

## ARISTOPHANES AND THE DEMON POVERTY\*

Aristophanes' last two surviving plays, *Assemblywomen* and *Wealth*, have long been regarded as something of an enigma. The changes in structure – the diminution in the role of the chorus, the disappearance of the parabasis, etc. –, as well as the shift of interest away from the immediacies of current politics towards broader social themes, can reasonably be interpreted as an early stage of the process that ultimately transformed Old Comedy into New, even if it is unlikely ever to be finally agreed whether Aristophanes was leading or following this trend. The decline in freshness, in verbal agility, in sparkle of wit, in theatrical inventiveness, which is perceptible in the earlier play and very marked in the later, may be put down to advancing years and diminishing inspiration. Such an explanation squares with the evidence of a marked decline in Aristophanes' productivity towards the end of his life. Whereas in the first seven years of his career (427–421) he seems to have produced, or had produced for him, not less than ten plays,<sup>1</sup> and in the years 420–405 approximately another eighteen, the twenty years or so that followed *Frogs* yielded a further eleven at the very most<sup>2</sup> unless some titles have been completely lost; and since it is not likely that after the outstanding success of *Frogs*, and the public recognition that followed it,<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes would have experienced any difficulty in securing a chorus, the explanation can only be that he was writing less. But the truly puzzling feature of the two late plays we possess is the apparent sea-change in the author's social orientation. In his fifth-century plays, from *Acharnians* to *Frogs*, as has been shown (in my view conclusively) by de Ste Croix,<sup>4</sup> Aristophanes reveals himself as one who instinctively speaks the language and thinks the thoughts of the well-to-do, even if at the same time he can laugh with the common man at ostentatious and useless wealth in the shape of Pyrilampes' peacocks,<sup>5</sup> Leogoras' pheasants<sup>6</sup> or the sultan-like garments of an Athenian imperial official<sup>7</sup> – as one who was happy for the Demos to be sovereign so long as it was willing to be guided by the advice of its 'betters', the *καλοὶ τε κάγαθοί* of (e.g.) *Knights* 738 or *Frogs* 727–9, and to leave them in the quiet enjoyment of their property. At first sight in *Assemblywomen* and *Wealth* this seems to have changed almost diametrically. In both

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<sup>1</sup> Certain are *Daitalēs*, *Babylonians*, *Acharnians*, *Knights*, the original version of *Clouds*, *Proagon*, *Wasps* and *Peace*. Almost certain are *Holkades* (cf. Hypothesis III 33–37 Platnauer to *Peace* and fr. 407, 411) and *Georgoi* (cf. fr. 100, 107, 109).

<sup>2</sup> Certain are *Assemblywomen*, *Wealth*, the late *Kokalos* and *Aiolosikon II*, and also *Storks* (cf. fr. 431, 439); probable are *Telemessians* (cf. fr. 538) and also the first version of *Aiolosikon* in view of the 'Middle Comedy' nature of the plot (Platonios, *Prolegomena de Comoedia* 1 22–31 Koster), which cannot have differed much from that of the later version. In addition a number of plays are not readily datable on the information we have, or at most can only be assigned a *terminus post quem*; of these *Danaiids*, *Lemniai*, *Phoinissai* and *Polyidos* may be later than *Frogs*, though the only evidence is the absence of known references to persons and events of earlier date.

<sup>3</sup> Attested by one of the *Vitae* (*Prolegomena* xxviii 40–43 Koster) and by Hypothesis I to *Frogs* citing Dikaiarchos. I have discussed the honours awarded to Aristophanes in my edition of *Acharnians* (Warminster, 1980), 24–25 n. 10; I would now date them fairly confidently to late 405 or early 404, since the advice of *Frogs* 718–37 would be unlikely to appeal much to Athenians who had experienced the rule of the Thirty.

<sup>4</sup> G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), 355–76.

<sup>5</sup> *Ach.* 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Clouds* 109.

<sup>7</sup> *Birds* 1021 *τίς ὁ Σαρδανάπαλλος οὔτοσί;*

plays a central concern is the sufferings of the poor, many of whom, we are constantly reminded,<sup>8</sup> are not in a position to feed or clothe themselves adequately; and in both a fantasy-project is set on foot to end these sufferings, a project which is bound to harm the living standards and life-style of the rich in ways that would have drawn screams of horror from the Aristophanes of twenty or thirty years before. In *Assemblywomen* Praxagora abolishes all private property: land is to be held in common, town houses merged into a single great residential complex,<sup>9</sup> and personal chattels surrendered to the state, which will maintain all citizens through public dining-halls. In *Wealth*, the miraculous healing of the god of wealth results in all and only those who are of good character becoming rich, whereas previously one could become rich only through crime;<sup>10</sup> thus all those who were formerly rich are made poor, at least until they reform themselves morally. De Ste Croix<sup>11</sup> has rightly called attention to Aristophanes' acceptance, in his earlier work, of the usual Greek upper-class equation of 'the rich' with 'the good'; but in these two plays we find Aristophanes explicitly equating the rich with the bad.<sup>12</sup>

It is natural that critics should be reluctant to credit the notion that Aristophanes underwent, in middle life, so apparently complete and radical a transformation in his socio-political attitudes – though we should remember that if there was a change, it may well not have been as sudden as, on our limited evidence, it inevitably seems. For those who wish to avoid supposing a transformation, there seem to be three possible approaches. One is to seek evidence of a radical 'left-wing' viewpoint in the fifth-century plays; this has been attempted, without great success, by Helmut Schareika.<sup>13</sup> Another is to see the two late plays as simply comic fantasies, influenced both by the Utopian tradition within Old Comedy<sup>14</sup> and by discussion in philosophical circles of new models of society, but not intended to have any serious effect on the thinking of members of the audience on contemporary social issues; on this view<sup>15</sup> *Wealth*, which as comedy is weak, must be accounted a failure.

Most prominent, however, in recent discussion have been a variety of approaches which, while differing in detail, agree that Aristophanes takes in these plays a negative attitude towards the kind of radical social changes that the plays depict. Since on the surface the two revolutions are triumphantly successful, this must mean that Aristophanes has presented them and their results in an ironical manner, intending at least the discerning spectator to realize that the new social order would be

<sup>8</sup> *Ass.* 353, 380–2, 408–26, 566, *Wealth* 219, 253, 263, 283, 504, 535–46, 562, 594–7, 763, 842–7, 952–4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ass.* 673–4 τὸ γὰρ ἄστυ μίαν οἰκὴσίν φημι ποιήσιν συρρήξας εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα, ὥστε βαδίζειν ὡς ἀλλήλους. The abolition of individual housing reappears in Plato (*Rep.* 3. 416d, 5. 458c); for its appearance in later collectivist utopias and at least one actual collectivist society (pre-conquest Peru) see I. R. Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York, 1980), 198–9.

<sup>10</sup> *Wealth* 30–1, 35–8, 45–50, 352–90, 502–3, 569, 754–6, 774–81.

<sup>11</sup> *Origins* (n. 4) 358–9.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the passages from *Wealth* cited in n. 10, see *Ass.* 426 (implying that the wealthy Nausikydes has never done any good for the community), 603 (a man with much money must have acquired it by perjury), 608 (the rich are the biggest thieves). De Ste Croix, *Origins* (n. 4) 360, misses these passages, and explains those in *Wealth* by 'the nature of the plot', which begs the question why Ar. chose to make a plot of this nature (and twice!).

<sup>13</sup> *Der Realismus der aristophanischen Komödie* (Frankfurt, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> On this tradition and its reflection in Aristophanes (especially in *Wealth*) see F. Heberlein, *Pluthygieia: Zur Gegenwart bei Aristophanes* (Frankfurt, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> For which see (among others) R. G. Ussher, *Aristophanes (G&R New Surveys in the Classics 9 [1979])*, 18–19 and A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: The Acharnians, The Clouds, Lysistrata* (Harmondsworth, 1973), 14.

unworkable and/or would bring no real benefits; or alternatively (as has recently been suggested, in relation to *Wealth*, by Konstan and Dillon)<sup>16</sup> that he has adroitly confused different conceptions of the causes and cure of poverty in order 'to dissolve the issue of exploitation and inequality into a vague nostalgia for a golden age'.

Ever since Wilamowitz<sup>17</sup> the ironic interpretation of *Assemblywomen* and *Wealth* has been that of most German scholarship, and even Heberlein<sup>18</sup> in his recent discussion of *Wealth* maintains this interpretation despite his rejection of the greater part of the evidence on which it had usually been based. Outside this tradition, too, recent studies by Saïd,<sup>19</sup> Foley<sup>20</sup> and Konstan and Dillon seek by different routes to understand the two plays as hostile to radical social change.

