

“SPEAK ON MY BEHALF”: PERSUASION AND PURIFICATION IN ARISTOPHANES’ *WASPS*

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Persuasion, Isocrates announces in his *Nicocles* (3.6), was a necessary condition for the development of human society; the art of persuasion gave men the ability to articulate their desires, separating them from beasts, and allowed them to found cities and establish laws. Such claims were not likely to cost Isocrates his audience. The Greeks generally defined their cultural superiority in terms of persuasive speech, almost as often as their vaunted reverence for νόμοι and δίκη.¹ But Isocrates was not shrouding himself in meaningless clichés. The Greeks believed πειθώ permeated their social lives. This is certainly obvious in the role persuasion was given in the production of citizens, the ongoing re-performance of society’s mythical origins. There is no better way to prepare young men for their adult public lives than by inculcating the arts of persuasion, Socrates insists in the *Republic* (548b); those who learn laws by force rather than persuasion are easily overwhelmed by their own passions. Once planted in the mind of the young citizen, the arts of persuasion continue to hold a primary place throughout his life. Pericles’ funeral oration in Thucydides reads like a eulogy of Athenians’ ability to persuade and willingness to be persuaded—in particular, their willingness to subordinate personal ambitions and attend to the needs of the city when it is threatened.

1 See Buxton 1982.58–63. In the alternative version of human nature presented by Aristophanes’ bird chorus, man is by nature a deceiver (*Birds* 451–52: δολερὸν μὲν ἀεὶ κατὰ πάντα δὴ τρόπον / πέφυκεν ἄνθρωπος). Yet here too, δόλος is not the opposite of πειθώ: the chorus will listen to Peisetaerus, a man, in the expectation that he will say something useful that has not occurred to them (452–59).

Yet there is a palpable ambivalence that lies just beneath the surface of these celebrations of *πειθῶ*, an ambivalence that springs from the simple fact that although young men and citizens, when persuaded, far outstrip their coerced peers, there is always the possibility that persuasion will fail, that young men and citizens will come to find their teachers and leaders unconvincing, or (worse still) that they will find other teachers and leaders more persuasive. Pericles' eulogy of Athenian receptivity to persuasion is itself persuasion: his goal, in praising the war dead, is to transform them into paradigms of Athenian citizenship. In effect, then, that praise is conditional and tautological: Athenians are truly receptive if they prove receptive, that is, if they subordinate their personal aims and desires to a city whose leaders have committed it to war. Through it all, Pericles treats his fellow Athenians with generosity. He will help the Athenians overcome their inability to believe stories only so far as "each believes himself capable of doing what he hears said about others" (Thuc. 2.35.2)—that is, he will gladly explain to them how they can tell those stories about themselves as well. Of course, the war with Sparta was in its infancy, and visions of glory motivated the Athenians as effectively as dire threats. That would soon change. Pericles' successors, Cleon in particular, approached the Athenians with sticks, not carrots; the vaunted Athenian *πειθῶ*, handsome young boys charmed into behaving nicely by their elders' words, had devolved (as much because of Pericles' war as his successors' limitations) into a continual haranguing of frightened citizens with grim images and inescapable facts. The Athenians might not have been willing to forgive Helen (as Gorgias urged) because she acted under the influence of *πειθῶ*,² but their leaders certainly hoped that persuasion was every bit as powerful as Gorgias claimed.

But what about comedy? Persuasion is obviously important for Aristophanes' surviving comedies, which make a substantial dramatic investment in relationships between individuals who persuade and those individuals or groups who allow themselves to be persuaded or resist persuasion. Dicaeopolis, the Sausage-Seller, Trygaeus, Peisetaerus, Lysistrata,

2 That the Athenians did not believe Gorgias is suggested by Euripides' *Helen* (produced in 412): that play returns to the more drastic defense that Helen never went to Troy. But Gorgias was probably not terribly concerned as to whether the Athenians believed his defense of Helen or even his claims about the powers of persuasion. According to Plato's *Meno* (95c), Gorgias was only really interested in making people seem clever in speaking; his defense of Helen nicely demonstrates that his brand of sophistic persuasion can do this, even if he himself lacked the awesome persuasive charms that his Paris wielded over the unfortunate Helen.

and Praxagora, Aristophanes' most memorable heroes, all act by persuading: they realize their dreams and transform their world largely through their good fortune in persuading reluctant or hostile individuals or crowds to join them or, at least, to get out of their way. The dramatic evolution of the comic chorus, the most common object of the hero's persuasive desires, provides a measure of the success or failure of that persuasive attempt. The comic agon, where heroes typically display their rhetorical talents and choruses feel their effects, draws heavily on forensic and political rhetoric. This is a particularly significant feature of *Wasps*, Aristophanes' most explicit treatment of Athenian legal practices and forensic rhetoric—its psychological nature as well as its political implications. In *Wasps*, legal metaphors become literal, as Aristophanes transforms his stage into a court, interweaving the Athenian citizen's identity as juror into the play's dramatic core. This paper attempts to show that *Wasps* participates in a democratic discourse on citizen identity by subjecting the citizen—who he is and what he becomes when persuaded—to a close and politically charged scrutiny, offering in the process a distinctive image of the culture of persuasion in the Athenian democracy. Does comedy share the Athenian ambivalence towards *πείθω*? Does it celebrate its place in Athenian culture as long as *πείθω* produces the effects comedy likes? A simple yes or no will not suffice; I will argue that *Wasps* offers a rich image of political persuasion as a process in which the citizen is purified of corrupting influences and restored to his true, if incorrigibly waspish, political self.

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Comic sketches of Athenian legal procedure find their way into *Wasps* early, before the parabasis sends the play along its final dramatic path. The audience could not fail to notice the multiple layers of comic parody, including comic images of prosecutor and defendant, jury, charge, and penalty, in the trial for theft of the domestic dog Labes. But the audience likely sensed a comic caricature of Athenian legal procedure even earlier, in the examination in *Wasps*' agon of the behavior and motives of the play's extraordinary hero, Philocleon. Philocleon, we learn at the start of the play, is a man whose defining characteristic is an overwhelming addiction to jury duty.³ He is a "lover of the Heliaea like no man" (88) and is "passionate

3 On names in Aristophanes, see Olson 1992. Names, like other personal attributes, serve as yardsticks of the transformation in identity that typifies the dramatic trajectory of many of

about judging” (89). Yet it is not the business of deliberating itself that captivates him, nor seeing justice dispensed after a careful consideration of contrasting positions. Philocleon is, in fact, indifferent to persuasion—the persuasion of the defense—and is incapable of sympathy. So Philocleon begins each law case resolutely determined to vote for conviction and for the severest punishments.⁴ This makes him seem something of a contradiction: this lover of the law courts despises and scorns persuasion: “He alone has never been persuaded” (278), the chorus says with admiration, tellingly equating being persuaded by defendants with being persuaded tout court. In the real world of Athenian law, it was, of course, also incumbent on prosecutors to prove the defendants’ guilt. Defendants not only plead for mercy, they also characteristically deny guilt or displace it (often onto their accusers). Moreover, Athenian juries could enjoy the satisfaction of exacting penalties at the prosecution’s expense as well as the defense’s; they would certainly do so if they were as little persuaded by them as Philocleon is convinced by defense speeches. In short, Philocleon’s refusal to be persuaded by defense speeches implies a complete naiveté towards prosecution speeches—the interests that underlay them, the rhetorical stratagems that drove them.

