

## WHEN GODS DON'T APPEAR: DIVINE ABSENCE AND HUMAN AGENCY IN ARISTOPHANES\*

**ABSTRACT:** *Surprisingly few gods appear in the eleven surviving comedies of Aristophanes. This article examines what roles the gods do play when they are present. It further argues that humans with divine attributes often appear in lieu of the gods themselves. These humans together with the handful of gods who are present fall into the broad functional categories of helpers and opponents of the comic protagonist. The gods' absence is to be attributed to an Aristophanic conception of human agency, namely that humans in comedy, especially when compared to tragedy, have extraordinary control of their lives. A god's presence would be too great a threat to comic inventiveness.*

### I. Great Ideas and Comic Agency

The gods are generally absent from Aristophanes' comedies, at least when compared to Euripides' tragedies, the usual foil against which Aristophanes defines his poetic practices.<sup>1</sup> While a large majority of Euripides' extant tragedies have gods among the *dramatis personae*,<sup>2</sup> only four of Aristophanes' eleven comedies include divine characters: *Peace*, *Birds*, *Frogs*, and *Wealth*.<sup>3</sup> This is, at first glance, hardly surprising. Aristophanic Comedy usually leaves the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> On Aristophanes' use of Euripidean tragedy to define his own drama, see G. W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play: Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics* (Oxford 2001) 89–104, 133–56; M. S. Silk, *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy* (Oxford 2000) 47–48.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 17 extant tragedies of Euripides, 12 have divine characters: *Alc.*, *Hipp.*, *HF*, *IT*, *Hel.*, *Andr.*, *Tr.*, *Ion*, *Supp.*, *Or.*, *El.*, and *Ba.* (Gods also appear in the pseudo-Euripidean *Rh.*) Of the five plays in which gods do not appear, *IA* and *Ph.* have interpolated endings and so we cannot predict whether Euripides would have ended with a *deus ex machina*; *Herac.* and *Hec.* do not conclude with gods but instead show human characters delivering oracles that link the play's action to cult; and *Med.* ends with the mortal Medea transformed into a quasi-divine avenger speaking *ex machina*. In contrast to Euripides, gods appear in only one of Aeschylus' six extant tragedies (*Eum.*), plus the pseudo-Aeschylean *PV*, and in only two of Sophocles' seven extant plays (*Aj.* and *Ph.*). On the disconcerting, "alien" presence of gods in Sophoclean tragedy, see P. Pucci, "Gods' Intervention and Epiphany in Sophocles," *AJP* 115 (1994) 15–46.

<sup>3</sup> I am not including among Aristophanes' divine characters the semi-divine Amphytheos of *Ach.*, the falsely divine Clouds of *Nu.*, nor the nymph Echo of *Th.* I also exclude the abstractions War, Uproar (*Pax*), Reconciliation (*Lys.*), and Poverty (*Plut.*), none of whom is ever called a god (in contrast to *Peace* and *Wealth* in their eponymous plays who are clearly gods). On War in *Pax*, see S. D. Olson, ed., *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford 1998) xl. Poverty does occasionally appear as a goddess before Aristophanes' *Pl.* (*Alc.* fr. 364 LP, Democr. 68B24 DK, Eur. fr. 248 TrGF), especially in allegorical genealogies, but has no cult, art, or mythology (A. H. Sommerstein, ed., *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, 11 vols. [Warminster 1980–2001] ad *Pl.* 437).

tales of gods and heroes to Tragedy and creates fictional, human stories for itself. Perhaps the more surprising fact is that most gods in Aristophanes, in the few times when they do appear, are highly ineffective agents.<sup>4</sup> Compare the toadying Hermes of *Peace* and the bumbling Dionysus of *Frogs* with the cruel Aphrodite of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, the vengeful Athena of *Trojan Women*, and the terrorizing Dionysus of *Bacchae*. In Euripides' and even Sophocles' tragedies, a god's appearance is almost always in the prologue and/or at the end *ex machina*.<sup>5</sup> The divinity's presence usually suggests divine influence or control over human lives. In Aristophanes' comedies, the gods' absence from the tragic-style control of humans' lives throws into relief the way in which Aristophanes constructs human agency. This paper aims to shed light on one aspect of Aristophanes' constitution of agency, namely how he insulates his characters—especially the protagonists, whose comic ingenuity drives the plots—from the potentially destructive whims of the gods and thereby guarantees their access to the goods that constitute their happiness.

Each of Aristophanes' comedies is structured more or less around what Arrowsmith and Sommerstein have called a "Great Idea."<sup>6</sup> It is a fantastic initiative created by one character and designed to relieve an extraordinarily unacceptable situation. Typical Great Ideas include Dicaeopolis' private peace with Sparta (*Acharnians*), Strepsiades' plan to learn sophistic rhetoric (*Clouds*), Lysistrata's sex-strike and seizure of the acropolis (*Lysistrata*), and Euripides' infiltration of the women's festival (*Thesmophoriazusae*).<sup>7</sup> Most of a comedy's characters assume functional roles with respect to the Great Idea.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the plan's conceiver carries it out; other times he or she persuades another to become its executer.<sup>9</sup> Some ancillary characters become

<sup>4</sup> G. Jay-Robert ("Fonction des dieux chez Aristophane: Exemple de Zeus, d'Hermès et de Dionysos," *REA* 104 [2002] 11–24) studies Aristophanes' use of the gods from a very different perspective, namely their role in Aristophanes' critique of the cultural status quo.

<sup>5</sup> The lone exception is Euripides' *HF*, where Iris and Lyssa appear mid-play. But, even here, the scene functions as a second prologue. It introduces as a wholly new plot the madness of Heracles.

<sup>6</sup> W. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy Politics of Eros," *Arion* n.s. 1 (1973) 137. Sommerstein ([above, n.3] 1.11–13) first described the functional structure of Aristophanic comedy that I draw on here.

<sup>7</sup> When I presented an earlier version of this paper, an audience member remarked that the play which seems possibly not to have a Great Idea is *Wasps*. I would say that it does have a central, organizing Idea, namely Bdelycleon's attempt to save Philocleon from kowtowing to demagogues by trapping him in the house and by reconfiguring his plight as political enslavement. There is an Idea, it is just not very great.

<sup>8</sup> G. M. Sifakis ("The Structure of Aristophanic Comedy," *JHS* 112 [1992] 123–42) analyzes Aristophanic comedies from a Proppian functional perspective. He identifies the following "bearers of functions" in Aristophanic comedy: "the villain/cause of misfortune, the seeker, the helper, the opponent, and the object of quest" (133, original emphases). Sifakis envisions the comic action more as a quest than as the enactment of an Idea, and so I do not exclusively utilize his functional roles. I am, however, indebted to his methodological framework.

<sup>9</sup> Those who are both conceivers and executors include: Bdelycleon (*Vesp.*), Trygaeus (*Pax*), Peisetaerus (*Av.*), Lysistrata (*Lys.*), Dionysus (*Ran.*), Praxagora (*Eccl.*),

helpers to the executer.<sup>10</sup> Opponents stand in the way, but the Idea's executer generally overcomes these obstacles. Occasionally, a Great Idea fails. More often, it succeeds, and the Idea's conceiver and/or executer are hailed as "savior" (σωτήρ). The Great Idea has produced "salvation" or "safety" (σωτηρία).<sup>11</sup>

The Idea's conceiver initiates the comic action by attempting to solve what we might call a Great Problem. In three of the extant plays (*Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*), the Great Problem is the Peloponnesian War. Other Problems that affect the entire *polis* or society include political corruption (*Knights*), political intrusion into private life (*Birds*), decadent tragic theater (*Frogs*), men's political incompetence (*Ecclesiazusae*), and poverty (*Wealth*). Some Problems are more limited to an individual. They include Strepsiades' burdensome debt (*Clouds*), Euripides' fear of the women's hostility (*Thesmophoriazusae*), and the exploitation of the aged Philocleon (*Wasps*). The last masquerades as a societal Problem when writ larger by its conceiver Bdelycleon (see above, n.7).