In both plays, certainly, there is material which could well be used to support one or another variety of this general thesis. We may consider for instance the second half of *Assemblywomen*, which consists of three scenes exemplifying the consequences of the new social order. In the first of these (730–876) we meet a character who notwithstanding Praxagora's new law is determined to keep his property and not surrender it to the state: I shall refer to this man as the Dissident.<sup>21</sup> The Dissident is not only himself refusing to comply with the law; he is confident that many others will refuse as well (769–77, 787–829), and confident also that despite his disobedience he will be able to wangle his way into the communal dinner. Moreover, if we take a later passage<sup>22</sup> literally, he succeeds in this. The next scene (877–1111) shows an unfortunate young man, whom I shall call Epigenes,<sup>23</sup> being fought over by three old and hideous women, all of whom, under another new law, claim a prior right to receive sexual satisfaction from him; he comes close to being torn to pieces (1083–90) for no fault at all, and his disappointed girl-friend is made to argue (1038–42) that the new sexual communism will result in large-scale incest. And in the final scene it seems twice to be hinted (1147–8, 1175–8) that the magnificent communal feast has no real existence. It might well be felt that there was enough evidence to lead us to Saïd's conclusion that the attempt to establish universal equality and communality is presented as failing because of the persistence of selfishness, which no law can abolish.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> D. Konstan and M. Dillon, 'The ideology of Aristophanes' *Wealth*', *AJP* 102 (1981), 371–94.

<sup>17</sup> See the essay on *Assemblywomen* appended to his *Lysistrata* (Berlin, 1927), e.g. (p. 220) 'Aus Andeutungen entnehmen wir, dass der Dichter die Sinnlosigkeit der Pläne Praxagoras uns zu verstehen geben will' – though Wilamowitz may not have been entirely content with this interpretation, for he added 'Nicht viele Zuschauer werden ihn verstanden haben'. His successors have not been deterred from following him by this perceptive remark: see especially W. Süss, 'Scheinbare und wirkliche Inkongruenzen in den Dramen des Aristophanes', *RhM* 97 (1954), 289–313, and H. Flashar, 'Zur Eigenart des aristophanischen Spätwerkes', *Poetica* 1 (1967), 154–75 (reprinted in H. J. Newiger ed. *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie* [Darmstadt, 1975], 405–34).

<sup>18</sup> F. Heberlein, 'Zur Ironie im "Plutus" des Aristophanes', *WJA* 7 (1981), 27–49.

<sup>19</sup> S. Saïd, 'L'Assemblée des Femmes: les femmes, l'économie et la politique', in J. Bonnamour and H. Delavault ed. *Aristophane, les femmes et la cité* (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1979), 33–69.

<sup>20</sup> H. P. Foley, 'The "female intruder" reconsidered: women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*', *CP* 77 (1982), 1–21.

<sup>21</sup> He is never named in the text. His *nota personae* in the manuscripts is generally *φειδωλός*; the scholia (Σ<sup>R</sup> 853, 869) refer to him as *ὁ μὴ καταθείς*.

<sup>22</sup> 1132–3, where Blepyros is told 'Out of more than thirty thousand citizens, you alone have not dined'.

<sup>23</sup> We are told in 934 (*ὁδὶ γὰρ αὐτός ἐστιν*) and in 951 (*ἀλλ' οὐτοσί γὰρ αὐτὸς οἷ' μεμνήμεθα*) that the young man who enters at 934 is the same person whom the old woman was talking about in 931 and 933 and whom she then named as Epigenes.

<sup>24</sup> Saïd (n. 19) 55.

In *Wealth* there have been some rather captious doubts of the purity of motive of the hero Chremylos. It is pointed out<sup>25</sup> that he asks Wealth to make him rich *καὶ δικάως καδίκως* (233) and says to the god that he loves his only son 'more than anything else – except you' (251). That so much has been made of these remarks merely shows how very little there really is to be said against Chremylos. If the first remark were taken literally, it would be inconsistent with the whole plot of the play. The Wealth-god has no wish to enrich anyone unjustly; he has only done so in the past because he was blind, and could not see who was honest and who was not; and in future, when he has been cured, in accordance with Chremylos' own wish (386–8) he will favour only the virtuous. We must therefore understand *καὶ δικάως καδίκως* as a polar expression used loosely, as is the Greek habit with such expressions,<sup>26</sup> to mean (as the scholia say) *παντὶ τρόπῳ*. As to Chremylos' admission that he loves Wealth more than anything else, this is not a sign of avarice, only of frankness;<sup>27</sup> for in Chremylos' view *every* human being has an insatiable desire to be wealthy (188–97), and he does not pretend that he himself is an exception. Where he does differ from most is in wanting others to be wealthy as well as himself (345, 386–8): as we shall find, generosity and its opposite, miserliness, are quite important themes in this play.

Some other features of *Wealth*, especially in its latter half, have also been seen as lending themselves to an ironic interpretation; these will be examined later (pp. 323–8). But by far the most important evidence suggesting that at least not all the right is on Chremylos' side comes from his *agon* with the goddess of Poverty (487–618).

Chremylos and Blepsidemos are about to take Wealth to be healed in the temple of Asklepios when they are interrupted (415) by a hideous and terrifying old female who identifies herself as Poverty, 'who has been living with you these many years' (437). The two men declare their intention of driving her out of Greece (463); she undertakes, on the contrary, to prove that if they do so they will be doing great harm to themselves and humanity, and a formal debate is duly held, its special status being signalled by a change of metre to anapaestic tetrameters and a typical two-line *katakeleusmos* by the chorus-leader.

Chremylos is first to speak, and that in itself may be regarded as significant; for in almost every other Aristophanic debate in *Langversen*<sup>28</sup> the first speaker is the ultimate loser. He argues that justice demands that wealth should be the reward only of virtue, adding (for the first time in the play) that if this is done everybody will become virtuous (497) since virtue will be in their material interest.<sup>29</sup> His words for 'virtuous' and 'wicked' are mostly vague and general – *χρηστός* and *ἀγαθός* on one side, *πονηρός* on the other – , but he also describes the wicked, or one class of the wicked, as *ἄθροιοι* (491, 496) and says that in the better world of the future all men will be *τὰ θεῖα σέβοντες* (497). This may well seem hard to square with the actual outcome of Wealth's healing: what happens then is that all men turn to Wealth alone in worship

<sup>25</sup> Flashar (n. 17) 159–60 (in the reprint: 412–3).

<sup>26</sup> Amply illustrated by Wilamowitz on Eur. *Herakles* 1106.

<sup>27</sup> As Chremylos himself explains (252), *τί γὰρ ἂν τις οὐχὶ πρὸς σὲ τὰ ληθῆ λέγοι;*

<sup>28</sup> I use this expression, rather than *agon*, in order to exclude those scenes (*Birds* 451–638, *Ass.* 571–709) which possess all or most of the formal characteristics of an *agon* but are exercises in persuasion by a single speaker rather than debates between two speakers. Among genuine debates the only exception to the generalization in the text is *Knights* 303–460, where the first epirrhema (335 ff.) opens in noisy confusion with both antagonists demanding to be allowed to speak first.

<sup>29</sup> This contrasts sharply with the existing state of society, which offers the virtuous so little hope of success that Chremylos himself, anxious for his son's well-being, had almost resolved to bring the boy up to be a criminal (35–8).

while the other gods and their priests starve for lack of offerings (1099–1190). Nor does Chremylos' prediction of universal reverence and piety sit well with his earlier assurance to Wealth that once the latter regains his sight 'the sovereignty of Zeus and his thunderbolts [won't be] worth three obols' (124–6). One may feel that if anyone in the play deserves to be called ἄθεος it is Chremylos himself.<sup>30</sup>

In reply to Chremylos' initial presentation and defence of his proposal, Poverty argues (507–16) that if everyone is wealthy, and hence able to live in comfort without working, no goods or services will be produced. Chremylos, like Praxagora (*Ass.* 651), counters that the work will be done by slaves, but he is unable to explain satisfactorily how slaves will be procured, and is confronted with the prospect of being 'compelled to plough and dig and do the rest of the hard work yourself' and lead 'a far more wretched life than now' (525–6) – to which the only answer he can find is a curse (ἐς κεφαλὴν σοι). It seems to have been shown, paradoxically, that universal wealth must lead to universal misery.

Chremylos' vivid description of the horrors of poverty, in a passage to which we shall have to return (535–47), is a splendid piece of soap-box invective but has hardly any relevance to Poverty's argument: at most it establishes that the existing situation is bad, not that it would be improved by the healing of Wealth. Moreover, or so Poverty claims, it rests on a failure to distinguish between *πτωχεία*, which she admits is an evil, and *πενία*, which she regards as a good (548–50). The latter she defines as 'living austere, concentrating on one's work, not having any surplus but not having an insufficiency either' (553–4), in short, living at subsistence level; and she says it produces 'wiry, wasplike men, deadly to their enemies' (561) – men, no doubt, like the Wasps of an earlier play who defeated the Persians by land and sea (*Wasps* 1060–1101) – whereas the products of wealth are 'gouty, pot-bellied, thick-calved, obscenely fat men' (559–60) who are inclined to be hybriatic (564) and, if they are in politics, to plot against the people (569–70). And here (571) Chremylos admits that Poverty is telling the truth.