This is the foundation of the case that Bdelycleon, Philocleon’s son, brings against the old man. Bdelycleon opens the agon with the claim that his father is manipulated by the prosecution in the various trials he judges: he may view himself as a master, but he is, in fact, a slave. Philocleon ardently rejects the claim; he responds to his son’s accusation by transforming the domestic dispute between father and son into a quasi-legal matter and the stage into a court (521). Father and son become litigants who must

Aristophanes’ heroes. The audience often learns the hero’s name only relatively late, as a final piece in the puzzle of his identity (e.g., Dicaeopolis of *Acharnians*), or after the hero has undergone a fundamental change (e.g., Agoracritus in *Knights*). *Wasps*’ audience hears Philocleon and Bdelycleon named early in the play (133–36) and only once later (Bdelycleon, 372; Philocleon, 1466). The point of the names in *Wasps* is to describe a fundamental axis around which the identities of the father and son dance in the course of the plays. Philocleon’s name, in particular, is structured as an elaboration of his defining νόσος (φιληλιαστία, cf. 88). On Philocleon’s νόσος, see also Sidwell 1990 and Bowie 1993, who focus on elements of (respectively) Corybantic and initiatory ritual in *Wasps* and are less interested in the significance of Philocleon’s dramatic trajectory for Athenian political identity.

4 This makes for an awful juror in reality, but it was hardly uncommon in comedy. In this respect, Philocleon resembles the choruses of *Acharnians* and *Birds*, who function as jurors in the agons of their respective plays. In Allen 2000.128–30, the transformation of Philocleon’s anger is the point of the play.

persuade the chorus, which is explicitly entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the matter and mediating between father and son (521). From this point in the agon, speeches of prosecution and defense meld completely into the agon's poetic structure. The legal flavor of the argument, as it is transformed into an arbitration (δίαιτα, 524) complete with third-party mediation, seems natural here;⁵ δουλεία was a serious charge in democratic Athens, a charge that easily reaches beyond the limits of a domestic dispute, even when applied loosely to a citizen who too credulously obeys the dictates of Athens' leaders. Most important for the dramatic outcome of the play, Philocleon binds himself to the result in the course of this exchange: the chorus's opinion, when it is rendered after the two speeches are completed, will have the force of a verdict. There is a certain logic in this implication: if Philocleon is as easily duped as his son asserts, if he is a slave, then he is not qualified to serve as an Athenian juror.⁶

The chorus is suddenly empowered to make a decision. The transformation, typical in Aristophanes' early agons, is particularly easy in *Wasps*. The role Bdelycleon and his father give them in deciding Philocleon's fate reduplicates their usual daily activity. Bdelycleon is quick to agree to this (522), though it seems that he is taking a great risk. The chorus is certainly inclined against him, and their prejudices are given license when the quarrel between Bdelycleon and his father outstrips the family's ability to resolve it on its own. Yet though the chorus seems a perversion of the independent arbitrators called for in an Athenian δίαιτα,⁷ their installment nonetheless gives a special significance to *Wasps*' agon as a reflection on Athenian forensic rhetoric: the wasps are an Athenian jury, they embrace the suspicions, prejudices, but also the particular demands and insights of their kind.

5 On arbitration (δίαιτα), see Todd 1993.123–25. In mediating between Bdelycleon and his father, the chorus seems already to be assuming their role as supporters of the household, a role that will become explicit after they render their verdict.

6 Hence the change in the form of the arbitration brings with it a change in the actual substance of the dispute. Philocleon is put on mock trail for pretending to be a citizen, a domestic version of a γραφή ξενίας, rather than his son, for abusing and seeking to enslave his elderly father (γραφή κακώσεως). That the “lover of Cleon” undergoes something like a γραφή ξενίας must be considered particularly salient if there is any truth to the story that Cleon brought this very charge against Aristophanes. On the charge, see MacDowell 1995.42–45.

7 The wasps obviously belong firmly in Philocleon's camp at the start of the agon. They are not only inclined to vote for him, they also give him the substance of his principal point: Athenian jurors wield power like kings (βασιλεία, 546, cf. 549).

This is made clear after Philocleon has finished speaking and his son is about to begin his rejoinder. In a simple directive that spells out the chorus's criteria for persuasive speech and, I will argue, hints at the play's political core, the chorus leader instructs Bdelycleon in very clear terms (644–47):

δεῖ δέ σε παντοίας πλέκειν
εἰς ἀπόφευξιν παλάμας.
τὴν γὰρ ἐμὴν ὀργὴν πεπᾶναι χαλεπὸν
μὴ πρὸς ἐμοῦ λέγοντι.

It is necessary for you to weave every kind
of cunning if you want to get off.
For my anger is difficult to soften
for someone not speaking on my behalf.⁸

The chorus has just heard Philocleon, who finds it very easy to speak “on behalf” of the jurors’ lives. Indeed, the chorus feels taller when they listen to Philocleon (637–38); his encomium of their way of life allowed them to imagine that they “apportion justice in the Islands of the Blest” (639–41). Socrates makes fun of orators in very similar terms (*Menex.* 235a–c), and a fine oratorical performance nearly makes him forget himself in the *Apology* (17a)—but the wasp chorus would certainly deny that they lose themselves when they listen to Philocleon. Just the opposite: for the first time, they seem to locate their true identity.⁹ This is not altogether for the wrong reasons. Philocleon gives a speech that is concrete and personal¹⁰ and springs from his identity as a citizen; thus it simultaneously promotes his interests and

8 The chorus is obviously threatening Bdelycleon. The audience might well have understood the threat in concrete legal terms as an allusion to the possibility that Bdelycleon would not get one-fifth of their votes and thus become liable for a fine or some other penalty. On “speaking on my behalf” (πρὸς ἐμοῦ λέγοντι), see Antiphon 5.32: slaves, when tortured, speak “in favor” (πρὸς τούτων) of those most in control of their βάσανος (cf. LSJ πρὸς A.III.2). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

9 Socrates, who came as close as any man to defying John Donne about the impossibility of escaping human society, was persuaded of his value by his own inner voice and showed it as he walked “brilliant in his eyes, posture, and gait” (Xen. *Ap.* 27).