Unlike in Euripidean Tragedy, gods rarely cause the negative circumstances. The Peloponnesian War is said to be caused by variations on the theme of human greed (*Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*). The corruptions of demagogues, whether individualized (as in *Knights*) or systemic (in *Birds* and *Wasps*), cause other Problems. The ineptitude of young tragic poets causes Dionysus' Problem (*Frogs*); all men's ineptitude causes Praxagora's (*Ecclesiazusae*). Only the Problem in *Wealth* is attributable directly to a god: Zeus begrudges humans their prosperity. Only Euripides (*Thesmophoriazusae*) and Strepsiades (*Clouds*) are responsible for their own misfortunes, and only Euripides admits that he contributed to his troubles (*Thesm.* 85, 182). Strepsiades, in contrast, blames his skyrocketing debts on the war

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and Chremylus (*Pl.*). In contrast, the First Slave (*Eq.*), commonly identified with the general Demosthenes, brings in the Sausage-Seller, and Euripides (*Thesm.*) first asks Agathon to attend the Thesmophoria for him but, upon Agathon's refusal, settles on his Relative as his Idea's executer. We might also consider Dionysus' journey to the Underworld in *Ra.* not an enactment of a Great Idea, but a means for finding an executer of the Idea.

<sup>10</sup> Dicaeopolis (*Ach.*) enlists the help of Amphytheos, and Strepsiades (*Nub.*) looks for assistance from his son Pheidippides, the teacher Socrates, and the two Arguments. Agathon (*Thesm.*), after his refusal to become executer, still plays the role of helper to Euripides.

<sup>11</sup> Executors who are said to bring about σωτηρία include: the Sausage-Seller (*Eq.* 149, 458), Trygaeus (*Pax* 866, 914, 1035), Peisetaerus (*Av.* 545), Lysistrata and her female allies (*Lys.* 30, 41, 498, 525), Praxagora (*Eccl.* 209), and (see above, n.9 ad fin.) Aeschylus (*Ran.* 1419, 1501). In addition, Pheidippides (*Nub.* 77, 1161, 1177) and Agathon (*Thesm.* 186) are described as saviors, although the former provides a false salvation and the latter refuses to take up the function of executer. On σωτήρ as a term of civic approbation, see N. Dunbar, ed., *Aristophanes: Birds* (Oxford 1995) ad 544-45. C. A. Faraone ("Salvation and Female Heroics in the Parodos of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*," *JHS* 117 [1997] 38-59) discusses how the Women's Chorus of *Lys.* plays a savior's role with respect to dramatic, ritual and political traditions. On the relationship of Aristophanes' σωτηρία and tragic σωτηρία, V. Frey ("Zur Komödie des Aristophanes," *MH* 5 [1948] 168-77) remains worthwhile reading.

(*Nub.* 6), his son (14, 26), his aristocratic wife and the matchmaker who introduced them (41–55, 60–74), and—a charge that will be directly contradicted—Poseidon (84–85).

Except in *Wealth*, then, the causes of the Great Problems are human, not divine. This fact stands in strong contrast to the plays of Euripides. He frequently casts gods as responsible for human misfortune, and, when he does, he most often treats their actions as a species of chance or luck (τύχη).<sup>12</sup> In his plays, chance events can be attributed to a specific god<sup>13</sup> or to an unknown god<sup>14</sup> or to the pantheon of gods.<sup>15</sup> Occasionally, the gods are said to be responsible for good luck.<sup>16</sup> It is explicitly stated in several tragedies that gods “give τύχη.”<sup>17</sup> Τύχη can be personified as a divinity.<sup>18</sup> Characters can also attribute their own actions to the gods’ luck if they wish to dissociate themselves from their actions.<sup>19</sup> The omnipresence of τύχη and its close association with the capriciousness of the gods add to the evident, ominous feeling that in Euripides’ tragedies, humans cannot control their own lives.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On Euripides’ deployment of τύχη, see J. Assael, *Euripide, philosophe et poète tragique*, Collection d’Études Classiques 16 (Louvain 2001) 14–26; and J. de Romilly, *La Modernité d’Euripide* (Paris 1986) 22–40. On τύχη as a narrative technique in Euripides, see B. Goward, *Telling Tragedy: Narrative Technique in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides* (London 1999) 123–25. V. Giannopoulou (“Divine Agency and Tyche in Euripides’ *Ion*: Ambiguity and Shifting Perspectives,” in M. Cropp, K. H. Lee, and D. Sansone, eds., *Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century*, ICS 24–25 [Champaign, Ill., 2000] 257–71), in tracing the ambivalence of τύχη in Euripides’ *Ion*, suggests that Euripides’ “contemporaries would have perceived tyche both as subsumed by the gods and divine intentions and as a more or less independent power of chance” (258). See also K. Zacharia, *Converging Truths: Euripides’ Ion and the Athenian Quest for Self-Definition*, *Mnem. Suppl.* 242 (Leiden 2003) 143–45.

<sup>13</sup> “Aphrodite’s luck,” Eur. *Hipp.* 371–72; “Hera’s luck,” *HF* 1392–1393; *Hel.* 262–269.

<sup>14</sup> Aegeus’ childlessness is blamed on “some god’s τύχη,” Eur. *Med.* 671; see *IT* 863–867, *Soph. OC* 1505–1506.

<sup>15</sup> Eur. *Hipp.* 831–833, *HF* 309–11, *IT* 475–78, *IA* 351, fr. 37 *TrGF*; *Soph. Ph.* 1316–17, 1326.

<sup>16</sup> Eur. *El.* 590–595, *Ion* 1456–1457, *Phoen.* 1202; [E.] *Rhes.* 583–584.

<sup>17</sup> Eur. *Alc.* 1070–1071, *Heracl.* 934–935, *Ion* 67–68, fr. 140, fr. 554 *TrGF*.

<sup>18</sup> Eur. *Hec.* 786, *Cyc.* 606–607, *IA* 864; *Soph. OT* 1080–1081, fr. 314.79 *TrGF* (satyr play).

<sup>19</sup> As Orestes does in order to disown his matricide (Eur. *El.* 890–892), Creusa does in order to disown her attempted murder of Ion (*Ion* 1497–1509), and Ion does in order to disown his attempted murder of Creusa (*Ion* 1512–1515).

<sup>20</sup> Olson (above, n.3) ad *Pax* 939–41 surveys passages in Greek literature where θεός and τύχη together work to explain all possible actions and events that lie outside human control. See my discussion of this passage from *Peace* below. On τύχη generally as an explanation for unintentional happenings, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley 1974) 138–41; and, in a more philosophic and scientific vein, R. J. Hankinson, *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought* (Oxford 1998). On τύχη as a mode of historical explanation in Thucydides, see L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975). Democritus (68B119 DK) and Thucydides’ Pericles (Thuc. 1.140.1) both cast blame on those who would attribute their own shortcomings to chance.

Aristophanes only rarely taps into the discourse of *τύχη*. When he does, it is almost exclusively for a Chorus' wish for or celebration of the gods' good luck. Thus, the *Wasps*' Chorus prays to Apollo to grant Bdelycleon good luck for reforming his father (*Vesp.* 869). Similarly, Euripides' Relative prays to Demeter and Kore that good luck will attend his mission (*Thesm.* 282–283). The Chorus of *Peace* celebrates Trygaeus' command over the winds that gods and *τύχη* have provided for humans (*Pax* 939–946). The Birds are pleased that Peisetaerus, their "savior," has come by the work of some god or good luck (*Av.* 544–545). Only the Chorus of *Thesmophoriazusae* recognizes a character's bad luck: the Relative's prayer has not been fulfilled (*Thesm.* 724–725). These passages are too isolated and too unsystematic to suggest that Aristophanes' plays were deliberately arguing for a metaphysical worldview, as Euripides' plays did. Most of them seem rather to be clichéd references to the uninteresting fact that chance exists.

And so, in Aristophanes, not only do we not find tragic-style gods who capriciously dispense misfortune to mortals, we also miss the tragic-style citation of chance as the genus of the gods' unpredictable actions. The absence of chance and its divine embodiments leaves more secure (possessing more *σωτηρία*, if you will) the many goods that are necessary for comic Great Ideas to be realized.<sup>21</sup> It thus makes possible the self-sufficiency that is the hallmark of Aristophanic protagonists.<sup>22</sup> It further invites us to take a new, and rather peculiar, view of human agency in Aristophanes. If Aristophanes secures for his characters all the necessary goods, his characters' agency need be represented only as instrumental. That is, Aristophanes need not have them concern themselves with discovering and choosing what is

<sup>21</sup> In this sense, I am following the lead of studies, such as M. Nussbaum, "Aristophanes and Socrates on Learning Practical Wisdom," *YCS* 26 (1980) 43–97, which trace intellectual and ethical issues not commonly discussed in scholarship on Comedy. My consideration of the goods sought by comic protagonists is also influenced by the similar consideration of goods sought by tragic protagonists in M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge 2001). In that book, Nussbaum shows how indispensable chance is for tragic characters. As she writes, "Human excellence is seen . . . as something whose very nature it is to be in need" (2). There is a goodness in the very instability of tragic goods and the fragility of human life. This is decidedly not the case in Comedy, where the absence of tragic-style threats of the gods and chance insulate the characters from such instability and fragility.