Two further arguments by Chremylos – that poverty must be an evil because men shun and flee from it (575) and that wealth must be better than poverty because Zeus is wealthy and Zeus surely knows what is best (579–80) – are rebutted in turn by Poverty, and with that rational argument virtually ends. It may well be felt that Poverty has made the most solid points; at any rate she has put forward at least two arguments to which Chremylos has failed to find a satisfactory answer:

- (1) That if all men are made rich, and so are able to live in idleness, free men will abandon productive work and slaves will become unobtainable, with the result that the new life will be much more miserable than the old (507–34).
- (2) That a state with a mainly poor (but not *very* poor) population will be better able to defend itself than one whose people have been enervated by wealth (558–61).

These arguments are far from invulnerable. They are inconsistent with one another (for how can people be enervated by a wealth that will reduce, not increase, their standard of living?), and the first is not even consistent with itself (since possession of money will not deter people from working if there are no goods on which they can spend the money). Nor is it hard to find rational rejoinders to them (e.g. that slaves could be bred or obtained by warfare; that a rich state could defend itself by building a powerful fleet and hiring mercenary soldiers and sailors). But the fact is that Chremylos offers no such rejoinder. Throughout the debate, once his initial statement

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Süß (n. 17) 311–2.

of his case has been challenged, his main weapons of argument are emotionalism, cursing, and sarcasm. Again, how does the *agon* end? At the close of a normal Aristophanic *agon*, either the loser admits defeat<sup>31</sup> or the chorus or other arbiter declare a winner<sup>32</sup> or declare themselves convinced by the single speaker.<sup>33</sup> Here it is Chremylos who breaks off the debate, and the words in which he does so suggest on the face of it that he is intellectually convinced that Poverty is in the right, and that only emotion and prejudice make him deaf to her arguments:

ἀλλὰ φθείρου καὶ μὴ γρύξῃς  
ἔτι μὴδ' ὀτιοῦν.  
οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἦν πείσῃς (598–600).

Poverty, after brief resistance, departs with the words ἡ μὴν ὑμεῖς γ' ἔτι μ' ἐνταυθοὶ μεταπέμψεσθον (608–9), to which Chremylos replies

τότε νοστήσεις· νῦν δὲ φθείρου (610)

which, again, might be thought to suggest that he recognizes despite himself that the banishing of Poverty cannot be permanent, but prefers even a brief experience of wealth to none. It has been argued, too, as by Heberlein,<sup>34</sup> that when Chremylos does become wealthy his wealth takes decidedly inconvenient forms, with kitchen utensils being turned to gold, silver, ivory and other such materials (812–5), which in some cases results in their being quite unsuitable for their proper purposes. Even if we are not prepared to put as much weight as Heberlein does on a single casual reference, in a quite different context (287), to the legend of Midas, we may still wonder if Chremylos has not fallen into the same trap as the Phrygian king.<sup>35</sup>

To this point I have been putting the case, as fairly as I can, for the ironic interpretation of *Assemblywomen* and *Wealth*. But can it be upheld? Are the plans of Praxagora and Chremylos in fact presented as failures? And which side, if either, are we really to take to be victorious in the *agon* of *Wealth*?

The second halves of both plays consist of a series of self-contained scenes, and we may begin by considering these in turn. The first relevant scene in *Assemblywomen* is that between Chremes<sup>36</sup> and the Dissident. The naïveté of the former is no doubt sometimes laughable, but the opportunism of the latter is contemptible, especially when he abruptly changes his attitude as soon as he hears of the splendid free dinner (834–52) and says he will use violence and robbery, if necessary, to get a share of the food (860–6) – a procedure which he describes as ‘helping the community’ (861): in his opinion the duty of a good citizen is to take all the benefits the state offers while contributing as little as possible in return (cf. 777–9). His attitude, if at all widespread, would be the ruin of any society, and he is given no positive qualities whatever. He does, indeed, at the end (872–6) give us to understand that he has had an idea (he does not tell us what it is) that will enable him to get in and have dinner; but before

<sup>31</sup> *Clouds* 1102.

<sup>32</sup> *Knights* 943–59 (Demos takes his ring from Paphlagon and gives it to the Sausage-seller); *Wasps* 725–6; *Frogs* 1467–71.

<sup>33</sup> *Birds* 627–8; *Ass.* 710.

<sup>34</sup> Heberlein (n. 18) 45–6.

<sup>35</sup> The story of Midas’ ‘golden touch’ was known to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1257b14–17), and it may safely be assumed that it was known to Aristophanes and his audience: see L. E. Roller, *Classical Antiquity* 2 (1983), 310.

<sup>36</sup> For convenience I designate thus, with Rogers and Ussher, the character who in this scene is preparing his property for surrender to the state, but I doubt very much whether he is in fact intended to be the same person as the Chremes of 372–477; see my paper in *BICS* 31 (1984).

he makes this prediction we have already had opportunities to form an opinion on his powers of prophecy. He did not believe that the public would surrender their possessions (772); later we hear that they are already doing so, in Chremes' neighbourhood at any rate (τοὺς ἐμᾶυτοῦ γέροντας ὁρᾶ φέροντας, 805–6). He expects that the women will 'piss' on him (832), i.e. treat him (and men generally) with disdain; in fact they are at once heard issuing a general invitation to dinner. After these wrong predictions the natural expectation, when he goes off in the hope of cheating or forcing his way into the dining-hall, is that he will be wrong again; and if he does prove to be wrong, no spectator will regret it. The statement in 1133 that Blepyros is the only citizen who has not yet dined is hardly to be taken as evidence that the Dissident has succeeded in getting in; even if it were legitimate to take 1133 as an implied reference to a one-scene character about whom we have had no occasion to think for over 250 lines, μόνος would be an unsafe word on which to base such deductions, considering how often it is used in an exaggerated way to spotlight an individual with little or no thought of literal accuracy<sup>37, 38</sup>.

The lot of the young man Epigenes, who becomes the victim of three lecherous crones, is much more likely than the Dissident's to gain our sympathy, particularly as he at any rate has done nothing to deserve it.<sup>39</sup> This scene has been very variously evaluated in recent scholarship. Konstan and Dillon<sup>40</sup> view it positively, 'not as a critique of the women's communist experiment but as its most glorious expression, the randy, boisterous, grotesque triumph of comic energy'; for Saïd<sup>41</sup> on the other hand it is pervaded with the miasma of death, and serves as a refutation of Praxagora's promise of a world free from hate and jealousy, theft and abduction, discord and misery. We may perhaps derive some assistance in our interpretation by considering more generally the attitude of Old Comedy to youth and age. If we do, we will find that Old Comedy, in marked contrast to New, throughout displays a systematic bias in favour of older and against younger men. The rejuvenation of the old is a favourite theme, and in other plays as well as this one sexual success with attractive young women is the almost exclusive prerogative of the older male.<sup>42</sup> The Aristophanic comic hero, if male, is regularly old;<sup>43</sup> indeed young male characters of any kind are rather

<sup>37</sup> In Aristophanes, compare especially *Clouds* 365 (contradicted by 264–5, 423–4, etc.); *Peace* 130 (the same fable that says the beetle flew to heaven also says the eagle flew there first!); 739; *Frogs* 1453 (the second half of the line contradicts the first); *Wealth* 948.

<sup>38</sup> The characterization in *Ass.* 730–876 has been well discussed by G. Maurach, *Acta Classica* (Cape Town) 11 (1968), 3–7, although his term 'Dummkopf' is distinctly unfair to Chremes, who has quite enough sense to know when the Dissident is trying to take advantage of him (867–71).

<sup>39</sup> We cannot hold it against him that he wishes to seduce an unmarried citizen girl. Under the old dispensation this would have made him a μοιχός, but Praxagora has established full sexual freedom for citizen women (except for certain rules prescribed in the interests of equality) and has indeed effectively prevented men from resorting instead to slaves and prostitutes (718–24) ὅσα τῶν νέων ἔχουσιν αὐται (the citizen women) τὰς ἀκμάς. Epigenes therefore is acting as Praxagora expected and intended that men should act.

<sup>40</sup> Konstan and Dillon (n. 16) 382.

<sup>41</sup> Saïd (n. 19) 58–60.

<sup>42</sup> Dikaiopolis (*Ach.* 1198–1221); Demos (*Knights* 1389–95); Philokleon (*Wasps* 1341 ff.); Trygaios (*Peace*); Peisetairos (*Birds* 1634–end); Blepyros (*Ass.* 1138). No young free male enjoys such a success in any surviving Aristophanic comedy; there is only the Scythian slave in *Thesm.* 1172–1225, and even he is being duped by the elderly Euripides and has to pay heavily for his few minutes with young Elaphion – he loses his quiver and his prisoner, and can probably expect severe punishment for neglecting his duty.