10 See MacDowell 1971.206, on Philocleon’s speech 546–630: “Philokleon’s speech does not consist of dull generalizations, but of individual examples vividly described; it is easy for the audience to imagine the accused men standing at the court entrance (553–8), or the cringing attitude of Theoros (599–600), or the daughter coaxing her father (607–9).”

embraces and charms his audience, the chorus.¹¹ His duties as juror, he claims, give him extraordinary public and domestic power and privilege. Philocleon is talking primarily about εὔθυναί, the scrutinies of outgoing magistrates; these were the legal procedures that were the most likely to lend his position credibility and to tie his duties to the powers of the state. Philocleon gives graphic evidence of the jurors' power to examine the accounts of outgoing magistrates with no consideration of their influence and wealth. Bdelycleon helps his father give some order to his vivid but chaotic speech and is selective in the points he contests. Moreover, he admits that there is something appealing in seeing arraigned ex-magistrates extending their mendacious hands to common jurors like Philocleon and his friends,¹² and that jurors can do great things—mostly bad but sometimes good.¹³ Bdelycleon does dispute, however, that Athens' jurors truly benefit from the powers that they wield.¹⁴

This is the main thrust of Bdelycleon's response to his father's glowing account of jurors' lives. The speech is not easy. The chorus's warning puts extraordinary burdens on the young man, who must reach across a huge generational and class divide to the wasp jurors' very different lives.¹⁵ But Bdelycleon clearly rises to the challenge. In response to his

11 My argument will be that the jury is insisting on a shift in the nature of leadership that redraws the shape of citizenship and the political. This is something entirely different than the requirement Josiah Ober believed democracy placed on leaders to "play the roles of common men and to voice their solidarity with egalitarian ideals"—a "drama" that, for Ober (1989.191), ultimately permits the elite to "assert their claims to special consideration." On leadership and comedy in Aristophanes' *Knights*, see McGlew 2002.86–111.

12 He also does not blindly accept his father's claim (cf. φάσκων τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἄρχειν, 577). The point that Bdelycleon seems to insist on is that it is not enough to exercise great power. What distinguishes the free man from the slave is his enjoyment of his power. On taking the hand of the jurors, see Ps.-Xen. 1.18.

13 It becomes evident as the agon progresses that Bdelycleon's arguments will not include the charge that the father does great evil, nor will Philocleon's that he does good.

14 MacDowell 1971.206 remarks that "Philocleon makes no attempt to argue that the jury system is right or just, or even that it is beneficial to Athens." We should note conversely that Bdelycleon in no way asserts that the system is fundamentally unjust or hurts Athens. Both father and son focus exclusively on the relationship between the system and jurors. Is Aristophanes indifferent to the potential for injustice or simply unable or unwilling to address this potential? If the argument presented here is correct, the question misses the point: for Aristophanes, the benefits of justice spring from pure, independent wasp jurors.

15 Bdelycleon finds himself squarely within two of comedy's least favorite groups: the young and the wealthy. On young men in old comedy, see Sommerstein 1984. MacDowell 1971.218 notes that Porson added νεανίᾳ after χαλεπὸν at 646. While the addition makes explicit Bdelycleon's comically significant status as a young Athenian, it is justified only on metrical grounds, which MacDowell completely rejects.

father's enthusiastic reviews of the adulation jurors receive from Theoros and Cleon, Bdelycleon points to the cold, hard fact that a very small portion of the annual tribute comes to jurors. From this assertion, Bdelycleon proceeds to counter his father's proofs of political power and domestic bliss with an account of the pleasures of Athens' leaders, those who apparently fawn on Athens' jurors. Since the allies, Bdelycleon argues, perceive that the jurors are easily satisfied with only a small fraction of their huge annual payments to Athens, they ignore the people of Athens and court instead their leaders. Appearance and reality thus diverge in his father's speech. Philocleon can "satisfy himself" (603) ogling naked little boys and passing around available widows, he can let himself trust Cleon's concern for the jurors' welfare, and he can delight in his 3 obols (609; cf. 684). The truth is that jurors' powers benefit others far more than themselves.

This is a complex argument, full of quick calculations and large numbers. It becomes a powerful legal proof that can appeal to the chorus only when it is transformed into the concrete image of Philocleon performing his civic duties at the beck and call of the likes of Chaireas's son (687). With the mention of this particular individual, whose unattractiveness must have been obvious to most of *Wasps*' audience,¹⁶ Bdelycleon seems to reach beyond his own generational and class sphere. It is most telling that Bdelycleon now attempts to fold the entire audience into the dramatic jury that will decide the question of whether Philocleon is a slave. When he makes his point that to be poor and to look on helplessly as the undeserving make themselves richer is the "greatest slavery" (682), Bdelycleon expands the group to which Philocleon and the chorus belong beyond the 6,000 jurors (most of whom were presumably poor) to include all those who serve Athens for pay: those "driving the boats, fighting by foot, and doing sieges" (684–85). Bdelycleon is now speaking "on behalf" of the majority of Athenian citizens who have helped Athens acquire and maintain its empire. To this more inclusive audience, Bdelycleon announces that what he finds most offensive is to see his father ordered to and fro by the young dandies who make up the newest generation of Athenian leaders.

The chorus surprises itself when it finds Bdelycleon persuasive. But it is not difficult to see why he wins. From start to finish, Bdelycleon's

16 MacDowell 1971.226 notes that "nothing is known about the son of Khaireas, not even his name," but suggests that he "must have been a well-known figure in the courts." The passage also seems to imply that he was, at the moment, widely despised.

speech works to inculcate the distinction between the more and less privileged among Athens' citizens; first, by a grand reckoning of the Athenians' public incomes, then in a concrete examination of the profound differences between the lives of jurors and their leaders.¹⁷ At first glance, Bdelycleon seems to pursue a divisive rhetoric, a tactic favored by many of Aristophanes' early heroes. Dicaeopolis, for example, unites the Acharnian chorus behind him by proving to them that they have little in common with Lamachus. Yet such rhetoric—in *Wasps* and *Acharnians*—does not quite transform the chorus in the way we might immediately expect. When persuaded, the irascible and cranky supporters of Athens' fractious leaders do not simply redirect their waspish attentions elsewhere; when they spurn the likes of Chaireas's son, whom they once supported alongside Philocleon, they do not act as noxious insects annoying their old enemies or their former friends. Rather (much like that of *Acharnians*' chorus), their persuasion is in a sense tantamount to a kind of depoliticization; they seem to undergo a loss of their civic identities and their fierce, unforgiving natures. Since the only issue at the core of *Wasps*' agon is whether Philocleon should go to the courts, nothing keeps the chorus from continuing on their way. But they do not simply believe Bdelycleon and leave him to manage his father as he sees fit. Instead they take his words very much to heart: they remain beside Philocleon, becoming a part of his household and closely following his progress.

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The chorus provides insight into their own dramatic transformation in the parabasis, which comes after Philocleon, without the chorus's participation, gets a last, disappointing chance at jury duty in the trial of Labes. When the chorus turns to the audience and speaks, among other things, about its own dramatic and extra-dramatic identity, they give the audience a rich and positive picture of the change they had undergone in the agon and, at the same time, a sympathetic interpretation of the act of being persuaded. As the parabasis makes clear, the chorus retains their principal characteristic through the play: their stings. Instead of losing their original identity, their transformation is understood as a clarification of their true nature: "We may seem stubborn and irrational," the wasps seem to be saying, "but we are really something else entirely." This more positive image is undergirded by a

17 Against this, see Hubbard 1991.133.

conceptual merger of persuasion and purification—two themes that the dramatic course of *Wasps* has already bound together. At the very start of the parabasis, the chorus leader announces: “νῦν αὖτε, λεῶ, προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν, εἴπερ καθαρὸν τι φιλεῖτε,” “Pay attention, folks, if you love to hear something pure” (1015). Translating καθαρὸν τι here as “something pure” may capture the slight awkwardness of the expression. The chorus, in its traditional address to the audience, is offering something “pure,” “chaste,” or “clean.” The striking implication is that believing the comic poet is tantamount to κάθαρσις. This implication is later supported when the chorus touts the comic poet as an “purifier who wards off evil from this land” (ἀλεξίκακον τῆς χώρας τῆσδε καθαρτήν, 1043) and complains that his ideas lie fallow because of the Athenian audience’s “failure to understand purely” (ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ γνῶναι καθαρῶς, 1045). In fact, the language of κάθαρσις appears even before the parabasis. When Xanthias fills in the audience on the basic situation at the start of *Wasps*, he tells them that Bdelycleon “washed and purified” (ἀπέλουν κακάθαιρ’ ὃ δ’ οὐ μάλα, 118) his father when persuasion failed (ὃ δ’ οὐκ ἐπέθετο, 117). Later, the chorus congratulates Philocleon for his fine speech in the agon, proclaiming (631–33):

οὐπόποθ’ οὕτω καθαρῶς
οὐδενὸς ἠκούσαμεν οὐδὲ
ξυνετῶς λέγοντος.

