the tyrannical desires preached by Unjust logos in the rhetorical debate.

In *Clouds*, the point of contact between the philosopher and the city occurs through the rhetorical debate between Just and Unjust logos, which is the only part of the play that takes place in the public forum with the Athenian audience themselves as witnesses.[263] But here several significant facts place Socrates himself at a distance from the affairs of the polis. First, he is not present (or at least does not participate) in the debate, being merely the venue manager. He therefore provides the circumstances for the debate to take place without in any way affecting its outcome. In more precise terms, Socrates offers the foundational natural teaching that makes the rhetorical debate possible without himself being shown to follow the conclusions it draws. If ethereal vortex rules and not Zeus, then Just logos' thesis that justice is "with the gods" is wrong; there is no justice; human affairs belong entirely to the realm of convention with the most convincing speaker being the one most likely to prevail. Yet, although Pheidippides (Socrates' promising young student), and Euripides seem influenced by this teaching, Socrates himself does not. He is presented by Aristophanes as thoroughly unerotic. Although Socrates might agree on the fundamental point that there is no common good, only an individual good, he pursues this good in a very different way, by dedicating himself to contemplation.

Second, the outcome of the rhetorical debate proves that the victory of the Unjust logos was a foregone conclusion: Unjust logos converts Just logos by proving *ad oculus* that the arguments in support of the traditional education that he had presumed to be so convincing no longer carry much weight. The whole Athenian audience that Just logos had thought supported his side already count among the "buggered"; what had seemed to be the "weaker" argument in the old days is now the "stronger" one. This joke, which seems to exaggerate in much the same way

[263] His argument with the creditors is obviously private.

as the Second Female Orator's assertion that Euripides had converted the men into atheists, nevertheless contains a serious kernel of truth. The present generation of Athenians has been thoroughly influenced by the teachings of the sophists and the rhetoricians. Given Socrates' isolation from the city, he is a symptom and not a cause of Athens' corruption.

Aristophanes punishes Socrates not so much for corrupting the city through his natural philosophical teaching as for his lack of prudence, or lack of political responsibility.[264] In this point lies the "positive teaching" we sought in *Clouds* and the particular superiority of poets to philosophers or at least of Aristophanes to Socrates. A comparison between Socrates and the Clouds had sufficed to illustrate this: the Clouds wish to replace the Olympians and yet they never state openly that the gods do not exist. The moment they become aware that a disaster is brewing they abruptly change sides and present themselves as the champions of morality, abandoning their erstwhile champion in the process. Aristophanes and Socrates are both associated with the Clouds (Aristophanes is a Cloud, and Socrates is their chief devotee) but the rhetorical flexibility of the Clouds stands in contrast to Socrates' stark inflexibility. Poets who (after all) compete with one another like the gods for an audience/worshipers must be politically savvy – and they are able to appear in different disguises and call on allies to help them. Socrates is destroyed because he has no ability to transform himself; he is too much absorbed in his quest for knowledge; he presents himself to the city as he really is, and hence he is bound to be misunderstood and eventually destroyed.

In this way *Clouds* leaves us in a strange position: the philosophy that Socrates espoused is not refuted on rational grounds, only on political grounds. Put another way, Aristophanes'

[264] Cf. *Gorgias* 521d-522a for Plato's rebuttal of this charge on behalf of his Socrates.

defense of the gods only proves that they are necessary to sustain the family and the common good of the city without asserting positively that they really exist. Socrates' rational proof that Vortex rules in place of Zeus remains unchallenged in the play. Correspondingly, the catalyst for Strepsiades' dramatic conversion as a religious fanatic occurs on the basis of the profound realization that he cannot retain his paternal authority over his son without the gods – his attachment to the gods occurs on the basis of the love of his own, not on the basis of selfless piety. The paradox implied in this realization (it was love of his own that caused Strepsiades to want to defraud his creditors in the first place) is nowhere resolved.