<sup>43</sup> Dikaiopolis; Strepsiades (*Clouds*); Trygaios; Peisetairos; Euripides' kinsman ('Mnesilochos') (*Thesm.*); Chremylos. Dionysos in *Frogs*, as a god, is of indeterminate age, but he is fat (*Frogs* 200) and physically unfit (128 and the rowing scene). In *Wasps* the young Bdelykleon is

rare, and when they do appear they are quite often shown undergoing some kind of discomfiture. Bdelykleon in *Wasps* may succeed in weaning his father away from the life of a juror, but thereafter he proves totally unable to control the old man, who even succeeds in knocking him down (1384–6), and by the final scene (1474–1537) Bdelykleon seems to have given up the struggle. In *Birds* the father-beater (1337–71) and the young *συκοφάντης* (1410–68) both fail to gain what they expected to gain from their visits to Cloudcuckoo-ville. In *Lysistrata* the only young male character, Kinesias, is thoroughly bamboozled by his wife. Aristophanes' young men are typically self-confident, cocksure of their ability to get their way, and arrogant in their superiority to other forms of humanity; and it appears to be one of the functions of comedy to take them down a peg. Sometimes they are worsted by older men, sometimes by women; that a young man of the most objectionable type, Pheidippides, walks out of *Clouds* insolently triumphant<sup>44</sup> is one of many uncomic features of that play. The general pattern is clear, and our scene of *Assemblywomen* conforms to it. Indeed, from the comic point of view it may actually be a merit of Praxagora's scheme that it enables conceited young men to be treated as Epigenes is treated here, while benefiting older men by giving them preferential treatment as regards opportunities for sexual activity<sup>45</sup> and providing communal dinners which they are shown as particularly enjoying.<sup>46</sup> It is true, as Saïd has noted, that the Epigenes scene is unusually dark in tone and heavily overlaid with the imagery of death;<sup>47</sup> that this contrasts sharply with the brightness of his and the girl's love-songs earlier in the scene (952–75); and that she suffers as well as he, though not so much. Yet perhaps the morbid imagery only brings to our attention how absurdly Epigenes is exaggerating his plight. He is not, after all, going to be killed, nor under the terms of the new law<sup>48</sup> can there really be any question of one of the old women detaining him *ὅλην τὴν νύκτα καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν* (1099); and we may add that unlike Blepyros (619–20) he will have quite enough energy left to cope satisfactorily with his young lady when the two older ladies have finished with him, for he must surely be supposed no less capable than Peisetairos (*Birds* 1256) or Demos (*Knights* 1391, where see my note) or the chorus of *Acharnians* (*Ach.* 994) of copulating three times in quick succession.

As to the claim made by the girl (1041–2) that 'if you establish this law, you will fill the whole land with Oedipuses', if this is really an attempt to raise an incest scare it is wildly misguided. There is no reason why Praxagora's new social order should lead to any increase in the incidence of Oedipal incest: for although children will not

formally the hero, since it is he who conceives and implements the 'Great Idea' (on this concept see my edition of *Acharnians* [n. 3] pp. 11–13), but Philokleon is more comic, more ingenious and more lovable, and he triumphs in the end (see text above). Only the Sausage-seller in *Knights* is unequivocally a hero and unequivocally young.

<sup>44</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *YCS* 26 (1980), 78, suggests that Pheidippides goes into the *φροντιστήριον* at 1475 and is thus caught up in the subsequent conflagration; but it is hard to believe that Strepsiades would thus endanger the life of his only son, whom at 1464–6 he regarded as *φίλτατος* and a fellow-victim of Socrates' and Chaïrephon's villainy. More likely Pheidippides goes impudently into his father's house, or nonchalantly off by one of the side-passages, a *πατραλοίας* and *ἄθεος* who has got off scot-free.

<sup>45</sup> *Ass.* 626–34, 702–9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ass.* 848–50.

<sup>47</sup> *Ass.* 994–6, 1030–6, 1073, 1101 (see Ussher's note), 1105–11.

<sup>48</sup> The law provides only that a man wishing to have intercourse with a young woman must first, on demand, give the same satisfaction to an older woman (*Ass.* 617–8, 693–701, 939–40, 986, 990, 1013–20, 1049–51); there is no indication that the older woman has the right to detain him indefinitely. Epigenes at 947 does not say 'If only I could have the pretty one!', for he knows that eventually he *will* have her; he says 'If only I could have the pretty one *and her alone* (*μόνην*)!'.



know their fathers (635–50), there is no mention of any proposal, such as was made by Plato<sup>49</sup> and by some later socialist theorists,<sup>50</sup> for breaking the connection between a child and its natural mother. In any case, incest is irrelevant to the context of the girl's remark. She is not saying that the old woman is Epigenes' mother, only that she is old enough to be his mother (1040); and it seems likely that Aristophanes is here taking the same humorous attitude to the Oedipus story as is taken in *Frogs* 1193–4: the most terrible thing that happened to Oedipus was that he married a woman much older than himself – the fact that this woman was his mother was a trifle in comparison. If Aristophanes had wanted to suggest that sexual communism would lead to widespread incest, he could have directed our attention to the fact that under Praxagora's scheme it would be impossible to prevent accidental incest between fathers and daughters unaware of their blood relationship;<sup>51</sup> but he has not dropped the least hint of this.

The allegation<sup>52</sup> that the communal feast at the end is unreal partakes more than a little of unreality itself. Where, if not at the feast, has the maidservant managed to get so gloriously drunk (1112–24) on such high-quality wine? The joke that the entire audience can look forward to an excellent dinner 'if they go off home' (1148) is the same joke at their expense that we find made at much greater length in two choral songs in *Lysistrata*,<sup>53</sup> where a whole series of magnificent free-gift offers are dangled before the audience and then unexpectedly snatched away. The audience of *Assembly-women* had never expected to partake themselves of a feast which, like Blepyros and Praxagora and the maid, belonged to the dramatic fiction; and the same character who extends the bogus invitation to them shows at once that *he* regards the feast as real enough, for his very next line is 'Now I'm going to hurry off to the dinner' (1149).

At the very end of the play, indeed, after describing the main dish of the feast in a lip-smacking word of seventy-nine syllables,<sup>54</sup> the chorus say to Blepyros:

σὺ δὲ ταῦτ' ἀκροασάμε-  
νος ταχὺ καὶ ταχέως λαβὲ τρύβλιον,  
εἴτα λαβὼν κόνισαι  
λέκιθον, ὃν ἐπιδεννῆς.

(1175–8)

And it may be asked: why should Blepyros take a bowl of porridge with him, unless because he will find, on arrival at the dining-hall, that the fabulous meal is a mirage? Against this we may note that the chorus, like Blepyros before them, promptly show

<sup>49</sup> *Rep.* 5. 460c–d.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Dom L. M. Deschamps, *Le vrai système* (Geneva, 1963), 170–1: 'Les enfants n'appartiendraient qu'à la société... Les femmes, qui auraient du lait sans être enceintes, donneraient leur sein aux enfants indistinctement, et sans se soucier de savoir s'ils sont ou s'ils ne sont pas à elles'. This was written about 1770; for more recent examples of the same idea in theory and practice see Shafarevich (n. 9) 246, 270–1.

<sup>51</sup> Plato avoided the problem by imposing so strict a control over sex and procreation that each man could easily identify (by their dates of birth) the relatively small subgroup of the younger generation which would contain his own biological offspring if he had any (cf. *Pl. Rep.* 5. 461b–e). In Praxagora's society, on the other hand, sex and procreation are completely unrestricted (*Ass.* 614–5) except for the two laws giving priority to the old or ugly (nn. 45, 48).

<sup>52</sup> For which see e.g. Süß (n. 17) 291–7.

<sup>53</sup> *Lys.* 1043–71, 1189–1215; cf. E. Fraenkel, in *Greek Poetry and Life: Essays presented to Gilbert Murray* (Oxford, 1936), 273–4. The idea of a pseudo-invitation to the audience to share the characters' dinner reappears in Plautus, *Rudens* 1418–22 ('you can all come to my party – in sixteen years' time'), *Pseudolus* 1331–4, *Stichus* 775.

<sup>54</sup> A small suggestion for the improvement of this word: for the obviously corrupt -παραιο- (1171) read -παραιο- 'lightly salted' (cf. *Ach.* 1158 with my note): salt is in place here as a seasoning, between silphium and honey.

by their own words (δειπνήσομεν 1181) that they do *not* believe it a mirage.<sup>55</sup> The reason why Blepyros is urged to take the precaution of bringing along some food of his own is more probably that there is a risk of his discovering that he has arrived too late and the food has all been consumed. Attendance at dinner has replaced attendance at the Assembly as the main duty of the Athenian male; and as formerly only punctual arrivals could be sure of receiving their pay for attending the Assembly (282–4, 290–3, 380–93), so now only punctual arrivals can be sure of getting their meal – and Blepyros is the very last arrival (1133). Most of the others had finished about two hundred lines earlier,<sup>56</sup> and now Blepyros can only be assured that there is some Chian wine ‘left over’ (1139). There is no reason to believe that the feast in *Assemblywomen* is any more unreal than those which occur at or near the end of most other Aristophanic plays.

To come to more general considerations about *Assemblywomen*, both Saïd<sup>57</sup> and Foley<sup>58</sup> have argued that whether or not Praxagora’s scheme is shown to be workable in its own terms, it is presented as resting on a value-system which the audience are intended to find unacceptable. When, however, we ask what this supposedly unacceptable value-system is, it turns out to be identical with that which commonly prevails in Old Comedy. For Saïd, the new order is presented as a bad one inasmuch as it assumes that the sole legitimate interests of human beings consist in ‘the satisfaction of their alimentary and sexual needs’. I leave on one side the brilliant demonstration by Igor Shafarevich<sup>59</sup> that precisely this assumption has been made over many centuries by the majority of theorists of utopian or revolutionary socialism, and content myself with observing that in Aristophanic comedy generally, it is precisely food, drink and sex that are the typical rewards of the successful male hero. What Praxagora has done is to make these universally available – to enable every male Athenian (especially the older men) to live the life of a Dikaiopolis or a Trygaios. If we like we can say, with Foley, that the men are ‘reduced to living a drone-like life of pleasure in a world run by others’; but we could say just the same about the mythical inhabitants of the Isles of the Blest. The normal man in Old Comedy may, in Dover’s words,<sup>60</sup> be the man who works and fights, but he would be a very abnormal man if he did more of either than he had to.