<sup>22</sup> On self-sufficiency as an ideal of comic protagonists—in particular, of *Acharnians*' Dicaeopolis—see F. Heberlein, *Pluthygieia: Zur Gegenwelt bei Aristophanes* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) 41–42; N. W. Slater, "Space, Character, and *ἀπάτη*: Transformation and Transvaluation in the *Acharnians*," in A. H. Sommerstein, S. Halliwell, J. Henderson, and B. Zimmermann, eds., *Tragedy, Comedy, and the Polis* (Bari 1993) 401–2; N. W. Slater, *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (Philadelphia 2002) 48–49; D. F. Sutton, *Self and Society in Aristophanes* (Washington, D. C., 1980) 19–20; and P. von Möllendorff, "Literarische Konstruktionen von 'autonomia' bei Herodot und Aristophanes," *A&A* 49 (2003) 14–35. B. E. Goff (*The Noose of Words: Readings of Desire, Violence, and Language in Euripides' Hippolytus* [Cambridge 1990] 46–48) usefully describes the dangers of such self-sufficiency on the tragic stage in the person of Hippolytus.

good for them.<sup>23</sup> Goods for comic protagonists never come into serious conflict nor do they suffer any serious danger to their existence. Instead, they are assumed to exist, to be unthreatened and to be readily available. The characters need only develop Ideas to overcome the obstacles that stand between them and their happiness.

This thesis is borne out by the following study of the Great Ideas' helpers and opponents. While the gods (except in *Wealth*) have no role as causing Problems, they do occasionally offer help and resistance to the Idea-executers. And, more prominently, Aristophanes characterizes several human helpers and opponents with divine imagery. Although Aristophanes never activates the Euripidean discourse of τύχη, these helpers and opponents introduce a sort of chance that could advance or retard the Idea's progress. It is a less formidable chance than Euripides' gods ever introduced, but its weak presence points out the strength of the comic protagonists' instrumental agency.

## II. Divine Opponents

There are in Aristophanes, to be sure, occasional complaints about divine interference in human affairs.<sup>24</sup> Yet *Wealth*, Aristophanes' last extant play, is the only one in which the Great Problem is caused by a god. The Problem is that the virtuous suffer in poverty while the dishonest and criminal prosper (*Plut.* 28–31). The cause of the injustice is Zeus himself, who blinded the god Wealth because Zeus begrudged (φθονεῖ) humans their prosperity (87–92; see also 587–89). The gods' φθόνοϛ and the human desire to avoid it are familiar themes

<sup>23</sup> They thus do not operate according to what contemporary intellectuals would have called τέχνη ("skill" or "craft"). τέχνη is often contrasted with τύχη in fifth-century discourse. Just as τύχη-dispensing gods do not appear in Aristophanes, it is clear that we ought not to think of comic protagonists as operating by τέχνη. τέχνη requires rational deliberation about the desired end and the means to achieve that end. It also requires the development of specialized knowledge within the sphere of activity described by the τέχνη. (See D. W. Graham, "Socrates, the Craft Analogy, and Science," *Apeiron* 24 [1991] 1–24; T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* [Oxford 1995] 69–70 [with bibliography in n.12]; and Nussbaum, *Fragility* [above, n.21] 95–99. Fifth-century texts utilizing the τέχνη—τύχη antithesis include: Agathon frs. 6, 8 *TrGF*; Eur. *Alc.* 785–86; Gorg. *Hel.* 82B11 §19 D–K; *AP* 7.135 [Hippocrates' epitaph]. For a complete collection of Hippocratic passages contrasting τέχνη and τύχη, see L. Edelstein, *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, O. Temkin and C. L. Temkin, eds., [Baltimore 1967] 106–8.) While Great Idea conceivers do aim intentionally at their ends, it is not clear that they deliberate regarding those ends or possess any specialized knowledge for achieving them. P. Thiery (*Aristophane: Fiction et dramaturge* [Paris 1986] 95–102) suggests that each Idea's conceiver undertakes syllogistic reasoning in order to develop his or her Idea and to institute on the comic stage "une nouvelle réalité." While there may be a certain weak logic in the creation of Ideas, it does not usually rise to the level of rational deliberation. One notable exception is the many allusions to the τέχνη of seafaring in *Knights*. These play a prominent role especially as an analogy for the Sausage-Seller's resistance to the blustering winds of chance, embodied by Paphlagon (*Eq.* 430–441, 756–762; see *Pax* 943–946).

<sup>24</sup> E.g., *Eq.* 32–35; *Nub.* 85, 1264–1265; *Vesp.* 9; *Pax* 38–42; *Lys.* 997–998; *Ran.* 310–311. As a close parallel to *Ra.* 310, K. J. Dover (*Aristophanes: Frogs* [Oxford 1993] ad loc.) cites Eur. fr. 912.12–13 *TrGF*.

in Tragedy.<sup>25</sup> Even in Euripides, however, a god's φθόρος arises only because of a human's transgression, never capriciously. In contrast, Zeus' grudge in *Wealth* is directed against the virtuous, the only ones who honor him (93–94). It is an extreme type of malevolence: punishment meted out to the good *because* they are good.<sup>26</sup> When Chremylus conceives his Idea, he persuades Wealth that he will be more powerful than Zeus if his sight is restored and he can again distribute wealth according to desert. His argument is that humans require wealth in order to purchase the goods they sacrifice to Zeus, sacrifices on which Zeus' power depends (139–143).<sup>27</sup> He adds that all human arts, inventions, and activities are motivated by the desire for wealth (160–164, 181–183).<sup>28</sup> Without wealth, all that humans do, both religiously and secularly, is impossible.<sup>29</sup> Wealth, itself an external good and the means to securing all other external goods, is a necessary condition for the complete life. Chremylus' Great Idea aims to restore the correct distribution of wealth and thereby to make a good life possible.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Aesch. *Pers.* 361–363, *Ag.* 134, 904, 921, 946–947; Soph. *El.* 1466–1467; and Eur. *Alc.* 1135, *Hipp.* 20–22, *Supp.* 346–348, *HF* 1308–1310, *Or.* 974, *IA* 1096–1097, *Rhes.* 342–343, 455–457.

<sup>26</sup> This is why Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad *Plut.* 93–94 convicts Zeus as “guilty of ingratitude and of violating the fundamental Greek ethical rule that one should treat well those by whom one has been well treated.” It is a violation of the rules of reciprocity. See also A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual and Comedy* (Cambridge 1993) 271–75.

<sup>27</sup> See *Plut.* 1120–1123, where Hermes says that he has begun to starve without humans' food sacrifices. See also *Av.* 185–186. Dunbar (above, n.11) ad *Av.* 186 notes the comic exaggeration of the traditional belief that the gods receive the burnt portion of animal sacrifices.

<sup>28</sup> Contrast Poverty's argument (*Plut.* 532–534) that she is the cause of all humans' goods.

<sup>29</sup> On money in Greek thought as a universal means, necessary for religious and secular life, see R. Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind: Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy* (Cambridge 2004) 162–65.