Never before have we heard
anyone speak so purely
and insightfully.

Aristophanes’ effort to stress the representation of comic persuasion as purification adds a new twist to the Aristophanic parabasis.¹⁸ It also has a

18 On the representation as a literary conceit, see Hubbard 1991.118, 203 n. 129. On the poet’s rage and the Heracleian features of this poetic self-representation, see Konstan 1995.19, MacDowell 1971.268, and Sommerstein 1983.218–19. On the theme of purification in *Wasps*, see Reckford 1977, who argues for an intimate connection between the themes and receptive strategies of escape and recovery: it is a catharsis that operates through a method of comic exposure by which Aristophanes uncovers “every single trace of fraud or deception or coercion, *even by himself*, that might accompany the desired catharsis” (309–10, emphasis in text). *Wasps* is “non-coercive like a dream which, on rightly being interpreted, brings out its own true story from our unconscious feelings and thoughts; and honest, because it includes the exposure of its own shadow side, its inherent dishonesty” (310).

particular significance for the matter of wasp identity, which is explicitly addressed at the end of the *Wasps*' parabasis and links the parabasis to the rest of the play. In the wake of the wasps' participation in judging Philocleon's case—an experience that affects them as much as Philocleon—they now give the audience a new image of themselves. Who are they? Nothing more nor less than Athenian citizens. Easily irritated, quick to swarm, these autochthonous creatures both emerge as representative of the Athenian citizen body and offer an interpretation of it. Exploiting the common features (thin waists, irascible natures) that make wasps virtually indistinguishable, Aristophanes' metaphorical interpretation recaptures and reanimates comedy's familiar complaint about self-interested leaders in terms of a division between wasps who possess stings, who fight for Athens, and the drones who profit from the efforts and risks of others.¹⁹

The audience is now learning something new. They are not told before the end of the parabasis that they should be able to find themselves in the wasp chorus; in fact, their initial characterization as old, poor, and pathetic seems intended to make the audience view them as something apart. Yet their one passive and seemingly unheroic achievement in *Wasps*, resisting the pull of their prejudices and allowing themselves to be persuaded by Bdelycleon, purifies and transforms them, stripping from them any sign of age and poverty.²⁰ This is a transformation in dramatic function as well as characterization. By the logic that drives it, the chorus apparently hears “purely” the contrasting speeches of Philocleon and Bdelycleon and picks that which was closest to themselves, in keeping with their warning to Bdelycleon (cf. τὴν γὰρ ἐμὴν ὀργὴν πεπᾶναι χαλεπὸν / μὴ πρὸς ἐμοῦ λέγοντι, 646–47). Understood as purification, the persuasion leading to the rejuvenation that transforms them into model citizens shepherds the wasps to their true selves; they do not become different or adopt a new or foreign identity. Rather, what they really are is clarified and supported.

Changes in the chorus's dramatic role seem intended to reconfigure the play's receptive posture. Most obvious is the sudden amplification of the chorus's extra-dramatic referent, which draws upon and continues the expansion of Bdelycleon's target audience in the agon (684–85). Out of a sordid collection of angry and hungry jurors, the wasps emerge in the parabasis as the hoplites who stood strong at Marathon (1076–90). But lest

19 On Aristophanes' drones and their Hesiodic antecedents, see Allen 2000.55.

20 On the rejuvenation of the wasp chorus, see 1066–67.

the audience construct them in socially restrictive terms, they quickly metamorphose into the Athenians who rowed the boats in the early days after Salamis (1093–94), a more inclusive group with fewer social or economic pretensions. Glorious achievements now replace indigence, as the chorus seems eternally young and fresh. But they still are jurors (1108–09). In fact, just as important as the fact that the wasps now embody all Athenians, the love of jury duty is no longer characterized as the disease of a deranged few or a misguided social class: Aristophanes seems to want to preserve the good in Philocleon and the wasps—or rather, he now clarifies the good in them, namely, their relentless, if irascible, insistence that the speakers who come before them talk “on their behalf.”

Yet not all wasps are good wasps. The dramatic transformation of the wasps does not mean that Aristophanes wishes to delude the Athenians about themselves. Lurking among the hard-stinging Athenian wasps are stingless drones who do nothing for Athens and steal from their fellows.²¹ But there is a change in the view of the Athenian civic identity, as if the Athenians become better (perhaps even taller) citizens by the very experience of watching *Wasps*. The chorus urges the audience to identify and deal with this contingent of stingless wasps, who are variously and vaguely defined as “the younger” who steal the tribute (1101) and as those who take pay for state service without “grabbing an oar-handle, taking a lance, or getting a blister” (1119).²² But this new internal enemy is much less formidable for being less well defined; in general, the poverty or gullibility of Athenian jurors on which the Athenian leaders are said to feed in the agon (cf. 703–06) seems no longer worth mentioning: the Athenians, now rejuvenated, cannot be duped by unscrupulous politicians and set upon their rivals like mad dogs. There is then nothing amiss with a jury insisting that those coming before it speak “on its behalf”: the interests of jurors (and all citizens) are a touchstone of good politics.

The new, optimistic representation of the Athenian citizen that we see at the end of *Wasps*’ parabasis—which is, in effect, an optimistic view of

21 For the metaphor, see also Pl. *Rep.* 552c. Stingless drones in the *Republic*, however, “end up as beggars in their old age.” The “sting” (κέντρον) of rhetoric appears elsewhere in comedy; Eupolis in *Demoi* (102.7 KA) gives one to Pericles, which that gifted speaker left in his audience.

22 As if to de-emphasize the threat still more, the penalty that the wasps urge the Athenians to inflict on the drones is nothing more drastic than depriving them of their customary τριώβολος (1121).

the play's own reception—is anticipated by the poet's self-representation at the start. Aristophanes, as his audience knew, loved to begin the celebration of his victory before his play was quite finished—playfully pre-empting the judges' decision. The claims that the chorus makes on behalf of the poet and their protests about the Athenians' ingratitude do something very similar. The wasp-citizen image serves as an example of the “freshly scented” ideas for which the Athenians should honor their poets (1051–59). The *Wasps*' more positive image of Athenian civic identity and the poet's honor seem co-dependent: the Athenians can think better of themselves as long as they acknowledged the poet's value in making them better. In one single moment, the members of Aristophanes' audience separate themselves from the hated drones who plague Athens' courts and the disagreeable spectators (σκαριοὶ θεαταί, 1013) who fail to appreciate the comic poet's true value. Yet of course, the chorus's claims on behalf of their poet are manifestly exaggerated and their protests are self-parodic; they should not be taken any more seriously as a poetic confession than Aristophanes' wasp imagery deserves as political insight. What seems to be reinforced nevertheless is the dramatic transformation of wasp identity and the poet's lofty self-representation: the purifying powers of comedy. This is purification through play, the vanishing of divisiveness and partial identities and the rejuvenation of the demos, all thanks to the extraordinary healing powers of laughter and fantasy.