In *Wealth* – to pass now to that play – there are effectively five scenes which follow the entry of Wealth, healed of his blindness, into the house of Chremylos, and illustrate different aspects of the new order of things which his healing has inaugurated. In the first brief scene (802–22) Karion describes the new-found wealth of the house itself. We have seen (p. 319) that some of the blessings listed have been thought to be of little more real benefit than Midas’ golden bread and cheese, but the leading place in the recital is taken by things that are very obviously beneficial and of which Chremylos had often been short in the past<sup>61</sup> – corn, wine, oil, figs, perfume (806–11). The only item in the list that can really be accused of being a mixed blessing or worse

<sup>55</sup> This is ignored by Süß (n. 17) 297.

<sup>56</sup> Epigenes, when he enters at 938, is evidently coming *from* the meal; his situation is similar to that foreshadowed in 691–701.

<sup>57</sup> Saïd (n. 19) 55.

<sup>58</sup> Foley (n. 20) 16–18.

<sup>59</sup> Shafarevich (n. 9) *passim*; he summarizes his findings on pp. 258–69 (cf. also pp. 3–6, where he shows that Praxagora’s programme as a whole is almost identical with ‘the classic statement of the Marxist program contained in the *Communist Manifesto*’).

<sup>60</sup> K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford, 1968), liii.

<sup>61</sup> Like the members of the chorus, he had often had to supplement his diet by gathering wild plants (253).

is the ivory *ἰπνός*, if, as is probable, this means 'oven'; for an ivory oven would quickly destroy itself by burning. We need not, however, suppose that the audience are meant to deduce that this (still less Wealth's other gifts) is not worth having. As Sobolevsky has pointed out,<sup>62</sup> poor men's fantasies about being rich are not restricted by considerations of practicality or convenience. The Russian peasants whose saying Sobolevsky cites – 'If I were rich I'd lie summer and winter on a hot hot stove wearing a fur coat, and I'd eat fat fat cabbage soup with honey-cakes' – were not saying that being rich can be hazardous to your health; they were saying that rich people, unlike themselves, were never cold or hungry. In this connection it is worth noting how often in this play we are reminded that poverty and hunger are close companions.<sup>63</sup>

In the second scene (823–958) we see the restoration to prosperity of an honest man who had become poor not through extravagance nor even through bad luck, but because he did what everyone should do<sup>64</sup> and helped his friends when they needed help (830); and we also see the deserved impoverishment of an informer (*συκοφάντης*). The honest man has come to Chremylos' house in order to dedicate to Wealth the cloak and shoes which for thirteen years were the only ones he had (842–8), and inevitably it has been suggested by some<sup>65</sup> that we are meant to regard his piety as hypocritical because his offering is of very small value. Small indeed it may be, but surely he offers it because it is all he has to offer. Everything else he possesses has just been given him by the Wealth-god, and he evidently feels, very humanly, that he wants to thank the god by giving him something of his own: one does not show one's gratitude to a benefactor by handing back one of his gifts almost immediately after receiving it. And if there is no irony in this part of the scene, there is certainly none in the rest of it, nor any sign that we are intended to see any redeeming features in the informer.

The scene that follows (959–1096) seems to show the new system working much less satisfactorily: we see a young man, far less attractively presented than Epigenes in the earlier play, repudiating with scorn and insult an elderly mistress who had plied him with lavish gifts to retain his affections. It is true that the woman describes him as *χρηστός* (977), but she is there speaking of the past (*ἦν* 975... *ἔποίει* 978), and in any case is referring not to his moral qualities but to his (obviously mercenary) attentiveness to her needs (977–8). Only two things are we told that can be thought to count in his favour. Yet these two things are crucial. They are that the young man was poor (976) and that he had the burden of supporting his mother and at least two unmarried sisters (984–5). The woman, on the other hand, was rich – the kind of person who can travel in a carriage to Eleusis for the Mysteries (1014–5); and both by the standards of Chremylos (223–6, 345) and by those of the honest man of the previous scene (830) she ought to have shared her wealth ungrudgingly and without making any demands in return. Certainly the youth was sponging on her, but as he shows by his behaviour when once independent of her, he hated every minute of it: we must presume that like so many others in these two plays, he had no other means of making an adequate living. With no marketable asset except his good looks, he has been forced into a life that he finds repugnant, and his reaction when able to escape

<sup>62</sup> S. J. Sobolevsky, *Eirene* 1 (1960), 98–9. Earlier in the same article Sobolevsky makes out a convincing case for 'oven' as the meaning of *ἰπνός* here.

<sup>63</sup> *Wealth* 219, 504, 536, 539, 543–4, 562, 594–7, 628, 762–3, 1005.

<sup>64</sup> K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1974), 177–8 cites ample evidence for the proposition that 'a good man was expected to invite his friends to share his good fortune'.

<sup>65</sup> e.g. Maurach (n. 38) 10.

is natural. If it makes him forget a moral obligation he has incurred,<sup>66</sup> Chremylos makes him accept that obligation – perhaps (though this is not made explicit) under threat of losing his new-found wealth if he does not. The old woman's complaint that Wealth has not fulfilled his promise 'always to help the victims of wrong' (1026) is ill founded, as perhaps even she will admit in the end when she gets the young man back after all (1201) and incidentally retains her own riches (at any rate she never complains of having lost them).

The fourth scene (1097–1170) brings Hermes down from heaven to fulminate threats of destruction against Chremylos and his household. It appears (1113–6) that since Wealth has regained his sight, no one any longer sacrifices to the (other) gods. It has been complained<sup>67</sup> that this gives the lie to Chremylos' earlier assertion (491) that he wished 'the wicked and the godless' to become poor, and to his expectation that in his new world everybody would be 'virtuous and rich and reverent towards the gods' (497). What, though, does reverence towards the gods (τὸ τὰ θεῖα σέβειν) mean? It means reverence towards those gods who hold power at any given time. Zeus is lord of the universe now, and so men should revere Zeus; but in the Golden Age (Hesiod, *Works* 109–111; Kratinos, fr. 165K = 176 Kassel–Austin), when Kronos was lord of the universe, it was men's duty to revere Kronos. If on the other hand Zeus should be deposed by (say) Peisetairos and the birds, it would become men's duty to revere Peisetairos and the birds. What is dangerous and wrong, because it risks incurring the anger of Zeus, is to deny his power and the duty owed him *while he still holds that power* and demands that duty: this was the religious offence of Socrates in *Clouds*. We should know by now that Greeks believed it was their duty to obey the gods, not because the gods were good or deserved obedience, but because they were powerful and could punish disobedience. And in *Wealth*, as Chremylos told the incredulous Wealth-god early on (124–6), the power of Zeus to punish disobedience, or to enforce his will in any way, evaporates as soon as Wealth recovers his sight. Wealth himself is now the greatest of divine powers, and all human worship is naturally turned to him (823–48, 958, 1088–9, 1191–3). Treason against the gods, like treason against one's sovereign or country, is only punishable if it fails. As Hermes himself points out, by means of an allusion to the seizure of Phyle by Thrasyboulos in 403 (1146), what Chremylos and his friends have done is to *lead a successful revolution* against the selfish divine oligarchy that ruled the universe and to install Wealth as a benevolent, democratically-minded despot.

The final scene, involving the priest of Zeus Soter, continues this theme, and we learn that Zeus Soter himself has deserted to his enemy's camp.<sup>68</sup> His behaviour is

<sup>66</sup> The obligation to treat well a person who has treated him well (1029) and not to discard her merely because she is of no further use to him (cf. 1084–5).

<sup>67</sup> e.g. H. J. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie: Studien zu Aristophanes* (Munich, 1957), 157, 174.

<sup>68</sup> That this, as recently argued by Konstan and Dillon (n. 16) 383 (cf. earlier Rogers *ad loc.* and R. F. Willetts, *Blind Wealth and Aristophanes* [Inaugural Lecture, Birmingham, 1970], 4–5), is the correct interpretation of *Wealth* 1189–90 I have no doubt at all. The interpretation offered by the scholia, followed e.g. by van Leeuwen *ad loc.* and Newiger (n. 67) 171, is that the Wealth-god is being spoken of as the new Zeus Soter; but this does not fit what is said:

Χρ. ὁ Ζεὺς ὁ σωτὴρ γὰρ πάρεστιν ἐνθάδε,  
αὐτόματος ἦκων.  
Ιε. πᾶντ' ἀγαθὰ τοῖνυν λέγεις.