<sup>30</sup> Although the question only indirectly affects my point about Zeus' causing *Wealth's* Great Problem, it is worth noting the divergent interpretations concerning the aim and success of Chremylus' Great Idea. As the play progresses, Chremylus' goal shifts from the enrichment of the virtuous to the enrichment of all humanity, a shift which assumes a parallel movement in the play's Problem from the impoverishment of the virtuous to the impoverishment of all humanity due to a scarcity of wealth. This larger Problem is raised in the agon between Chremylus and Poverty (415–609). The agon's outcome appears ambivalent since, although Poverty is dismissed at the end of the scene, Chremylus does not answer her strongest arguments. He only lamely shouts, “You will not persuade me, not even if you persuade me” (οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἢν πείσῃς, 600). Poverty's arguments have found numerous supporters among modern critics. There has thus arisen an “ironic” interpretation of the play according to which Poverty represents *Wealth's* true political message: e.g., Bowie (above, n.26) 284–91; and H. Flashar, “Zur Eigenart des aristophanischen Spätwerks,” *Poetica* 1 (1967) 154–75. Even scholars who reject the irony accept that the play is essentially conservative of the economic status quo: e.g., D. Konstan and M. Dillon, “The Ideology of Aristophanes' *Wealth*,” *AJP* 102 (1981) 371–94; E. Lévy, “Richesse et pauvreté dans le *Ploutos*,” *Ktêma* 22 (1997) 201–12; and S. D. Olson, “Economics and Ideology in Aristophanes' *Wealth*,” *HSCP* 93 (1990) 223–42. (For further bibliography on the ironic interpretation, see A. H. Sommerstein, “Aristophanes and the Demon Poverty,” *CQ* 34

Outside of *Wealth*, Aristophanes does not allow a god to pose a genuine threat to human beings and the goods they value. The poet occasionally has a human character blame a god for his troubles, but the human always proves to be mistaken. For example, in *Peace*, Trygaeus flies to heaven to blame Zeus for causing the Peloponnesian War. Once Trygaeus arrives on Olympus, though, he learns that the Olympians, far from hostile to or neglectful of humanity, repeatedly tried to broker peace treaties among humans. The humans' refusal to make peace led the gods to abandon them (204–226).<sup>31</sup> In *Clouds*, Strepsiades has gone into debt by supporting his son's interests in horses. Hearing his son swear "by Poseidon," the god of horses, Strepsiades complains, "this god is the cause of my troubles" (οὗτος γὰρ ὁ θεὸς αἰτιός μοι τῶν κακῶν, *Nub.* 85).<sup>32</sup> At the end of the play, though, the Chorus, echoing the language of 85, tells Strepsiades, "You yourself are the cause of these things for yourself" (αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν σάντ' ὅσ' αὐτῶν αἴτιος, 1454). In *Peace* and *Clouds*, the attempt to attribute human troubles to the gods leads to the revelation that the gods are not the cause of their troubles. The gods have not destroyed humans' opportunity for peace and have not removed Strepsiades' wealth. The only thing standing between these people and their goods is human foolishness. Learning this, Trygaeus reconceives his means to success and thereby achieves his goal of peace. Strepsiades learns his own foolishness too late and fails in his endeavor.

### III. Divine Helpers

When gods do appear, they are threatening but ineffectual, or surprisingly benevolent. In *Peace*, after informing Trygaeus of the gods' benevolence, Hermes at first threatens to inform Zeus of Trygaeus' Idea. His weak resistance is overcome with a series of entreaties, threats, and bribes (378–379, 409–413, 416–424). Thereafter, he becomes Trygaeus' helper in rescuing Peace. After her rescue, Peace herself is said to be a "profit," "benefit," and "salvation" to humans (588–595). The Chorus celebrates her favor in a song that I shall return to at the end of this section. For now, it is sufficient to note

[1984] 316.) There has also arisen an alternative explanation. The most reasonable of these seems to me to be J. McGlew, "After Irony: Aristophanes' *Wealth* and Its Modern Interpreters," *AJP* 118 (1997) 35–53, which argues that a logical analysis of the Idea's shifted goal misses the point; it is more important to recognize that the play works to unify the audience against poverty's divisiveness. In McGlew's reading, the gods, from the hostile Zeus to the subservient Hermes, represent "the 'other' against whom the once poor and now wealthy define themselves" (47). Their power is excluded in order that humans' power may be elevated. See also P. Sfyroeras, "What Wealth Has to Do with Dionysus: From Economy to Poetics in Aristophanes' *Plutus*," *GRBS* 36 (1995) 231–61; and Sommerstein (above, this note).

<sup>31</sup> Olson (above, n.3) xxxix–xl emphasizes that the humans in *Peace* are to blame for their own problems.

<sup>32</sup> K. J. Dover (*Aristophanes: Clouds* [Oxford 1968] ad 85) misses the point of 85 when he writes, Strepsiades "does not mean that Poseidon bears him malice, but that the god's sphere of interest is the cause of his troubles." Strepsiades certainly does want Pheidippides—and the audience—to view him as a victim of Poseidon's divine malice so that he may exonerate himself.



that *Peace* features gods giving good fortune, so long as humans are sensible enough to take advantage of it.

This same pattern holds true in other plays. In *Birds*, Prometheus, always a friend to humans (1504, 1545), tells Peisetaerus how he may strike a final blow against Zeus' power by demanding Basileia in marriage. The divine delegation that appears for the negotiations comprises Poseidon, Heracles, and a Triballian God. Poseidon attempts to appear threatening, but the embassy's threats prove to be as empty as *Peace*'s Hermes'. Just as Hermes is won over with promises of more sacrificial meat, so, too, are Poseidon's colleagues won over by appeal to base (human) needs. The gluttonous Heracles and the incompetent Triballian prefer the food Peisetaerus cooks to the protection of Zeus' dominion. In *Frogs*, Dionysus—a disconcertingly human god—is the protagonist who seeks to save tragic theater and then Athens itself, but, although he finds assistance from Heracles and Pluto, he is primarily seeking human help to bring about his desires. His goals, especially as he shifts to desiring the salvation of Athens, coincide perfectly with the goals of the Athenian *polis*.<sup>33</sup> And in *Wealth*, Chremylus overcomes Zeus' capricious malevolence by receiving assistance from Apollo's oracle and Asclepius' healing of Wealth.<sup>34</sup> Hermes also puts in an appearance and agrees to serve Wealth by sponsoring musical and athletic contests as the god of competition (*Plut.* 1153–1163). And, in the end, even Zeus the Savior (Zeus Sotēr) himself accepts his subordination to Wealth (1189–1190).<sup>35</sup> All humans and gods now share in the blessings of Wealth. Chremylus' Great Idea succeeds because, except for Zeus' initial grudge, the gods not only did not oppose it, but actively aided its accomplishment. In all these plays, the gods make the Idea-executor's path to his goal smoother, or at least step out of the way when we might have expected them (in a tragic paradigm) to offer hindrance.

So much for the plays in which gods actually appear—a minority, as we said before. The gods are still benevolent even when they are not on stage. If the protagonist succeeds in the enactment of a comic fantasy, he or she usually receives blessings from the gods rather than their hostility. In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis is assisted by

<sup>33</sup> I. Lada-Richards (*Initiating Dionysus: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' Frogs* [Oxford 1999]) shows how, in the course of *Frogs*, Dionysus undergoes a ritual initiation that broadens his perspective from egocentric to civic-minded. She writes, "by the time he pronounces his decision, Dionysus' soul has fused and merged with the 'soul' of the *polis*, and *this* is the primary condition which sets his predilection in contrast to the earlier stages of the play" (219).

<sup>34</sup> Sommerstein (above, n.3) 11.21–22 notes that Chremylus is the only Aristophanic protagonist whose success depends on multiple divine interventions. He attributes this to a growing pessimism in Athens. In 391, the date of *Ecclēsiazusae*, it was reasonable to think that humans could save themselves; by the 380s and the production of *Wealth*, says Sommerstein, "it will take a miracle."

<sup>35</sup> See Konstan and Dillon (above, n.30) 383, n.16 for this interpretation of *Plut.* 1189–1190, defended by Bowie (above, n.26) 272, n.32 and Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad loc., contra Olson (above, n.30) 237–38, n.50.

the semi-divine Amphytheos.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the play, he receives the blessing of the priest of Dionysus, who invites him to dinner for the Anthesteria (*Ach.* 1085–1087). In *Knights*, Apollo's oracles bless the Sausage-Seller as the next leader of Demos' household. The contest between Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller can be read as each contestant's attempt to construct an Athena that coheres with—and therefore favors—his own view of the *polis* and *dēmos*.<sup>37</sup> In *Lysistrata*, the poet constructs Lysistrata's character as a human representative of Athena, a woman who acts with the goddess' full blessing.<sup>38</sup> Even in *Clouds*, Strepsiades' burning of the Phrontisterion, his sole successful action in the play, is said to be a suggestion from Hermes. Only *Wasps* and *Ecclesiazusae* lack divine approval for a successful protagonist.<sup>39</sup> In short, when Aristophanes' gods intervene in human lives, their action is either an approval of the Great Idea's execution or, more interactively, a creation of good conditions for the Idea's accomplishment.