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Although he is equally tied to the courts and presumably costumed at the start of the play to look like them, Philocleon comes to stand apart from the chorus in one obvious respect: he is not persuaded or purified in a single defrocking of a deceptive exterior; rather, his character and the audience's perception of him continue to develop in the course of the second half of *Wasps*. Bdelycleon's victory in the agon gives dramatic force to the domestic focus of Bdelycleon's speech (which, in part, he takes over from his father). In turn, the domestication of the chorus in the wake of Bdelycleon's victory in *Wasps* makes it clear how significant is the standard that Bdelycleon adopts (and Philocleon and the chorus allow him to use) to measure his father's power. Philocleon is a slave because the benefits he derives from his service in the courts do not come near those of Athens' leaders; Bdelycleon insists that his father's claims to return home as a hero from his daily battles in the courts appear foolish to his own family. In retrospect, then, Bdelycleon's

indifference to Philocleon's claims to exercise a tyrant-like power in the courts appears calculated. In arguing that Philocleon's civic power seems a paltry thing when viewed through a domestic lens, Bdelycleon is implicitly asserting that persuasion is a matter of reference to self-interest and, just as significantly, that domestic happiness serves as the single valid measure of civic duty.

But Philocleon himself has not yet been persuaded to give up judging. Though he comes to accept his son's evaluation of his situation, Philocleon is now compelled to admit that he is the victim of uncontrollable urges. This is not news to the audience, who had heard as much from the domestic slaves at the play's start (88–90). Bdelycleon's better arguments and the hopes of the persuaded chorus (729–30) have produced no change in Philocleon's character: for this addict of judging (752–59), life outside the law courts is not worth living. His is a disease of misplaced pleasures: he cannot delight in “sole or eel,” the finest of delicacies for a fifth-century Athenian audience, but “would rather have a little law suit baked in a casserole dish” (510–11).²³ The legal character of Philocleon's situation is consequently complicated (or re complicated) when Philocleon is forced to undergo behavior modification therapy. Though the Greeks did not generally mix punishment and reform, Philocleon may nonetheless be understood as sentenced to become what he should be: a citizen who, in his advanced years, is able to enjoy the comforts that his economic status allows him. The punishment fits the crime. Philocleon is not really a slave, he is a foolish and gullible citizen. In general for comedy (and nicely characteristic of its love-hate relationship with the Athenian democracy), gullibility is as much a proof of Athenian citizenship as a shortcoming of it. If the gullibility of the demos or the individual citizen can be fixed at all, it will not happen as a result of persuasion (115–17) or any conventional form of ritual purification (e.g., initiation in the Corybantic rites or an involuntary stay in an Asclepeion, 118–20). Philocleon himself will now be forced to judge domestic matters and to do what he has never done before: vote for acquittal.

This highlights *Wasps*' acute insight into Philocleon's problem and still more penetrating exploration of political self-interest in general. Added

23 Bdelycleon's response that his father “has become accustomed to find pleasure in such things” (512) suggests the trajectory that *Wasps* will follow. When Bdelycleon adds: “I believe that I will teach you that you have been deceived” (514), Aristophanes' audience might well have found a hint that this dramatic path would not be entirely smooth.

to the fault of gullibility, his inability to recognize when he is being used by others, comes a second problem, which is related but perhaps more serious: Philocleon is unable to enjoy life without exerting power over others. This, the play now suggests, is a symptom of Philocleon's νόσος (71).²⁴ Like many Athenians, he goes astray when he is bamboozled into taking great risks that only benefit Athens' leaders. But there is this greater and more formidable impediment: separate from his willingness to be fooled is his positive need to exert power at the expense of others.

Perverse persuasion fits this perverse condition. When we consider the cure that Bdelycleon applies to his father when he tricks him into acquitting the unfortunate dog, the first and only defendant he faces in his new family court, we may decide that this odd form of shock therapy finesses Philocleon's condition for dramatic purposes. Yet this is a dramatic shortcut that may suggest a certain degree of political optimism on Aristophanes' part and, in turn, points to the close relationship between drama and politics in his plays. Bdelycleon's unsophisticated but effective trick to make Philocleon acquit seems to articulate a comic hope that the illness that *Wasps*' comic everyman shares with the great majority of those "driving the boats, fighting by foot, and doing sieges" (684–85) is not really so difficult to fix. Once the Athenians try on a less hostile persona, like Philocleon and the wasp chorus, there seems to be no question of a return to the courts. Bdelycleon's trick is like comedy's: it is an imaginative and unexpected change for the better.²⁵ But is it really for the better? Recent scholarship on *Wasps*' political reception focuses on the question of Philocleon's behavior when this incorrigible nuisance is finally wrested away from the courts and unleashed upon Athenian upper-class nightlife.²⁶

24 On disease in Athenian literature, see Dumortier 1975. Allen 2000.77 makes the point that medical terms are almost always used metaphorically in tragedy; they "denote disorders at the level of both the individual consciousness and the social order, just as the phenomenon of pollution was used to discuss such problems in the historical city." This is also true of Philocleon's νόσος. Indeed the fact that he suffers from such a νόσος, which streams out of his individual person and flows through Athens, reaffirms his relationship to his audience. His affliction parallels Dicaeopolis's likes, prejudices, and dislikes as a foundation of his dramatic function as a common denominator of Athenian citizenship (on this, cf. *Ach.* 1–42). The φάρμακον that Philocleon must eventually accept (giving up jury duty) simultaneously transforms him into a φάρμακον for Athens as he is unleashed upon Athenian elite culture. On φάρμακον as pain and poison, see Allen 2000.85, 118.

25 See Olson 1996.144–45 and n. 32 on the connection between Bdelycleon and comedy.

26 See Olson 1996.137–38. On the identity and probable political leanings of the circle Philocleon joins, see MacDowell 1971.302–03 and Storey 1985.