The Wealth-god did not come to Chremylos' house αὐτόματος: he was brought there by Chremylos, and was decidedly reluctant to enter (230–44). Nor would the priest have replied with an expression of satisfaction (πᾶντ' ἀγαθὰ) to the news that the very name of his own patron

the final proof of Chremylos' earlier statement (146) that 'everything is subordinate to wealth'. Zeus, like everyone else, would rather be rich than poor; and if the only way to be rich is to become a subject instead of a ruler, then he will become a subject! Thus in the end after all there is no question of men being disobedient to the gods. Men and gods are all on the same side: they are all worshippers of Wealth, they all have the blessing of Wealth, and they can all unite in escorting Wealth to his new home (or rather his old home) in the opisthodomos of the Parthenon (1191–3).

So far then as these 'exemplificatory' scenes are concerned, there is no reason to doubt that the audience are intended to take a positive attitude both to the revolution of Praxagora and to that of Chremylos. It is true that certain important questions, which any thoughtful modern student of economics or political science would raise, are in these plays neither raised nor answered. Thus in *Assemblywomen*, as Saïd and Foley have both recently emphasized,<sup>69</sup> the *polis* is reorganized essentially on the model of an *oikos*, as is natural seeing that the reorganization is done by women (expert managers of *oikoi* who have hitherto had no part whatever in the management of the *polis*), and the result is that, by and large, only those aspects of life are catered for which normally come within the framework of the *oikos* – food (*Ass.* 673–92), clothing (653–4), sex (613–34) and procreation (implied in 635 ff.). Agricultural work is to be done by slaves (651), but the hundred and one other kinds of work necessary to the life of a civilized community are not mentioned at all.

This omission can perhaps be set aside as a simplification, passing over details of little comic value; if Praxagora had been pressed on the matter we may suppose that she would have replied, like Chremylos<sup>70</sup> and Phaleas of Chalkedon,<sup>71</sup> that the crafts too would be in the hands of slaves. It would be a more serious inadequacy if it were true, as Foley claims,<sup>72</sup> that Praxagora's scheme ignores such crucial aspects of civic life as legislation, judgement and war. But in fact these are not ignored. The entire second half of the play is based on, and displays the consequences of, two legislative enactments made by the women, that for the communization of property and that for equal rights in respect of sex. No doubt the feminine tradition of leaving well alone (215 ff.) will ensure that these laws once made are not altered, but this is to be seen as a welcome change from the baffling succession of enactments, repeals and re-enactments to which, according to the characters, male Athens has become addicted.<sup>73</sup> As regards judgement, there is indeed no provision for private civil litigation, because there is no private property to be the subject of dispute (655–61); but there can still be crimes against the community which require punishment, and machinery will exist to provide it (663–6). That the punishment proposed is of a domestic character – deprivation of food, seemingly a common disciplinary measure for slaves<sup>74</sup> – does not in itself mean that it is inappropriate for a *polis*: it is the nearest equivalent in a moneyless, propertyless society of that most common of Athenian penalties, the fine.<sup>75</sup>

god had been usurped by another: rather he is saying in effect 'I am glad to know that Zeus Soter has become a worshipper of Wealth, because it means that I, his currently starving (1174) priest, can safely do likewise'.

<sup>69</sup> Saïd (n. 19) 52; Foley (n. 20) 14–21.

<sup>70</sup> *Wealth* 517–8.

<sup>71</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 1267b15 οἱ τεχνῖται πάντες δημόσιοι ἔσονται. We do not know whether Phaleas proposed, as Praxagora does, that agricultural labour also should not be personally performed by citizens.

<sup>72</sup> Foley (n. 20) 18.

<sup>73</sup> *Ass.* 193–203, 797–8, 812–29.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Wasps* 435.

<sup>75</sup> It duly reappears two millennia later, in 1652, in the 'platform' of the English Digger leader Gerrard Winstanley (see G. Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom and Other Writings* [Harmondsworth, 1973]). In the society he envisages, the final punishment for a wide variety of offences

As to war, while it is certainly unlikely that Praxagora's state would wage aggressive war (for its citizens are presumed to have everything they need for a contented life), defensive war is by no means ignored: indeed special measures are proposed to honour the brave and put the cowardly to shame (678–80), and the title chosen for Praxagora is not, say, *ἀρχουσα* but *στρατηγός* (246, 491, 727, 835). What Praxagora's new Athens does apparently renounce is participation in international power politics; and just as well, considering what an incoherent mess the men have made of it (193–203).

In *Wealth* one must presume that international power politics will itself be abolished. If 'everything is subordinate to wealth' (*Wealth* 146), then all wars must have economic causes, and once everybody is rich there will no longer be anything to fight about. The most obvious flaw in the utopia of *Wealth* is rather that the whole thing is based on a miracle: in real life there is no way of ensuring that all and only the virtuous are wealthy. Or is there, perhaps? What if one assumes, as the characters in the play do,<sup>76</sup> that all large fortunes have been acquired dishonestly? If that is really so, then in a democratic state it is only necessary for prosecutors and jurors to do their duty and convict the rich of whatever crimes they have committed, and distribute the proceeds of confiscation among the poor, thereby abolishing before very long both inequality and poverty. If this has not in practice been done, it is because most prosecutors are selfish (like the one who is a character in the play) and most jurors less than conscientious, sitting not to do justice but to draw pay, and cheating the allotment system to increase their earnings.<sup>77</sup>

However, that line of thought is not deeply explored in *Wealth*: the play is content to assume a miracle. In this it resembles many another Aristophanic comedy in which a fantasy solution is found for a very real problem. In *Wealth* the audience are asked to suspend disbelief and assume it to be *possible* to have wealth distributed in accordance with desert, and the question for debate in the *agon* is whether such redistribution would or would not be *desirable*.

We have already seen (pp. 317 ff.) how one might interpret the *agon* in an ironic sense, regarding Poverty as the real winner of the argument. But does the author intend his audience to take it so? This question may be divided into two:

- (i) Are the two strong arguments that Poverty advances (507–34, 558–61) intended to be accepted as valid?
- (ii) Does the general tone of the debate suggest that Poverty is right when she complains that Chremylos and Blepsidemos are displaying mental blindness (581) in refusing to listen to her?

Heberlein holds that Poverty's argument from the uselessness of wealth when there is nothing it can buy (507–34) is to be accepted as valid;<sup>78</sup> this he sees as being proved by the fact that Chremylos answers it, not with counter-argument, but with a curse (526). Certainly there are some weaknesses in the position taken up by Chremylos hereabouts. In reply to Poverty's claim that if people can live in wealthy idleness they will not want to work and nothing will be produced, Chremylos says that the slaves

(from assault on a public officer and abduction of another man's wife to failure to work, persistent waste of food, and offering or accepting wages) is temporary or permanent enslavement under a task-master, and if enslaved persons 'prove desperate, wanton or idle... the task-master is to feed them with short diet, and to whip them' (p. 335; cf. pp. 379–89).

<sup>76</sup> See the passages cited in n. 10.

<sup>77</sup> *Wealth* 972 (alluding to jurors who sat to try cases on days when they had not been selected by lot to do so), 1166–7 (alleging that 'all the jurymen' contrive to get themselves registered in more than one of the ten standing panels of jurors so as to increase their chances in the daily allotment).

<sup>78</sup> Heberlein (n. 18) 44–5.

will do all the work (517–8); and when he is challenged to explain where the slaves will come from, Aristophanes carefully avoids letting him give the easy reply ‘from among the barbarians’; his slaves are going to be Greeks, kidnapped and sold by bandits in Thessaly (520–1). Thus he lands himself in a contradiction, for the new order which was going to abolish crime (497) will itself have to be kept going by crime. Nor does he, as he might have done, pre-empt the whole question by pointing out that the bounty of the Wealth-god will in future make work unnecessary – an idea well in the tradition of Old Comic utopianism exemplified by Krates’ *Beasts* or Pherekrates’ *Miners*.<sup>79</sup> In short, the author makes Poverty’s argument seem a good deal stronger than it actually is, and logically at 526 Chremylos seems beaten.

But is he? Poverty’s argument has culminated in the claim that after the redistribution of wealth, Chremylos will find himself ‘leading a far more wretched life than you do now’ (526). And to this an answer *is* given. It is given, with tremendous power, in 535–47. It is that for very many people, a more wretched life than their present one is inconceivable. The grinding misery of it all is described in words that can scarcely be paralleled in Greek literature:<sup>80</sup>

What good thing can you provide, except bath-house blisters<sup>81</sup> and crowds of half-starved kids and old women? Not to mention the innumerable lice and gnats and fleas that torment us, buzzing around our heads, making us wake up and saying ‘You’ll starve; up you get!’ And then, having a bit of rag instead of a cloak; for a bed, a rush mattress full of bugs that won’t let one sleep; for a carpet, a rotting mat; for a pillow, a good big stone at one’s head; to eat, not bread but mallow shoots, not barley cake but dry radish leaves; instead of a bench, the top of a broken jar; instead of a kneading-tray, a rib of a cask, and broken at that. Doesn’t that [Chremylos sarcastically concludes] show what *great* benefits you bestow on all mankind?