The gods' role in the accomplishment of a Great Idea is most joyously celebrated in *Peace*. After he rescues Peace, the Chorus fetes Trygaeus (notably, not Peace herself) as "savior to all humanity" (*Pax* 914–915). They sing, "Everything god wills (πάνθ' ὁ θεὸς θέλει) and chance sets up straight (χρὴ τύχῃ κατορθοῖ) comes to pass according to your intent (κατὰ νοῦν),<sup>40</sup> and one success follows another according to your timeliness (κατὰ καιρὸν)" (939–941). And, "Come, hasten now while a rapid wind, aversive of war, from the god (θεόθεν) prevails. Yes, now a god (δαίμων) is clearly redirecting us toward good things (εἰς ἀγαθὰ)" (943–946).<sup>41</sup> The Chorus' words exemplify the relationship between comic benevolent gods and their human beneficiaries. Aristophanes' gods do not simply supply goods to humans. Their will, their desire, provides a direction and,

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<sup>36</sup> On Amphytheos' semi-divine genealogy associated with Eleusis and his aping the sacred role of announcing the truce for the Eleusinian Mysteries (the Chorus calls him σπονδοφόρος [216], a technical term for this role), see Bowie (above, n.26) 21–22.

<sup>37</sup> C. A. Anderson, *Athena's Epithets: Their Structural Significance in Plays of Aristophanes* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1995) 9–38; and R. Lauriola, "Athena and the Paphlagonian in Aristophanes' *Knights*: Re-considering *Equites* 1090–5, 1172–81," *Mnem.* 59 (2006) 75–94.

<sup>38</sup> H. P. Foley, "The 'Female Intruder' Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*," *CP* 77 (1982) 9–10. Lysistrata's name is almost certainly an allusion to the name of Lysimache, the contemporary priestess of Athena Polias, whose cult is located on the Acropolis seized by the play's women. See J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford 1980) xxxviii–xli; D. M. Lewis, "Notes on Attic Inscriptions (II)," *ABSA* 50 (1955) 1–7; H.-J. Newiger, "War and Peace in the Comedy of Aristophanes," C. Radford, tr. *YCS* 26 (1980) 235–36.

<sup>39</sup> Thus, Sommerstein (above, n.3) 10.28 says that *Wasps* and *Ecclesiazusae* are the only two extant plays that proceed "on an almost wholly secular level."

<sup>40</sup> I follow Olson (above, n.3) ad *Pax* 939–941 in taking the prepositional phrase κατὰ νοῦν as referring to Trygaeus' intention, rather than some impersonal or indefinite intention (see Sommerstein's "goes as one desires" and Henderson's "according to plan").

<sup>41</sup> Translation following M. Platnauer, ed., *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford 1964) ad loc.

metaphorically, a tailwind toward good things. In this song, even τύχη itself contributes to this beneficial orientation. The gods and chance, however, are insufficient for guaranteeing human happiness in this comic world. It is not a carefree utopia.<sup>42</sup> Human action is necessary, and so the Chorus urges Trygaeus to "make haste" to harness the favorable winds.<sup>43</sup> The completeness and security of Trygaeus' peace is manifested in the fact that his actions, marked by νοῦς and καὶρός—terms that entail his intelligence, his forethought, and therefore, his agency—circumscribe the two forces usually most outside human control, the gods and chance. No destabilizing force is any longer possible.

#### IV. Quasi-Divine Helpers

In some plays, even though the gods do not appear as helpers of the Great Idea, executors can appeal for similar assistance to human characters. The poet may mark these human helpers as quasi-divine. So, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides turns to his fellow tragic poet Agathon for assistance. As Euripides and his Relative wait outside Agathon's house, a Slave appears, chanting a hymn as if in preparation for a god's epiphany.<sup>44</sup> In *Clouds*, when Strepsiades meets Socrates at the *Phrontisterion*,<sup>45</sup> the philosopher is suspended above the ground, probably in the same way that a *deus ex machina* appears at the end of tragedies. Strepsiades reverently utters, "O Socrates" (*Nub.* 219). Socrates ignores him at first—as is right for a god—but eventually addresses the lowly human as "ephemeral creature" (223).<sup>46</sup> In both

<sup>42</sup> Trygaeus' perfect peace calls to mind—but is notably different from—the comic utopias (Cratin. fr. 176 PCG; Crates Com. frags. 16, 17; Telecl. fr. 1; Pherecr. fr. 113, 137; Metag. fr. 6, all of which are culled from Ath. 267e–270a; see Ar. *Ach.* 978, *Pax* 1313–1314) that recall the Hesiodic Age of Cronus (Hes. *Op.* 109–20) in which all good things, especially food, come to humans of their own accord. Trygaeus' peace, in contrast, requires human action. On these utopias, see P. Ceccarelli, "L'Athènes de Périclès: Un 'pays de cocagne'?" *L'idéologie démocratique et l'αὐτόματος βίος dans la comédie ancienne*, *QUCC* 83 (1996) 109–59; Sutton (above, n.22) 55–67; and J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford 2000) 115–30. As Ceccarelli has shown (*pace* Wilkins), the utopic descriptions collected by Athenaeus probably all come from their plays' agons and probably stand in contrast to the ideology of the Athenian farmer, according to which toil is necessary to produce agricultural goods. Her interpretation of the Golden Age fragments coheres with my reading of the relationship between the gods and (the farmer) Trygaeus in *Peace*.

<sup>43</sup> Trygaeus' ability to navigate the "rapid wind" recalls the Sausage-Seller's expertise at seafaring in *Knights*. See below.

<sup>44</sup> Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad *Thesm.* 43–50. See below and n.47.

<sup>45</sup> According to S. M. Goldberg ("A Note on Aristophanes' ΦΡΟΝΤΙΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ," *CP* 71 [1976] 254–56), Aristophanes creates the word φροντιστήριον (named at *Nub.* 94) with a suffix that is typically used only in tragic diction (e.g., οἰκητήριον and εὐνατήριον) or in names of special political or religious buildings (e.g., βουλευτήριον, δικαστήριον, or χρηστήριον). There is thus an absurd solemnity associated with the quasi-divine Socrates' school. See also M. C. Marianetti, *Religion and Politics in Aristophanes' Clouds*, *Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien* 24 (Hildesheim 1992) 41–75, on the *Phrontisterion*'s function as a site of ritual initiation (μυστήριον).

<sup>46</sup> Dover (above, n.32) ad loc.: "Socrates is looking down on Strepsiades as a god might look down from Olympus on a mortal."

cases, the protagonists hope to obtain quasi-divine assistance. But in so doing, they risk whether their assistant will be a helper or an opponent, and they suffer for it. Agathon refuses to help Euripides and, while not opposing the Idea, throws the play completely into the very human realm of Euripides' machinations. He must rely on his incompetent Relative to persuade the women to let go of their anger. Strepsiades turns himself and then his son over to Socrates' education, only to suffer punishment when it turns out that Socrates is not the god-like man he claims to be. Not coincidentally, *Clouds* and *Thesmophoriazusa*e contain the two Great Problems that result from the conceivers' own follies.

There is one notably successful quasi-divine helper in Aristophanes, the Sausage-Seller of *Knights*. We will discuss him in the next section, in relation to his quasi-divine opponent, Paphlagon.

#### V. Quasi-Divine Opponents

With his gods acting largely benignly, Aristophanes needs another source of opposition in order to drive his comic plots. It is most significant for our argument that, in opting to have human characters as the primary opponents, Aristophanes marks them with divine imagery. He thereby gives his protagonists the opportunity to overcome opponents who threaten them with god-like potency. Yet, because the opponents are all human, Aristophanes never exposes his protagonists to the greater danger imposed by tragic gods. I examine below the three most prominent quasi-divine opponents, Lamachus, Paphlagon, and Philocleon.