Wasps seems like two different plays rolled into one. The first, through the parabasis, recounts the extraordinary trials Philocleon undergoes as he is weaned of his desperate desire to judge; the second, through the end, dramatizes the consequences of unleashing this man on other venues of Athenian political and social life. The dual nature of *Wasps* hardly sets it off from Aristophanes' other plays. *Acharnians*' first half features Dicaeopolis as a resourceful and persuasive leader, who uses popular (and populist) arguments to persuade the resolutely pro-war chorus to give up Lamachus and their previous political allegiance and support him instead. The transformation in the civic identity of *Acharnians*' chorus, who lose all association with their deme, is perhaps the clearest testimony to Dicaeopolis's persuasive powers. Dicaeopolis changes too, or at least his strategies and situation change, if not his moral character. *Acharnians*' hero is finished with persuasion by the time the parabasis comes. Democratic political models yield to monarchical in the final scenes of *Acharnians*; Dicaeopolis is more tyrant than leader. *Wasps* is structurally similar: the two halves (their divergence and points of continuity) spin out of a single character, Philocleon, whose instincts and behavior remain unreformed even though his social circle improves.²⁷ In this respect, Philocleon follows the pattern of Aristophanes' other heroes, whose resoluteness, and often resolute rascality, is typically set in relief by dramatic transformations of the chorus in the episodic portion of the play. The chorus, who have undergone a remarkable transformation, are optimistic that Philocleon will follow suit (1460: like many before him who "understanding the judgments of others, have changed their ways"). But their optimism is unjustified: change, like acquitting, is simply not Philocleon's "way" (cf. 1002).

In fact, Philocleon regrets nothing that he does before or after his son weans him of jury duty, with the exception (significantly) of his single meritorious act of acquitting Labes. About this accidental good deed he is utterly despondent. This act precipitates a major identity crisis for Philocleon (1002). Words have not persuaded him to change his ways: those spoken by defendants in the Athenian courts, by his son in his own trial or in Labes', but the extraordinary misfortune of acquitting Labes comes close. Much like Socrates in the *Apology* (17a) when he hears himself accused by his en-

27 This is true whether we follow Whitman 1964.160 and locate certain fundamental issues throughout or are persuaded by Vaio 1971 that Aristophanes provides enough hints to help his audience through to the second half.

emies, Philocleon nearly loses track of his own identity. In this moment of crisis, he agrees to entrust his happiness to his son.

Philocleon's self-doubts present Aristophanes with an opportunity to reflect on the nature of civic identity itself; we are treated, in effect, to a comic autopsy of civic identity.²⁸ Philocleon reluctantly replaces his old cloak, slippers, and chilblains (1122–67) as if (which is indeed the case) these marks of social class are a part of himself.²⁹ Each item in his new wardrobe is viewed as something utterly unfamiliar. Dressing up, of course, belonged to the nature of the symposium; its role as an overture to the evening's entertainment is roughly the same as the modern middle-class ritual of dressing the bride before her wedding. We get a sense of this at the start of the *Symposium* (174a) when Socrates explains his unusual getup by invoking the necessity of arriving at Agathon's party καλὸς παρὰ καλόν.³⁰ Like Socrates on that famous occasion, Philocleon seems now to be dressing up for the first time in distinctly public clothes; he has until now worn his domestic clothes in the civic sphere.³¹ In fact, the connection between dress and identity is as much a comment on the nature of civic (or, rather, class) identity as it is a dramatic device. When he sheds his old cloak and slippers and puts on his symposiast getup with a Persian cloak and new Laconian slippers, Philocleon asks his son, "Which of the rich do I most resemble?" (1170–71). The question (which does not receive a direct answer) suggests that the πλούσιοι and σοφοί whose company he will soon join are best defined by their appearance rather than by any innate qualities or achievements—not by their abilities, successes, family, or political aspirations, but

28 We do not know from *Wasps* whether Aristophanes is as interested in having Bdelycleon frustrate his father as in seeing Labes get off—and, therefore, whether Philocleon's trick is meant to serve as a counter model to his persuasion of the chorus and the transformation in its identity that goes with it.

29 Stone 1984.400: "Like Pheidippides, Philocleon of the *Wasps* also exhibits a change of lifestyle through new clothing."

30 Both Philocleon and Socrates are characterized by single, monolithic civic identities that they are reluctant to give up, even temporarily. The piece-by-piece scrutiny of dress and equipment as social markers is also a familiar comic device; see, for example, *Ach.* 581–87, 1095–1142. The review of the house judge's equipment (*Wasps* 805–23) is similar.

31 See *Wasps* 103: "As soon as he finishes eating, he calls for his slippers" and 116: Bdelycleon's first attempts to persuade his father "not to put on the old cloak and not to go outside." Philocleon's slippers are called "ancient" at 447 and are owed a certain respect (αἰδώς; see the chorus's remarks, 1068–69). Perhaps the difference between Philocleon and Socrates is that Socrates wears his public clothes home while Philocleon wears his house clothes out. Socrates' reputation for a troubled domestic life fits a comic image so well that it might have been a comic invention.

by clothes, walk, dining posture, their talk (cf. 1196: οἱ σοφοί), and perhaps by the fact that all these are assumed and can be changed.³² So Bdelycleon tells his father that he can “be wealthy” if only he would decide that this is what he wants (698). If this is true, it may be less helpful to ask in prosopographical terms who these people are whose symposia are mentioned in the final scenes of *Wasps*, and less troubling that the question is difficult to answer.³³ We might also find a clue to the political dimension of *Wasps*. The play turns Pericles’ project of awarding aristocratic virtue to all Athenians upside down: the increasingly fashionable symposium is parodied as a site where the virtues and values of common Athenian citizenship are systematically undermined.

So *Wasps*’ audience witnesses Philocleon assuming a false identity. Yet that does not mean that his original identity is itself unproblematic or that Aristophanes’ symposium parody is directed against Athens’ lower classes. Philocleon associates with Athens’ poor, but he is not himself a poor man. In fact, none of Aristophanes’ heroes is genuinely indigent; we are offered a close enough examination of his home life at the start of *Wasps* to know that Philocleon is richer than most. He does not share the desperate economic conditions of the chorus, his wasp friends, and it cannot be said that forcing him to give up jury duty is tantamount to tearing him from his native lower-class culture and inserting him into an alien social circle. On the other hand, he is also not “slumming it” when he makes his daily pilgrimage to the courts; he is a juror and is unwilling or unable to relearn his pleasures. There is nothing fraudulent about the Philocleon we meet at the start of *Wasps*. His desire to judge and to be with other Athenians who judge is sincere, even if perverse and diseased. If he does not utterly defy classification, Philocleon might be described as a member of a generation of the Athenian middle class that is learning new diseases—that is, whose addiction to civic life and venues is being replaced with the attributes of aristocratic culture. That the chorus finds the means within themselves to

32 On wealth as a matter of appearance and posture, see also 1195 and 1198.

33 MacDowell 1971.289 and Storey 1985 offer sophisticated reconstructions of the extra-dramatic identities of the two lists of symposiasts. Though their efforts are substantial, they seem to miss the significance of the conditions that make their work so difficult and tentative. As far away as we are, there are still too many Antiphons to be sure whom Aristophanes means (differently: Gagarin 2002.39). Perhaps that in itself is what makes the name attractive. See also Vaio 1971.337, who is right to give preference to the cultural pretensions of *Wasps*’ symposiasts.

give up jury duty (in effect, they join a wealthy household) and he cannot make perfect sense given the nature of Philocleon's passion: he is a victim of disease, not economic straits. Yet *Wasps* makes it clear that Philocleon's transformation is superficial and temporary. He keeps his promise to his son to forego his old life in such a way that his identity ("his way") is actually restored to him. Philocleon the symposiast, in other words, exhibits the same rakishness, the same incorrigible nature that had defined him as an Athenian juror.