No warmth, no proper clothing or bedding or furniture, no food worthy of the name: *that* is what real poverty is – and such a person has nothing to lose. Nor is this condition much more extreme than what we have seen and will see in other parts of the play. Chremylos himself, indeed, is not abjectly poor; but we have already been told that there are ‘many . . . honest men who had no corn’ (218–9) and that his friends will probably be found ‘toiling themselves in the fields’ (224) – they at any rate will not be frightened by Poverty’s prediction of a future in which they will have to do their own work! Twice we hear that these men eat wild thyme roots (253, 283), which chimes with the mention of mallow shoots and dry radish leaves in 544; and their life is described as ‘cold and comfortless’ (263). Later, we meet an honest man who has worn the same cloak and shoes for thirteen years (842–7), and we can no doubt see for ourselves how full of holes they both are; in winter this man had haunted the public baths for the sake of warmth (952–4; cf. 535). In fact almost all the miseries described in 535–47 appear elsewhere in the play, and in no case is there any suggestion that they are imaginary. Indeed if anything Chremylos is underplaying one important concomitant of poverty, namely disease and early death, no doubt because this is a subject that comedy habitually avoids<sup>82</sup> (though even this taboo is broken by the Aristophanes of our period, who mentions pleurisy as a scourge of the poor in winter in *Ass.* 417).

<sup>79</sup> Krates, fr. 14–15 K = 16–17 Kassel–Austin, Pherekrates, fr. 108; cf. Pherekrates, fr. 130, Telekleides, fr. 1, Metagenes, fr. 6, Nikophon, fr. 13K = 20 Edm.

<sup>80</sup> The passage might have served well as an epigraph for de Ste Croix’ *Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, which in fact never quotes it nor (so far as I can discover) refers to it.

<sup>81</sup> Alluding to the practice of poor people frequenting the public baths in winter to warm themselves at the stoves (cf. 952–4).

<sup>82</sup> It has often been noted that comedy makes no known reference to the great plague of 430–426.

In other words, though Poverty's argument might have some force in a case like that of Chremylos himself, it has none at all as applied to those who, as he and the audience know, are truly, desperately, radically poor.<sup>83</sup> However little revolution is likely to benefit such people, their actual situation is so hopeless that it is natural and inevitable that they will want revolution nevertheless. Poverty does not see this, because she is thinking only (one might say) in terms of economic theory, and thinking, moreover, from the standpoint of the well-to-do. Note how in 528–30 she argues that universal wealth will dry up the supply of *luxury* goods (coverlets, perfumes, coloured clothes), which are of little interest at present to Chremylos and less to the chorus.

Chremylos' splendid tirade at last forces Poverty to recognize the misery of the very poor, but she dismisses it (548) into a separate category of *πτωχεία* rather than *πενία*, using a verbal distinction that has rightly been characterized as sophistic.<sup>84</sup> Her definition of the good kind of *πενία* (553–4) is something fairly close to the sort of life Chremylos himself has been leading: 'living austerely, concentrating on one's work, not having any surplus but not having an insufficiency either'. The distinction does not appeal to Chremylos:

Demeter! what a happy life you've set down for him – scrimping and toiling, and at the end not leaving enough behind to pay for his funeral!

In any case, every poor person in the audience would know that *πενία* can easily slide into *πτωχεία* in times of adversity, for instance as a result of poor crops, illness or war. If it is agreed that *πτωχεία* is bad (and apparently Poverty now concedes this), then *πενία* must be bad too: walking on a tightrope over a crocodile-infested river is but little better than being thrown into it.

The argument that poverty makes better soldiers than wealth (558–561) is one that would have been fairly generally accepted,<sup>85</sup> but it presupposes one thing: that the soldiers are adequately fed. That is why Chremylos' one-line reply is devastating:

I suppose it's in order to make them waspish warriors that you starve them.

Nor does he have any difficulty with Poverty's next argument, for it suits his case as well as it does hers. It is that rich men are typically hybriatic, dishonest and anti-democratic (564–70). Chremylos entirely agrees: only, while he believes that these men are rich because they are dishonest (30–1, 35–8, 502–3), Poverty's argument only has force if she assumes that they are dishonest because they are rich – and she herself gives the lie to any such assumption by letting it slip out that the men in question (assumed to be politicians) become rich 'on public money' (569) *after* having made a start in public life as poor, honest democrats (567–8). Like the men who are driven by poverty to be thieves and burglars (565), they become dishonest while and because they are poor, and their dishonesty (embezzlement) makes them rich.

Thus it can be seen that three successive arguments raised by Poverty have all been rather weak; and since even her strong economic argument first had its effect blunted by the unsatisfactory conclusion on possible shortages of luxury goods (528 ff.) and was then followed by Chremylos' great tirade, the balance of the debate is now definitely against her. And now Chremylos produces his own best argument. Poverty

<sup>83</sup> I borrow this last expression from V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford, 1951), 172.

<sup>84</sup> W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, iv (Munich, 1946), 380 speaks of 'prodikeische Synonymik'. On sophistic features of Poverty's arguments in general see Heberlein (n. 18) 40–2.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Pl. Rep.* 4. 422a–c, 8. 556b–e; for other references see Dover (n. 64) 111–2.



has been trying to prove that it is better (better for the individual concerned) to be poor than to be rich; but the universal consent of mankind holds otherwise (575). Poverty replies that mankind are merely foolish (576–8) and the gods know better; but that reply commits her to the most sophistic and implausible of all her arguments, for she has to maintain that Zeus is not rich (581–6). We and Chremylos know she is wrong: we have already been told, and by a god, that if Zeus withholds wealth from deserving mortals (whether Olympic victors or ordinary honest folk) he does so neither from poverty nor from benevolence but from malice (87–92). The last word (594–7) is left to Chremylos, and it combines several themes: that poverty is the main cause of crime, that poverty equals hunger, and that it would be better even for the gods if men were less poor:

You can find out from Hekate whether it's better to be wealthy or hungry. She'll tell you that the 'haves' and the rich send her a dinner every month, but the poorer mortals snatch it away before it's even been set down.

There are men, in other words, who are desperate enough to commit sacrilege for the sake of something to eat.

Thus from 527 onwards the whole trend of the *agon* has been against Poverty. Her arguments have become increasingly strained and sophistic. She has extolled the blessings (themselves rather dubious) of moderate poverty and ignored the widespread existence, and the even more widespread fear, of extreme poverty, which Chremylos has vividly brought before the audience. At the end of all this it scarcely matters that seventy lines earlier she succeeded in establishing the theoretical point that a system of universal wealth would be self-stultifying – and in any case, even if she was right about that, it would leave most people no worse off than they were to begin with. The order of presentation is strongly in Chremylos' favour. So, let us not forget, is the horrific *appearance* of Poverty (cf. 422–4). This is not the only place in the play where the loser in an argument is allowed to make an effective point to which no reasoned reply is given. In 907–19 the informer argues that he and his like are essential to the control of crime. He is then much abused, but no one suggests how he can be replaced – unless indeed Aristophanes trusted his audience to remember that under the new dispensation there would no longer be any crime to control. In earlier plays too the losing side in an *agon* is sometimes allowed to state its case reasonably effectively, most notably Euripides in *Frogs*; it remains the losing side. The final silencing of Poverty by Chremylos and Blepsidemos (598–612) no more proves her in the right than the silencing of Pheidippides in *Clouds* 1447–51 proves that he was in the right to offer to beat up his mother just before.

The ironic interpretation, then, of *Assemblywomen* and *Wealth* cannot stand; nor can the subtler recent approaches which, while varying in the details of their analysis, all agree that Aristophanes takes a negative attitude to the sort of radical alterations of society depicted in the plays. We seem driven after all at least to entertain the possibility that a straightforward reading of the two plays is correct. Let us sketch out what the main lines of such a reading might be.

*Assemblywomen* and *Wealth* alike are simultaneously moral and social comedies. From the moral point of view, *Assemblywomen* puts the finger on selfishness as a major cause of Athens' current political and economic difficulties. In determining state policy, citizens take account only of personal or sectional interests (*Ass.* 197–8, 206–8); they obey laws and decrees only when it suits them (762–8, 853–4) and would not even attend the assembly unless paid to do so (183–8, 289–310, 380–2, 390–2); they never ask what they can do for their country, but only what their country can do for them

(cf. 778–9 λαμβάνειν ἡμᾶς μόνον δεῖ).<sup>86</sup> Hence the idea of turning over the city to the women, who by the nature of their social role live mainly for others, and who do not commit any of the common crimes to which selfishness leads (435–54). But not only should the moral evil of selfishness be abolished: abolished too, if possible, should be the social evil of poverty<sup>87</sup> – the poverty that forces two typical Athenians to miss a meeting of the assembly because each has lost his only cloak (352–3, 535–48); that makes men dependent on state pay for their food (380–2); that makes January the month for going down with pleurisy (416–7); that leaves many without beds and bedding in winter (418–21) and makes it understandable when there is talk of compulsory requisitioning of corn for the benefit of the poor (422–6); that coexists with substantial wealth for other individuals (591–3); that is the main cause of crime (605, 667–9). This is achieved by Praxagora's scheme for the communization of society. It is true that in her new order no provision is made for luxuries (except in the sphere of food); but no one complains of their absence. It is true, too, that Praxagora's sexual communism may be felt to go a little far; but it is much more to the point that she is headed in the right direction. For what is being suggested is that the community will not prosper until its members think, or are made to think, of the community's interests first and not their own; nor can it be healthy while there is absolute, desperate poverty in its midst. It may well be that the citizen will be prepared to think a little less of his selfish interests without those interests having to be abolished by law. It may well be that the rich will see that the alleviation of poverty is in their interest as well as in that of the poor, and that moderate measures effecting some degree of redistribution will make extreme measures unnecessary. But something, somehow, has to be done about both evils. *Acharnians* did not advocate the declaration of what might now be called a 'war-free zone'<sup>88</sup> in defiance of assembly decisions; but it did advocate the making of peace.<sup>89</sup> *Clouds* did not advocate the violent destruction of philosophers' houses; but it did express hostility to philosophers. *Assemblywomen* does not, at least not necessarily, advocate the abolition of private property; but it does advocate an attack on the evils of selfishness and poverty, and moreover implies that the two are interrelated.