In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis has the Idea to circumvent the troubles of the Peloponnesian War by negotiating his own private peace with the Spartans. After doing so, he defends his peace before the angry Chorus of Acharnians. He wins half of them over, but the other half summons Lamachus to punish him. The divine imagery begins with their first mention of Lamachus. They employ a prayer-form used to appeal for divine assistance, including a verb (φαίνεσθαι) often associated with divine epiphanies (*Ach.* 566–571).<sup>47</sup> They apostrophize him as one “whose eyes flash lightning,” as if he might rain Zeus' thunderbolts down on the offender, and they grant him an epithet—“Gorgon-crested”—elsewhere associated with Athena (*Eq.* 1181).<sup>48</sup> The Semichorus thus summons Lamachus as a quasi-divine avenger. Dicaeopolis plays along by sarcastically addressing him, “O Lamachus hero,” and notes his splendid gear (575), as if, in the words of one commentator, he is “an almost supernatural being.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> S. D. Olson, ed., *Aristophanes: Acharnians* (Oxford 2002) ad *Ach.* 566–567. See W. Horn, *Gebet und Gebetsparodie in den Komödien des Aristophanes* (Nuremberg 1970) 46–47, on Aristophanes here using the traditional elements of an appeal for divine assistance.

<sup>48</sup> See Anderson (above, n.37) 26–27.

<sup>49</sup> Dover (above, n.32) ad *Nub.* 219, comparing Dicaeopolis' address to Lamachus with Strepsiades' address to the airborne Socrates. See above, n.46.

Dicaeopolis betrays no signs of intimidation. Aristophanes has him deflate the potential threat of the quasi-divine soldier by making Dicaeopolis trick Lamachus into removing his armor and giving him a feather from his helmet—so that he can vomit with it (584–586).<sup>50</sup> He dismisses Lamachus as one of a class of soldiers who have unjustly traveled the world on public expense accounts while impoverished citizens have suffered at home (595–617).<sup>51</sup> As Lamachus departs, Dicaeopolis moves to set up his own marketplace while Lamachus returns to his wars. Dicaeopolis' situation could have been exploited by the quasi-divine soldier as a conflict between two highly valued goods: the democratic *polis* and his private peace. The conflict is most apparent when Dicaeopolis asserts that he is a "good citizen" (595) while he is disguised in the rags of a beggar and employing deceptive Euripidean rhetoric. Lamachus, however, never exploits the contradiction. It is *his* commitment to the democracy that is questioned. *His* clothing, not Dicaeopolis', becomes the sign of non-democratic pretension. And so Dicaeopolis emerges without any compulsion to reconcile or choose between his values.

Dicaeopolis' triumph is sealed later in the play when Lamachus' Slave approaches Dicaeopolis' market to purchase some delicacies (960–962). The Slave continues to employ the quasi-divine imagery used in Lamachus' first scene. He grants his master the epithets "the frightening, the holder of a bull's-hide shield" (ὁ δεινός, ὁ ταλαύρινος, 964), both of which are also given (in the same metrical position) to the personified abstraction War (*Pax* 241),<sup>52</sup> and the latter of which is an epithet of Ares in epic (*Il.* 5.289 = 20.78 = 22.267). The Slave also says that Lamachus "brandishes the Gorgon" (τὴν Γοργόνα / πάλλει, 964–965). His words not only recall the epithet "Gorgon-crested" connected with Athena, but also include a verb, πάλλει, that, although a very common epic word for wielding a sword, is used elsewhere in comic trimeter only in a description of Peisetaerus brandishing Zeus' thunderbolt (*Av.* 1714).<sup>53</sup>

In this scene, the quasi-divine vocabulary is used incongruously in the context of a routine mercantile transaction. Dicaeopolis' market is a space marked by economic stability, where Megarians and Boeotians, forbidden entrance to Athens' regular markets, have safely arrived and bartered in Dicaeopolis' private space, albeit in comically bizarre ways. The Megarian disguises his daughters as pigs for sacrifice, and, after he and Dicaeopolis engage in puns about the girls' genitalia, he trades them for Athenian garlic and salt; the Boeotian wants to

<sup>50</sup> On Dicaeopolis' stripping of Lamachus, see G. Compton-Engle, "Control of Costume in Three Plays of Aristophanes," *AJP* 124 (2003) 512–13.

<sup>51</sup> S. D. Olson ("Dicaeopolis' Motivations in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*," *JHS* 111 [1991] 200–03) demonstrates the importance of Dicaeopolis' economic motivations throughout the play, including during his defeat of Lamachus.

<sup>52</sup> On the status of the personification War, see above, n.3.

<sup>53</sup> Olson (above, n.47) ad *Ach.* 964–965 provides the parallels. Lamachus' Slave also parodies *A. Th.* 1384–85, a reference to the hero Tydeus.

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 "Thesm."  
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 → "Sept."

exchange his native products for something uniquely Athenian, and ends up with an Informer. The scenes demonstrate how Dicaeopolis' space secured economic transactions from Athenian corruption and made safe even the most obscene exchanges. They also established barter as the preferred method of exchange. Lamachus' desire to participate in this economic system is inappropriate. His divine imagery labels him as an outsider vis-à-vis the human-made system, and his Athenian-minted cash violates Dicaeopolis' barter system.

In rejecting Lamachus, then, Dicaeopolis makes his world invulnerable to Lamachus' quasi-divine threats to his secure economic peace. But in rejecting Lamachus' money, Dicaeopolis seemingly also opens his private space up to economic insecurity. Money embodies an abstract value that enables assets to be made commensurable so that exchange is fair to both parties.<sup>54</sup> Without money, the exchangers face the possibility of someone being cheated. Indeed, the earlier scenes seem to bear this out. Neither the Megarian's nor the Boeotian's exchange is of an equal monetary value. Money also makes value impersonal and makes exchange possible between any two parties, regardless of identity. Dicaeopolis' barter system, in contrast, requires that its participants have the right identity. All Peloponnesians, Megarians and Boeotians are free to trade, he says, "so long as they sell to me and not to Lamachus" (720-722). The possibility of unequal exchange proves to be immaterial. The creation of a peaceful trading community, in which Dicaeopolis can define the rules of exchange, is far more valuable.<sup>55</sup> The threat comes instead from the pretentiously divine Lamachus and his economically leveling money. The rejection of Lamachus demonstrates how nothing limits the goods Dicaeopolis is free to pursue, and nothing compels him to choose between conflicting goods or even to recognize a conflict. He is invulnerable to social constraint and divine compulsion. Lamachus' fate is just the opposite. Summoned into battle, he trips while leaping over a ditch and is impaled on a vine-prop (1174-1181). The peaceful implement of Dionysus shows Lamachus all too vulnerable.<sup>56</sup>

*Knights* presents a second quasi-divine opponent, Paphlagon, a thinly veiled disguise for the demagogue Cleon. In an echo of a Homeric description of the Sun,<sup>57</sup> it is said that Paphlagon "watches over everything" (*Eq.* 75). He is also said to stand like a giant, with

<sup>54</sup> Seaford's (above, n.29) discussion of the development of money and its impact on early Greek thought has greatly influenced my thought in this paragraph.

<sup>55</sup> Dicaeopolis' trading partners do not find the same value in peaceful exchange. The Boeotian at least is more interested in profit (see 905-907, 947, 957-958).

<sup>56</sup> Bowie (above, n.26) 30 quotes an *Iliad* scholiast (ad 1.59 Dind.), who notes that in the myth of Telephus—whose Euripidean version Aristophanes is again parodying in this scene—Telephus is wounded by Dionysus. Lamachus, playing the role of the wounded Telephus, likewise is the victim of Dionysus. Bowie emphasizes that the scene is not without its moral ambiguity, as Dicaeopolis, who earlier performed the Telephus role, refuses the supplication of Lamachus-Telephus.