The central importance of the political – of the relation between the individual and the city – led us to consider Euripides in *Women at the Thesmophoria*, the comedy par excellence that reflects on the relationship between the poet and the city. The core problem of the play had originated in the women's anger at Euripides' depictions of their erotic relations in several of his tragedies. However, if the women represent the conservative half of the city, adept at preserving the ancestral customs – the *nomos* – while the men have embraced the novel doctrines of the sophists by means of Euripides' tragedies, then Euripides' true crime is a crime against the city itself, not exclusively against the "demos" of women. His penetrating depictions of human relations expose too much the tension between the individual and the common good that the city must elide in order to function. As a result, his mission to find an advocate to plead for his behalf is tantamount to finding a political defense of his poetry.

As he carried out such a mission, we were able to measure Euripides against two other kinds of poet: Agathon, the poet whose central principle is the beautiful; and the Kinsman whose erotic nature, literal mindedness, and preoccupation with the body made him the comical equivalent of the comic poet himself. Agathon and the Kinsman therefore stand in opposition to

one another, as opposed as ugliness is to beauty. Agathon represents a tragedian wholly acceptable to the city's sensibilities (notwithstanding the difference between Agathon the man and Agathon the poet). He is, to follow the conceit of the play, the poet most capable of imitating women and their ways. And yet, the Kinsman had exposed Agathon's poetry as, at root, artificial and pretentious. Agathon might be able to move seamlessly among the women, but he is inferior to Euripides in the depth of his poetic wisdom.

The solution to Euripides' quest to avoid persecution lay in the creation of a strange hybrid of the Kinsman and Agathon. The Kinsman's comic transformation into a woman (no doubt an ugly one!) enabled him to infiltrate the Thesmophoria, but the speech he delivers to the women is entirely in keeping with Aristophanean comedy. Just as Dicaeopolis shocked the Acharnians with the assertion that the Spartans were not wholly to blame for the war, so the Kinsman shocks the women with the assertion that everything Euripides had said about them was true: he should be exonerated because he could have said much worse! In this comic moment of the play, Aristophanes pays tribute to Euripides by vindicating the truth of his depictions of the ways of the women; of the illicit ways of the city. Euripides comes very close indeed to the comic poet himself who had done much the same thing in *Acharnians*. There appears to be a natural amity between Aristophanes and Euripides.

The last challenge of the play encompasses the fantastic possibility of reconciling Euripides with the Thesmophorian women, of harmonizing Euripidean tragedy with the requirements of the city. He had, therefore, been obliged to undergo his own process of feminization through trial and error by reenacting with the Kinsman iconic scenes from his tragedies that portray women in a more favorable light. Although these attempts bore mixed fruit, Euripides and the women eventually arrived at an agreement that they would cease persecuting him if he ceases depicting

them badly. Where *Clouds* had ended almost tragically with the destruction of the Thinkery and the ruin of Strepsiades, *Women at the Thesmophoria* ends happily with Euripides (now fully transformed into a female procuress) and the Thesmophorian women banding together to deceive the hapless barbarian, thus facilitating the rescue of the Kinsman.

Although *Woman at the Thesmophoria* seems to depict the triumph of Euripides, we were compelled to question the likelihood and even the desirability of such a reconciliation: to what extent is the integrity of Euripides' tragedy - his particular power of depicting eros unconstrained by law – compromised by the necessity of harmonizing it with the requirements of the city? Would not such a compromise result in the debasement of Euripides' poetic wisdom, while doing little to improve the city itself? After all, the demands on Euripides of the city as represented by the women were moderate: it is sufficient for him to stop depicting them badly in his poetry; the question of his atheism is nowhere considered directly. The women do not know what atheism is, only atheistic acts. In *Clouds*, the gods had been shown to be necessary only to sustain the family, while the rational argument debunking justice in favor of the individual good was nowhere contradicted. *Women at the Thesmophoria*, likewise, ends in a manner that does not contradict the core argument of the Unjust logos that Euripides follows and represents in his poetry. The question of the play had been the extent to which Euripides can protect himself from persecution by means of a political compromise, not the effect of his poetry on the greater morality of the city. In order to consider the latter question, we turned to *Frogs*.

In *Frogs*, Aristophanes pits Euripides not against the city but against the greatest poetic representative of the city, Aeschylus. This comedy therefore forms the natural climax of *Clouds* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*, where the two giants of tragedy battle for supremacy on (relatively) equal grounds, with the best part of the city as witness and the god of the theatre,

Dionysus, as adjudicator. The stakes for the competition could not be higher: whereas the question in *Women at the Thesmophoria* had been Euripides' ability to escape persecution, the question in *Frogs* is which poet should be resurrected from Hades so that their tragedies can be restored to the tragic stage in Athens; the question concerns which tragedian should guide the morality of the city. The high stakes within the play are matched by the high stakes without. In 405, the year in which the play was produced, Athens teeters on the brink of political annihilation with revolution and tumult at home and a catastrophic military situation abroad.