In *Wealth* poverty is again in the centre of the author's field of vision, but the moral theme is perhaps more diffuse. Much is made of the virtue of generosity, which in the world as it is brings no benefits: the Honest Man found that the friends whom he had helped in the past cold-shouldered him when he was in need, and everyone is amazed when Chremylos invites his friends to share in his newly-won good fortune (*Wealth*

<sup>86</sup> The editors all assign these words to the Dissident as a statement of his philosophy, but they are better taken as an indignant rhetorical question by Chremes, to which the Dissident disconcertingly answers νῆ Δία: see J. C. B. Lowe, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 66–71 and H. J. Newiger, *Hermes* 96 (1968), 122–3. Ussher *ad loc.* does not satisfactorily defend the very late placing of νῆ Δία which the traditional text entails: he suggests it emphasizes δεῖ, but the key-word of the sentence is not δεῖ (which means little different from πάτριον . . . ἐστὶν in the previous line) but λαμβάνειν (contrasted with οἶσεν 777), no matter who the speaker is.

<sup>87</sup> On poverty and selfishness as the main evils against which Praxagora is struggling, see Saïd (n. 19) 49–51.

<sup>88</sup> It has become difficult to continue describing Dikaiopolis' private peace-treaty as 'an impossible fantasy. . . that by its very nature could never actually happen' (de Ste Croix [n. 4], 365), when scores of British local authorities have espoused the yet more fantastic notion that the best way to secure immunity from nuclear attack is to undertake that you will do nothing to help deter such an attack or minimize its effects, and to do this (unlike Dikaiopolis) without gaining any reciprocal undertaking from the other side.

<sup>89</sup> Those who find this statement naïve should consult de Ste Croix (n. 4) 363–7, 369–70 and D. M. MacDowell, *G&R* 30 (1983), 143–62.

340–2). Even the Old Woman is rewarded in the end for her liberality to her young man (1201). Much is made too of the contrary vice of meanness, of the person who has good fortune himself and grudges it to others – the miser. The archetypal miser in this play is Zeus, who blinded Wealth because he resented the prosperity of the virtuous (87–92), and who is not prepared to give even an Olympic victor a prize of real value (583–92). Wealth himself draws us a vivid little picture of the human miser (237–41):

If I happen to enter a miser's house, he at once buries me down under ground; and if then some honest friend of his comes asking to borrow a small sum of money, he says he's never seen me in his life.

Closely linked with miserliness is ingratitude – the ingratitude of Zeus, who 'is honoured only by the virtuous and just' (93–4) but does nothing for them in return (quite the contrary); of the gods generally, who have given men no recompense for their worship and sacrifice (1116–7, 1124–5); of the Honest Man's friends, who never repaid the help he had given them; of the young gigolo who, whatever excuses can in fairness be made for him, is ready to break his mistress's heart as soon as he is no longer dependent on her. But the acme both of generosity and of gratitude is Wealth himself, who is only too willing, once he recovers his sight, to dispense his blessings freely to all who deserve them, and most of all to Chremylos, who was responsible for his cure. He is also the link between the moral and the social themes. The social theme is simple. As things are, wealth is almost exclusively in the hands of criminals, and this must be put right; once it is, the inhuman burden of poverty will be eased. In the play, the unjust distribution of wealth is rectified by a miracle; in real life it can be done by making malefactors of great wealth pay the proper penalty for their crimes. We have come a long way from *Knights* and *Wasps*. In those plays it was the villains, Kleon and his associates, who posed as the champions of the poor and were represented as persecuting the rich, and Aristophanes with the help of characters such as Bdelykleon exposed what he saw as their humbug. Now a generation later it is the heroes, Praxagora and Chremylos, who are the champions of the poor; and Praxagora is allowed no effective opponent, Chremylos only the hideous, sophistic figure of Poverty and the detestable Informer. Clearly, something has changed; and the simplest hypothesis is that the change has been in the author.

Inevitably one is led to speculate (though we do not have the information to do more than speculate) on the causes of this change; and we are able to point to three or four factors that may have been at work. It is possible, indeed likely, that Aristophanes himself may have been among those who were considerably impoverished as a result of the defeat of 404. *Acharnians* 652–4 is often taken as evidence that Aristophanes lived or owned property on Aigina. If so, he will have lost his estate and become, not positively poor, but at any rate a good deal poorer than he had been. Thereafter, like everyone else, he had experienced the rule of the Thirty. These were some of the very men in whom a year or two earlier, in *Frogs* 718–37, he had recommended the Athenians to put their trust, and it would not be surprising if their tyrannical behaviour, and their shameful betrayal of all Athenian interests, created a particularly strong revulsion in the mind of one who had hitherto been inclined to regard their sort as *χρηστοί* and *καλοὶ κάγαθοί*.<sup>90</sup> Then, as Athens settled down under the restored democracy, and a comic dramatist could resume his normal activities,

<sup>90</sup> Giuseppe Mastromarco (in correspondence) has compared the possible effect on Aristophanes of the defeat of 404 and the rule of the Thirty with the way in which in Italy after the fall of Mussolini 'molti che erano stati convinti fascisti si trovarono a combattere il fascismo in nome di una ideologia contraria'.

Aristophanes will soon have become aware that his spectators were on the whole worse off economically than they had formerly been, and that many of them (as some contemporary speeches show)<sup>91</sup> were very ready to listen to abuse of the rich; and even if he had no strong feelings of his own, he may have felt it wise to accommodate himself somewhat to the feelings of his audience.

I suspect, however, that a factor as potent as any of these may have been Aristophanes' deep emotional involvement with the Attic peasantry. Seemingly a child of the city himself,<sup>92</sup> well versed in the latest artistic and intellectual fashions, he yet saw the country people as the healthiest element in Athenian society, as play after play makes plain;<sup>93</sup> and these country people had been injured far more than the townsmen by the war and its aftermath, their houses and fruit-trees destroyed not once but twice, while those who had been settled abroad were suddenly uprooted and bundled back to Attica without thought of their chances of making a living. The backbone of the Athenian people was being crushed, and something had to be done about it. And Aristophanes – for whom, by the nature of his profession, nothing could ever be too fantastic to contemplate – became ready to dream radical dreams of what might be done.<sup>94</sup> Having for nearly a quarter of a century spoken unmistakably in the language of the well-heeled, he began to write like a spokesman of the barefoot, because the class he most admired had lost their shoes.

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<sup>91</sup> See especially Lys. 22; also Lys. 7. 27; 14. 41–2; 16. 18; 18. 16–19; 19. 45–52; 27. 10–11; Isokr. 20. 11 ff.

<sup>92</sup> He was a member of the city deme of Kydathenaion (*Prolegomena de Comoedia* xxviii 2, xxixa 3, xxxiib 2 Koster; cf. *IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 1740. 24 = *Agora* xv 12. 26), so presumably his family had lived in the city since before 508.

<sup>93</sup> Especially *Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Wealth*; cf. also *Knights* 805–8, *Birds* 109–111, *Ass.* 300–10. In *Wealth* it is worth noting that Chremylos appears to loathe the urban *χειροτέχνη* almost as much as he does Poverty (617–8).

<sup>94</sup> It does not fall within the scope of this article to inquire to what extent and in what form ideas similar to those expressed in *Wealth* and especially *Assemblywomen* had already been put before the public by others. In addition to the discussion by Ussher (*Ecclesiazusae* xv–xx), the essentials of this question have been briefly and well presented by G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge, 1981), 160–2, and I would agree with him that 'while we are unable to make particular attributions it can be taken as virtually certain that revolutionary theories about the rights and the position of women [and, I would add, about the structure of society generally] were in the air throughout Aristophanes' lifetime'. On the question of a specific written source for the proposal for community of women and children, with its remarkable parallels to Pl. *Rep.* 5, it should be noted that Aristotle's statement (*Pol.* 1266a 34–5) that no one but Plato had recommended these innovations refers, as the context shows, exclusively to writers of *πολιτεῖαι*, i.e. *systematic* blueprints for improved forms of human society: he is not saying that similar ideas were not discussed before Plato in writings of other kinds.