That identity that emerges at the end of *Wasps* beneath the facades of the juror and symposiast may seem a moral disappointment: there is no improvement in Philocleon despite all the effort that his son and the audience invest in him. Is the audience meant to focus on this? Or is *Wasps*, like some ancient version of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, a celebration of the utter incorrigibility of the human character? If a romantic attachment to individuality at all costs is a modern phenomenon, there is still some dramatic point to Philocleon's new self, besides evincing the audience's scorn. Utterly unpersuadable, the old reprobate Philocleon has enough in him to anticipate his own sorry end. As his son is preparing him for his new life of leisure, Philocleon warns that the drinking at symposia is dangerous, a lesson that his own subsequent behavior confirms. Philocleon seems then to have exchanged mockery of wealth (576) for the mockery that is characteristic of the wealthy (the symposiast's hubris). The stories he tells supposedly to appease his victims are evidence of his new learning—and resemble the performances he once demanded from the fortunate few whom he and his fellow jurors chose to acquit (e.g., Oeagrus, 579–80).³⁴

Thus the dramatic reset that comes with the parabasis allows Aristophanes to send *Wasps* along a new and somewhat different trajectory. In fact, the changes are not limited to hero and chorus and the transformations that their identities undergo. The play itself seems to be refocused on entirely different issues. In the first half of *Wasps*, Bdelycleon urges and manipulates his father to abandon his public life and look for his pleasures at home. His sincerity is no more in doubt than Philocleon's, but with the episodic portion of *Wasps*, his concern to keep his father at home is replaced by an interest in involving him in the private activities of wealthy Athenians. There is no more talk of "sole or eel" (510–11), good things to eat by

34 On the stories, see Rothwell 1995.233–54.

yourself at home³⁵; instead, we hear about fine clothes, cleverness, and social drinking; the pleasures of the private gourmand yield to drinking parties and games, activities performed in the company of the wealthy and influential and performed according to rules (and in clothes) with which Philocleon is utterly unfamiliar.³⁶ Philocleon is no happier now that he is forced to sample the entertainments of wealthy Athenians outside his own home than he was when trapped in his own house and deprived of the meager pleasures of the Athenian poor. The new life that Bdelycleon forces on his father is nothing like the domestic independence that Philocleon claims in the agon (605–20) as a benefit of jury duty. We now get a sense of why Bdelycleon has relatively little to say in response to this argument, the last and most concrete that Philocleon makes for jury duty. Nonetheless, it seems likely that Aristophanes' audience enjoyed the elements of justice in Philocleon's behavior at the end of *Wasps*: when turned against his former masters, Philocleon is perfect retribution. In fact, Philocleon the symposiast proves to be a menace not only for the rich but for common Athenians as well. After he steals his fellow symposiasts' flute girl, he beats up the Athenians he encounters on the way home. It is as if his experience with symposia has left him a fish out of water, a citizen without a clear social context. In that sense, the object of comic attack is not Philocleon but the symposium and its popularization, an important cultural phenomenon, fraught with significance.³⁷ Philocleon has been transformed into dramatic proof that the trappings of aristocratic life, the symposium in particular, wreak odd changes on Athens' citizens.

If Philocleon is a form of revenge, of course he is caught in the very net he weaves. At the end of *Wasps*, Philocleon comes full circle; the judge can now expect to face judgment. Philocleon's dramatic trajectory and the fact that his nature does not change seem to expose *πειθώ* in *Wasps* and Philocleon's cure as empty. Philocleon's most egregious behavior as a

35 On eating fish, see Davidson 1997.3–20.

36 This is a surprise to Philocleon and to the audience. Bdelycleon had promised at 341 to treat his father to feasts, not to send him off to symposia; cf. 508–11, where Philocleon seems to believe that he is rejecting the finest gourmet cuisine available in a wealthy household, though the real point of the symposium was never the quality of the food.

37 On the relation of the symposium to the democracy, see Ober 1989.46. Although the symposium was held up by some in late fifth-century Athens as a model form of social interaction and an alternative to fundamental democratic institutions (see McGlew 2002.125–32), Aristophanes seems to have been unimpressed.

symposiast involves the adoption of the speech mannerisms of symposiasts and those whom he so resolutely opposed at the start of the play. Indeed, the stern critic of forensic rhetoric has become a practitioner of forensic rhetoric, reeling off the same sort of stories to get himself off that the unfortunate defendants tried in his court. In this sense, *Wasps* seems to continue the thrust of *Clouds* (originally produced in 423); *Clouds*' Strepsiades anticipates Philocleon in his close encounter with the alien world of Athenian high society, and the play's failure is among the subjects of *Wasps*.³⁸ This reintroduces the central problem of Philocleon's relentlessly waspish ways: what is the audience to make of this individual? Do they condemn (or celebrate) his character and actions as similar to (or utterly unlike) their own? There is a way out of this dilemma. Perhaps Aristophanes meant his audience to dislike Philocleon without incurring the serious consequences that might come from an unflattering portrayal of common Athenians and their civic passions. This is possible if Bdelycleon is meant to speak for Aristophanes when he expresses doubts about fixing his father's problems: "It is difficult to cure a disease, so old and common in Athens, requiring extraordinary intelligence and beyond the scope of comedy" (650). Comedy, surely, cannot be expected to fix mental illness.

While true, this is a modesty that is uncharacteristic of comedy. It seems hardly to fit the amazing therapeutic powers that Aristophanes claims for his art in the parabasis (1051–59, cf. *Ach.* 500–01). But no matter. Bdelycleon's trite defeatism is also far less helpful than the chorus's remarks about his father.³⁹ Understood as the embodiment of waspish advice with which the chorus concludes the parabasis, Philocleon exerts a remarkable hold on his audience. Philocleon's wasp identity undergoes renewal despite the limitations of his own character and the various efforts to render him socially acceptable.

Aristophanes makes this abundantly clear in his late portrayal of Philocleon. There is no love of Cleon left in the man and no sting that some speaker has stuck in his backside—as Eupolis accused Pericles of doing to

38 See Reckford 1977.310–11.

39 On this view, Bdelycleon shares much with the group of comic characters, such as Lamachus (*Acharnians*), the πρόβουλος (*Lysistrata*), and Penia (*Wealth*), who insist on a radical disjunction between comic fantasy and Athenian politics and whose dramatic fate typically reflects their inability to appreciate or participate in comedy. Against this view, see Hubbard 1991.132. Unlike Hubbard, I do not believe that the play fully embraces Bdelycleon's attempt to re-educate his father.

the Athenians (102.7 KA). Dressing Philocleon up in new clothes and forcing him to practice new ways does not castrate him.⁴⁰ Quite the opposite: Philocleon is tougher than ever. Exploiting the competitive undertone of the symposium, Philocleon battles his fellow symposiasts as if swatting insects—the stingless drones against whom the chorus warns the Athenians. His weapon, tellingly, is not a new found cleverness that he wears to the symposium along with his new clothes but his innate common identity. Unable or unwilling to conceal his true self, he walks and reclines like the common man he has always been (1172, 1210–13): he ridicules the inflated stories of his fellow guests (1174–1201), exposes their ambitions (1226–35), and, most importantly, blasts their pretensions and political opportunism (1236–41, 1309–21). Like Dicaeopolis and the Sausage-Seller, Philocleon discovers no better opportunity to fight such demons than through a public encounter with those determined to deny the common nature in themselves, like Lamachus, Cleon, or the consummate toady Theorus. For Philocleon in particular, who is recovering from his own troubled relationship with political creatures of Cleon’s ilk, the encounter is a crucial twelfth step, a “spiritual awakening,” that brings recovery beyond Philocleon to his audience. As easy as this proves to be, it is a far more noble undertaking than the group muggings the wasps deal out in the courts at the start of *Wasps*. Yet Philocleon’s moral credentials are ultimately not the point: he is the purifier not the purified. Aristophanes does not need to turn him into a model citizen, which is obviously not Philocleon’s strength: like Dicaeopolis and the Sausage-Seller, among Aristophanes’ early heroes, Philocleon’s incorrigibility sustains his attraction for his Athenian audience.