<sup>57</sup> *Od.* 11.109. see also *Eup.* fr. 316 *PCG*, another association of Cleon with the all-seeing Sun. See Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad *Eq.* 75.

one foot in Pylos and the other in the Athenian Assembly (75–76).<sup>58</sup> The Chorus labels him “exciter of cavalry” (ταραξιππόστρατον, 247), possibly an allusion to the title of Poseidon Taraxippos at Olympia, Nemea, and the Isthmus.<sup>59</sup> Paphlagon describes himself as a mighty wind that overturns land and sea in his zeal to punish his opponents’ boldness (429–431; see also 691–693).<sup>60</sup> Paphlagon’s very name, a geographical epithet, reminds the hearer of the verb παφλάζειν, a Homeric word that describes the boiling or blustering of the sea.<sup>61</sup> While not specifically divine imagery, the association of Paphlagon with the winds and the boiling sea suggests the capricious dangers of natural phenomena that can subvert humans’ goals. After the parabasis, the Sausage-Seller likens Paphlagon to an angry Zeus by describing his words as “hurled like thunder” (626). And in the contests with the Sausage-Seller, Paphlagon repeatedly represents himself as a favorite of Athena, being careful to construct her specifically in her most martial aspects so as to foreground his (that is, Cleon’s) own military accomplishments as well as the potential violence he may bring against his adversaries.<sup>62</sup>

Combining elements of the all-seeing Sun, earth-shaking Poseidon, thunder-wielding Zeus, and militaristic Athena with the unpredictable forces of nature, Paphlagon proves to be a much more formidable opponent than Lamachus ever was. To balance his quasi-divine power, Aristophanes creates an Idea-executor who can match his every threat.<sup>63</sup> The Sausage-Seller’s power is marked by quasi-divine imagery as strongly as Paphlagon’s. His first entrance is hailed by the Second

<sup>58</sup> The image alludes to Cleon’s political involvement at home and his military leadership in the assault on Pylos, but is also evocative of epic images such as Poseidon’s crossing the Aegean Sea with only four strides (*Il.* 13.17–22) or Hera’s peak-by-peak journey from Olympus to Lemnos (*Il.* 14.224–230). See R. Janko, ed., *The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol. 4: Books 13–16* (Cambridge 1994) ad 13.17–20. My thanks to Elias Theodoropoulos and Jeffrey Gibson for their help in tracking down these parallels.

<sup>59</sup> Paus. (6.20.15–19) associates the spirit that frightens racing horses with Poseidon. The allusion is cited by Bowie (above, n.26) 70, who too strictly divides the association of Paphlagon with Poseidon and the Sausage-Seller with Athena.

<sup>60</sup> Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad *Eq.* 692 compares the storm imagery at *Il.* 14.16–17. On the play’s analogy between disturbances at sea and political disturbances, see L. Edmunds, *Cleon, Knights and Aristophanes’ Politics* (Lanham, Md., 1987) 8–10.

<sup>61</sup> See *Il.* 13.798. The Sausage-Seller puns on the name at *Eq.* 919: ἀνὴρ παφλάζει. Σ *Eq.* 919c defines παφλάζει as τετάρακται. See below, n.67. See also M. Landfester, *Die Ritter des Aristophanes: Beobachtungen zur dramatischen Handlung und zum komischen Stil des Aristophanes* (Amsterdam 1967) 17–18.

<sup>62</sup> C. A. Anderson, “The Dream-Oracles of Athena, *Knights* 1090–95,” *TAPA* 121 (1991) 149–55; and Anderson (above, n.37) 16–27.

<sup>63</sup> Bowie (above, n.26) 58–66 identifies parallels between the succession of Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller and the succession of Cronus and Zeus in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Aristophanes thus mirrors the local events on a cosmic level, and gives the Sausage-Seller’s victory a quasi-divine inevitability. Among the parallels between the two succession stories is the trope that the successor appears as a double of the predecessor until he is transformed after his victory. This may help explain why the Sausage-Seller is the only truly successful quasi-divine character in Aristophanes’

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TEXT.CHANGE OR  
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Slave as taking place "by divine luck" (κατὰ θεῖον, 147). He is also greeted by the First Slave, as if his arrival were a divine epiphany, as a "savior" who "appears to the city and to us" (τῇ πόλει καὶ νῶν φανείς, 149; see also καὶ τῇ πόλει σωτὴρ φανείς ἡμῖν τε τοῖς πολίταις, 458).<sup>64</sup> The Sausage-Seller, like Paphlagon, cites Athena as his patron, but the Athena he creates for himself is a civic-minded goddess.<sup>65</sup> He also receives support from Apollo (229). The Chorus says that, once he defeats Paphlagon, he will bear a trident and shake the earth, actions associated with Poseidon (836–840). Furthermore, to combat Paphlagon's unpredictable natural forces, the Sausage-Seller is consistently represented as an expert at seafaring, a skill explicitly associated with Poseidon in the parabasis' ode (551–564).<sup>66</sup> More central than the quasi-divine Amphitheos of *Acharnians* and more benevolent than the quasi-divine helpers Socrates (*Clouds*) and Agathon (*Thesmophoriazusae*), the Sausage-Seller brings quasi-divine good fortune into the world in order to defeat the opponent and benefit the new world created by the First Slave's Great Idea.

The Sausage-Seller is so beneficent, and Paphlagon so threatening, because Paphlagon not only exploits a conflict of values (as Lamachus failed to do), but also aims to destroy the very goods that Demos and the other household slaves value. In this respect, he mirrors the destructive φθόρος of Zeus in *Wealth* insofar as Zeus destroyed the one good necessary for human happiness. In that play, the destroyed good was wealth; in *Knights*, the overarching good is the quiet life, a life of ἀπραγμοσύνη.<sup>67</sup> In the prologue, the two Slaves complain that Paphlagon tells Demos false slanders about them (64; see 7, 45) and blackmails them (62–70). If they are not obedient, he has them beaten (4–5, 69–70). Later, the Chorus of Knights also accuses Paphlagon of slander (262). They particularly charge him with slandering anyone

extant plays.

<sup>64</sup> On φαίνεσθαι as a verb associated with divine epiphanies, see above.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson (above, n.37) 27–35.

<sup>66</sup> Aristophanes, in the parabasis' anapests, likewise represents himself as a student of seafaring who is just learning the ropes and who is only now ready to set sail on the comic stage under his own name (541–550). He claims that his reticence is a demonstration of his self-restraint and intelligence (545). T. K. Hubbard (*The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis* [Ithaca 1991] 60–70) draws parallels between Aristophanes' restrained boldness in producing comedies and attacking Cleon and the Sausage-Seller's restrained boldness in defeating Paphlagon. On the Sausage-Seller's resistance to Paphlagon's bluster by means of his seafaring τέχνη, see above, n.23.

<sup>67</sup> Edmunds (above, n.60) recognizes that Paphlagon-Cleon's "disturbance" of the city's ἀπραγμοσύνη (see ταραττει [66], ταραξιπτόστρατον [247], βορβοροτάραξι [308], ταραττων [431, 692], ταραττης [867]) is figured as a form of *stasis* both in poetic tradition and in Athenian ideology. The Sausage-Seller, in order to defeat Paphlagon, engages in similar disturbances (τάραττε [214, 251], ταραξω [358], ταραττων [840], ταραττεις [902]). On ἀπραγμοσύνη in Athenian ideology, see L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford 1986), especially 82–84 on Aristophanes' farmers; V. Ehrenberg, "Polypragmosyne: A Study in Greek Politics," *JHS* 67 (1947) 46–67; and Dover (above, n.20) 188–90. On the relationship between ἀπραγμοσύνη and the virtue σωφροσύνη in Aristophanes, see H. North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca 1966) 98–100.



who is rich and quietist (πλούσιος, 265; ἀπράγμων[α], 261). In both the tenor and the vehicle of the play's allegory, in both public and private life, Paphlagon-Cleon acts as the meddlesome busybody, the πολυπράγμων man,<sup>68</sup> whose claims to be a sincere lover of Demos are built on the rejection and denigration of his peers and of the traditionally powerful.<sup>69</sup>

The goodness of the quiet life is reiterated at the end of the play as the Sausage-Seller and Demos celebrate the victory over Paphlagon. After the rejuvenated Demos has proclaimed how wisely he will henceforth rule Athens,<sup>70</sup> the Sausage-Seller rewards him with sexual provisions (a boy and two women representing peace treaties) and directs him to take them back to his farm (1384–1395). The new Demos is thus assimilated to the ἀπράγμων farmer, a man like Dicaeopolis. But, greater than Dicaeopolis, the new Demos is also painted as quasi-divine. For when the victorious Sausage-Seller reintroduces him to the Chorus, their conversation is in language explicitly reminiscent of prayers for divine epiphanies (1316–1329).<sup>71</sup> The Sausage-Seller steps back and takes the role of a priest to the approaching god, and Demos now assumes a role as distributor of the “new good fortune” (καὶ ναιὶ σὺν . . . εὐτυχίαι σὺν, 1318). As the beneficent god, Demos is addressed as “monarch” (1330) and “king of the Greeks” (1333). These are titles hardly befitting someone who values the quiet life; yet this is the consequence of Demos' rejuvenation and transformation into a quasi-divinity. The Athenian Demos, full of the spirit of archaic Athens, free from the slanders of Paphlagons and Cleons, can unite the contradictions of wise king and quiet farmer, much as Dicaeopolis united the contradictions of democrat of Athens and autocrat of his own domain. Both of Demos' roles provide blessings, and both have been well enough secured by the Sausage-Seller so as to be protected from all opposition.