Nevertheless, while Dionysus decides unequivocally in favor of Aeschylus, the grounds for his decision are obscure. The reason for this obscurity is due partly to the apparently arbitrary manner in which Dionysus makes his decision and partly to the difficulty in understanding the relationship between the first part of the play, which traces Dionysus' descent into the underworld with his slave, Xanthius, and the second part of the play, where the debate takes place. Put another way, it is unclear how the centrality of the political problem – the future survival of Athens as an independent political entity – emerges out of the concern with the private from which the play begins.

The climax of the first part of the play consists in the revelation of Dionysus' divinity, permitting the god to act as an adjudicator, a divinity recognized by both Aeschylus and Euripides in the second part of the play. Nevertheless, this revelation is highly ironic: Dionysus falls in love with Euripides while reading his *Andromeda* on an Athenian trireme in the midst of a naval battle. His love of Euripides, as ardent as Perseus' love for the anguished maiden, as keen as Herakles' desire for pea-soup, reflects a private passion for the pleasure Euripides affords him, without care or concern for the battle going on around his very ears. As a result, his decision to resurrect the recently deceased tragedian does not arise from any concern about the potential for Euripides to

assist the Athenians in the hour of their peril. He thus involves himself in a paradox: as a god of the city, his very existence depends on the recognition of the gods; and yet he is in love with a poet whose tendency is to deny them. His quest to resurrect Euripides, if successful, would have risked resulting in his own suicide.

The comedy of the beating scene where Aeacus, doorman of Hades, attempts to distinguish between the slave Xanthius and the divine Dionysus, underscores the latter's dependence on the *nomos* he is on the verge of obliterating. Herakles and Pluto can immediately recognize their fellow deity, but neither Aeacus nor Dionysus' worshippers (whether they be frogs or initiates) can do so: only gods can recognize other gods. The corollary to this "theological" principle, as Aeacus demonstrates, is that no mortal can ever recognize a god with his own eyes; he must rely on hearsay. As a result, the beating test itself is inconclusive; only Pluto's testimony that Dionysus is who he says he is sufficient, and that can take place only offstage, out of the audience's sight.

Aristophanes thus pays his due to *nomos* without denying the difficulties it raises. Belief in the gods of the city imposes its own kind of harshness, the equivalent of bearing a heavy burden on one's back. Dionysus' decision to descend into Hades disguised as Herakles reflects the god's lingering dependence on the nomos at the same time as his soft effeminate nature underneath the lionskin hankered after Euripides. The manly Herakles whom Dionysus imperfectly imitates had been his source for all the terrifying stories about Hades, famed for the terrible monsters that lurk in its shadowy depths. The threat of divine punishment is the corollary of the *nomos* that affirms the gods.

Euripides and Aeschylus, however, are unlike the slaves who complain about the heavy burden placed on their backs by the masters and secretly wish to overthrow them. The two poets, each in their own way, are above the *nomos*; as poets who offer the definitive interpretations of

the stories of Homer twice a year on the tragic stage, they can help shape what the *nomos* will be.[265] And yet Euripides and Aeschylus emerge as opposing principles; the one discloses man's erotic nature that transcends or opposes the nomos, the other suppressing eros for the sake of producing thumotic tragedies that inspire selfless dedication to the city at war. Euripides explores the nature of man on the basis of the natural philosophical principles he shares with Socrates; Aeschylus enchants us with awe-inspiring poetry that makes us forget our private needs in order to serve the common good. Euripides swears by aether whose airy lightness corresponds to abstract thought; Aeschylus swears by Demeter whose earthiness reminds us of the heavy limitations imposed by Hades.