In providing a foundation for Philocleon’s actions that lets us see him in the familiar role of the rejuvenated comic hero, the theme of purification also offers clues to an interpretation of what in Philocleon needs to be reformed and what image of the persuaded Athenian citizen is embedded in comedy. The chorus abandons its slavish devotion to Athens’ self-interested leaders, and Philocleon does indeed follow their lead (coerced, paradoxically, by his socially ambitious son). There is nothing wrong with justice in Athens, at least nothing that *πειθώ* (as Aristophanes understands it to function) cannot cure. Philocleon’s conversion is dramatically and psychologically more intense, but the substance is largely the same. Philocleon

40 On the phallic character of the κέντρον, see Henderson 1977.122 and Reckford 1977.306.

escapes the clutches of his own disease, which is explained as his need to exert power as the tool of Athens' opportunistic leaders, when the familiar comic antidote of the common Athenian citizen re-emerges in him. Purification in *Wasps* comes about through persuasion: the chorus's through the power of rhetoric, Philocleon's through his close encounter with Athens' pretentious symposiasts, and the audience's through comedy itself. In each, $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\acute{\omega}$ marshals the concrete aspects of a citizen's life, most especially, the citizen's sense of domestic pleasure and security. Unlike Pericles' funeral oration, which takes as its primary problem the inability of Athenians to believe stories that are not about themselves and solves it by offering Athenians an image of themselves as innately noble citizens of a perfect city, *Wasps* constructs persuasion as speaking "on my behalf": the rhetorical and dramatic search for the authentic citizen. Philocleon's greatest value lies in demonstrating this difference. Parrying his son's every attempt at re-education and social improvement, he concludes his own dramatic odyssey by becoming more purely what he originally was.

In this we now can read the outlines of a comic position on the dilemma of rhetoric that began this paper. Does comedy, while boasting of its contempt for Athens' leaders, share their ambivalence about persuasion, does it delight in its successes in swaying the Athenians and curse their gullibility when they find others more charming? Comedy certainly seems to—and why not? Few can afford to be picky about how they win their allies; Aristophanic comedy was too invested in its world to choose useless protestations of truth over power. But *Wasps* shows that comedy had a vision of persuasion and citizenship much opposed to the demand for self-sacrifice embedded in Pericles' panegyrics and the dire threats in Cleon's abuse. Bdelycleon brought the chorus hard to the ground after Philocleon had exalted them to the heavens, but the reason he wins is not because the Athenians were more receptive to insults than praise. Rather, he wins because he does a better job speaking "on their behalf"—the very criteria on which he is told his position will be judged. Speaking $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \epsilon\mu\omicron\upsilon$, "on my behalf," indicates a process of negotiation in which the speaker (in *Wasps*, a young man of some means) reaches beyond his social sphere (his class and generation) to understand, appreciate, and encompass the very different social and economic status of his audience. This is not to pander—even to a desire to be berated. In the course of his speech, the chorus undergoes genuine change: its members respond to his appeal to the part of their social identity that belongs to them as Athenian citizens and that they share with their dramatic audience—or rather, that the audience can imagine that it

shares with the chorus. In the end, Bdelycleon's dispute with his father does not conclude when he persuades the chorus that his father (and his fellow wasps) are slaves of Athens' corrupt leaders; his point is not to curb their political influence and send them back to their homes but to set them free. In the hilarious (but hardly nonsensical) story of Philocleon's antics and his son's failed attempts to improve him, persuasion is married to purification in a comic search for the authentic citizen that strips citizens of pretensions and misguided allegiances ("false consciousness" in fifth-century Athens). What remains is the lean, irascible, and almost preternaturally vigilant wasp citizen.⁴¹

The Aristophanic wasp citizen, of course, is no less an ideological construct than Pericles' "citizen-lover" or the distracted and befuddled dupe who grounds Cleon's self-serving picture of Athenian citizenship. Bdelycleon's rhetorical strategies, isolating and excoriating the likes of Chaireas's son, are not always admirable.⁴² Comedy cannot be placed safely above the ideological fray of late fifth-century Athens, nor beneath it: Aristophanes did not satisfy or preempt a social or psychological need to flout political authority. And if comedy gains an ideological edge in fifth-century Athens, it must lose its political neutrality for us: if we like comedy's "freshly-scented" ideas or reject them as a political anathema, or even if we take the least helpful path and grimly insist that comic laughter is incompatible with political persuasion, we are saying as much about ourselves as about Aristophanes and his art.

Yet Aristophanes himself has just a bit more to say about persuasion in *Wasps*; he concludes his play with a final variation on Philocleon's character: Philocleon becomes (against all odds) a practitioner of the higher arts of *πειθώ* in his own right. This is not a happy sight. Now Philocleon is engaged in a kind of rhetoric that is utterly unlike the image of *πειθώ* as purification that *Wasps*' parabasis features (cf. 1362). In fact, Philocleon seems incapable of separating persuasion from violence or deception. He takes the flute girl from his fellow symposiasts by simple theft, he insults and abuses the common Athenians who come to ask for compensation

41 The rejuvenation of Demos (and many other Aristophanes characters) is comparable: in *Wasps*, being persuaded is fundamentally restorative; in *Knights*, it is the Athenians' exertion of power over their leaders. On the Aristophanic wasp citizen, see Bowie 1993.97–98.

42 On the *φάρμακον* in Aristophanes, see now Rosenbloom 2002.

(1401–05, 1410–11, 1427–32), and he even threatens violence against his son (1386). In all this, Philocleon seems little better than *Clouds*' Strepsiades, who is likewise seduced by Athenian polite culture. These are not successful encounters. But, like Strepsiades, Philocleon embraces the mores and language of Athens' socially elevated so badly—as a result of his uncouthness, his inability to dissemble, and his palpable self-interest—that what he says and does has little to do with his own character and everything to do with the rhetoric and behavior he apes.⁴³ In this sense, Bdelycleon is right that his father's most recent behavior is perfectly consistent with this old ways (1433). That his father proves impervious to the gentle arts of education is certainly frustrating for Bdelycleon. But not, I think, for the audience, who must have been delighted that Philocleon's nature once again proves equal to every attempt to improve it.

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43 There is also the point that Philocleon, as a comic hero, makes no claim to moral righteousness: he is dramatically and politically immune from prosecution for *πονηρία*. On this, see McGlew 2002.63, 77–78.

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