The major twist in the second part of *Frogs* is the emergence of Aeschylus as the superior combatant when all the signs at the onset had pointed to Euripides as the likely victor. After all, in a contest of wisdom, the poet who makes "intelligence" (*noein*) his guiding principle should beat the poet whose thumotic tragedies appeal to the likes of "flesh-ripping pine-benders" like Phormisius and Magaenetus the Nut. However, under the intense pressure of the poetry dual, Aeschylus gradually reveals himself to be more than he seems. The poet who swears by Demeter and venerates Homer as the archetype of the thumotic poet declares for himself the right to determine what should and should not be publicly displayed. Unlike Just logos, who could never hope to defend the belief in Zeus and his pantheon against the rational, dialectic onslaught of

[265] Cf. James Redfield's observation that "every healthy society requires some kind of moral center, some universal point of reference; at Athens tragic drama answered this requirement" ("Comedy, Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes' 'Frogs'", 110).

Unjust logos, Aeschylus tacitly admits the incoherence of the *nomos* he champions at the same time as he justly (or convincingly) claims to serve the city's interests.

Nevertheless, in spite of Aeschylus' edge, Euripides loses only by a hair's breadth. Dionysus' personal preference for Euripides prevents him from deciding in favor of Aeschylus until the very last second, and only under immediate pressure from Pluto who constrains the debate within the limits of harsh necessity. It is Euripides' hubristic interjection, hypocritically reminding the god of his original promise to save him, that proves to be his downfall. Had Euripides been content to leave the tragic crown of the underworld in Aeschylus' hands, returning to Athens with Dionysus according to the original plan, he might have avoided this unfavorable outcome. In other words, Euripides is not content simply to be the best tragedian; he must be recognized as such by the city for all time; he must be the poet both of the individual and the common good. In his hubris to have his cake and eat it, Euripides underestimates the challenge he faces by submitting himself to a public debate with Aeschylus, the poet par excellence of the gods of the city. Euripides has no good reply to Aeschylus' repeated jibes about his contribution to the welfare of the city, and his wisdom proves to be severely limited when he is forced to proffer specific advice about Athens' woeful situation in the war.

Behind Dionysus, the judge of the debate, is concealed the comic poet whose genius, after all, is able to comprehend the two extremes that Euripides and Aeschylus represent and can never themselves resolve.[266] Aristophanes can rival or surpass Euripides in his understanding of man's

[266] Christopher Baldwin observes that "Like Aeschylus' and Euripides' tragic presentations of the choices faced by characters like Agamemnon, Orestes, and Oedipus, Aristophanes' presentation of the choice of Dionysus must make between Aeschylus and Euripides points to the possibility

erotic nature without corrupting or destroying the city's gods in the process. He can also surpass Aeschylus by reinforcing the *nomos* and recognizing the city's demands on the individual without suppressing eros and the pleasure it affords. Behind the debate between two opposing tendencies within tragedy is the prior question of whether tragedy or comedy is better able to contend with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the city. Aristophanes, I believe, proves himself the clear victor in these terms.

Nevertheless, Aristophanes' comic power of representing the tension between the individual good grounded in the natural philosophic teaching of Socrates and the common good demanded by the city and its gods always exhibits a tension; it is never reconciled. His comedies, therefore, tend to reflect a deep ambivalence towards the wise teaching of Socrates and Euripides on the one hand, and the tradition he appears to defend on the other. He seems both fascinated by and attracted to the philosophic teaching and concerned by the effect it has on politics and the kinds of individuals it produces. He defends the *nomos* at the same time as he ridicules the absurd handling of the city's affairs, the stupidity of single-minded thumotic devotion to warfare at the expense of all else, and the burden imposed on the mind by belief in the gods His claim to justice lies in mediating between the two poles, preserving the city without sacrificing the individual.

Aristophanes' understanding of justice and the good through the power of comedy therefore appears in contrast to the thought of Plato, whose Socrates claims to have discovered political philosophy, uniting together reason with justice. Whereas, for Aristophanes, the two must exist in irreconcilable tension, for Plato there is at least the possibility that the two can be united.

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that we face a tragic choice as human beings, a choice between different and irreconcilable conceptions of virtue or excellence" ("Learning the Lesson of Dionysus", 192).

The confidence in (or perhaps the dream of) this possibility has fueled the Western tradition of philosophy ever since, although the crisis it finds itself in now might suggest the wisdom in returning to the origins. Aristophanes reminds us of the essential problems that lie at the very root of this tradition.

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