In *Wasps*, the quasi-divine imagery is more localized. Philocleon, the Idea's opponent, briefly pictures himself as comparable to Zeus as he spars with his son Bdelycleon, the conceiver of that play's Idea. He describes himself as a divine avenger, sent as a juror to punish those who transgress the law (*Vesp.* 619–630). Philocleon is a mixture of previous comic types and functions. He is an old man

<sup>68</sup> Edmunds (above, n.60) 17–20.

<sup>69</sup> On Paphlagon's pretenses, see Lauriola (above, n.37). On the rhetoric of “demophilia” in the play, see A. Scholtz, “Friends, Lovers, Flatterers: Demophilic Courtship in Aristophanes' *Knights*,” *TAPA* 134 (2004) 263–93. On the historical Cleon's political innovation, the rejection of private, aristocratic friendships in favor of public claims to be working for the good of the demos, see W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton 1971) 87–136.

<sup>70</sup> Whether Demos appears onstage truly or only symbolically rejuvenated is debated: see Edmunds (above, n.60) 43–49; and S. D. Olson, “The New Demos of Aristophanes' *Knights*,” *Erano*s 88 (1990) 60–63.

<sup>71</sup> H. Kleinknecht, “Die Epiphanie des Demos in Aristophanes' *Rittern*” *Hermes* 74 (1939) 58–65; repr. in H.-J. Newiger, *Aristophanes und die Alte Komödie* (Darmstadt 1975) 144–54.

like Dicaeopolis, though far less ingenious; he sets himself up as a quasi-divine avenger like Lamachus, but he is even less effective; he functions as both the Problem and opponent like Paphlagon, but earns no one's curses. This mixture leads to the unique situation that the Idea's opponent is both the more ridiculed and the more sympathetic of the play's two main characters.<sup>72</sup> The divine characteristics he possesses come only from his own imagination, not from others' descriptions of him. They serve not as a sign that he could dispense danger; rather, they heighten the audience's sympathy for him, since they make him seem benignly out of touch with reality.

If there is a true quasi-divine opponent in *Wasps*, it is the off-stage Cleon and his fellow demagogues. Bdelycleon, in his censure of them, describes them as "thundering" (671), in language reminiscent of the First Slave's condemnation of Paphlagon (*Eq.* 65–69). As a commentator says, "Philokleon thought himself equal to Zeus (619–30), but Bdelykleon implies that it is really the demagogue who behaves like Zeus."<sup>73</sup> Unlike Zeus' thunder, however, Cleon's thunder will prove to be an empty threat if his spell is broken. That is the ultimate goal of Bdelycleon's Idea. With its sparse usage of godly characteristics, *Wasps* imagines little threat from anyone, divine or quasi-divine. It is a world in which Bdelycleon, from the beginning until Philocleon's rebellion at the end, controls everything.

Outside of *Acharnians*, *Knights*, and *Wasps*, the forms of opposition to Great Ideas rely less on the threats of divine or quasi-divine opposition. Several conceivers and executors have no human or divine opponents. The primary opponents to Trygaeus (*Peace*) and Chremylus (*Wealth*) are the personifications War and Poverty, quasi-divine characters to be sure, but on a different plane than the human Lamachus, Paphlagon, and Philocleon. These seem appropriate opponents to Trygaeus and Chremylus insofar as both protagonists interact with true gods. Likewise, Peisetaerus (*Birds*) faces no human opposition, only the Bird Chorus, whom he wins over by convincing them that they are themselves gods, and the powerless divine delegation, who agree to hand over Basileia, the key to Zeus' rule. The gods appear, but with none of the divine attributes that made Lamachus and Paphlagon potential sources of danger. Indeed, Peisetaerus' domination of the cosmos, by means of interrupting the traffic in sacrificial offerings between gods and humans, sets him and his Birds up as sources of disruption to humans and gods. Dionysus (*Frogs*) has no opponents at all; after all, the only live human in the play is his slave Xanthias, who provides trouble but hardly opposition. In these

<sup>72</sup> D. Konstan (*Greek Comedy and Ideology* [Oxford 1995] 20–21) finds that Philocleon and his fellow jurors receive "a certain nostalgic respect," but are lost because their old way of life cannot cohere with the ideology projected by the play and enforced by its demagogues. He "represents an ethic and a tradition that are both respected and diminished by the action of the play."

<sup>73</sup> D. M. MacDowell, ed., *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford 1971) ad 671. See Sommerstein (above, n.3) ad *Vesp.* 671.

four plays, in all of which the boundary between heaven and earth or between earth and the underworld is crossed, the plots are so fantastic and the Idea's conceivers and executors correspondingly so bold that the threat of a quasi-divine human opponent would hardly seem dangerous. Nevertheless, the absence of direct threats from the gods themselves, with the major exception of Zeus in *Wealth* and the minor exception of the powerless divine delegation in *Birds*, continues to demonstrate that the plays' structures guarantee successful actions by the human protagonists.

In the three extant plays not yet discussed in this section, Aristophanes casts women in prominent functional roles. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the women are the opponents; in *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*, women are the conceivers and executors. *Thesmophoriazusae*'s female opponents are, like Paphlagon, both opponent and Problem, but, unlike Paphlagon, receive no divine coloration. Their opposition to Euripides' Great Idea relies on stereotypically female cunning (see ἡ φαρμάκωσις ἡ μιᾷ γέ τῳ τέχνῃ, 430). Euripides' Idea is itself an example of stereotypically Euripidean cunning (see τοῦ γὰρ τεχνάζειν ἡμέτερος ὁ πυρραμοῦς, 94). As we have seen, Euripides turns to the quasi-divine poet Agathon for assistance. When Agathon refuses, however, both sides in the dispute, rather than brandishing any threats of τύχη, divine or otherwise, rely on their cunning τέχνῃ.

In *Ecclesiazusae*, Praxagora's opponents, the male citizens of Athens, have no divine traits and hardly put up any resistance at all. Even Praxagora's husband Blepyrus, who stands in the opponent's position in the agon, is distrustful but hardly hostile. Nor does Praxagora earn divine approbation for her plan. The logic of giving Praxagora no opponents becomes clearer through an examination of the similar logic of *Lysistrata*.

In *Lysistrata*, the most brazen opponent to Lysistrata's Idea is the Proboulos, one of a specially appointed panel of ten men who were allegedly selected to be elder statesmen and advisers to the Boule, but who proved to be precursors to the imminent oligarchic coup.<sup>74</sup> At first sight, the Proboulos appears to be a braggart soldier like Lamachus, threatening brutal punishment against the usurpers. He cites religious irregularities—a woman inappropriately performing a ritual for a foreign god while the Athenian Assembly was in session—as the cause of the city's troubles.<sup>75</sup> But he himself is in no way represented as quasi-divine. His threats to Lysistrata and her women are not threats of unpredictable actions. He and his men attempt only to use brute force to extract the women from the Acropolis. Henderson suggests that the characterization of the Proboulos as an unthinking bully enables Aristophanes to give the women an opponent without "impugning

<sup>74</sup> M. Munn, *The School of History: Athens in the Age of Socrates* (Berkeley 2000) 134–37.

<sup>75</sup> In fact, Aristophanes carefully constructs Lysistrata and her female allies, especially the female semichorus, as essential to correct religious behavior in the city. See Anderson (above, n.37), 47–51; and Faraone (above, n.11) 47–54.

the fitness of everyday political and military leaders,<sup>76</sup> which would perhaps have been a tactless move, given Athens' precarious military and political situation at the time of *Lysistrata's* production.

Besides avoiding questionable political attacks, Aristophanes' characterization of the Proboulos as a purely human bumbler, with no quasi-divine traits, also enables Lysistrata to respond with her own purely human strength and intelligence. Aristophanes brings this out when he has Lysistrata ask the Proboulos whether he thinks women "have bile" (χολήν), that is, courage (*Lys.* 463–465). For male Idea-executors, roguish ingenuity spurred their success. Dicaeopolis and the Sausage-Seller overcame their opponents through trickery and deceit. Trygaeus accomplished his goal by hubristically flying to Olympus. They brushed aside threats by means of actions that could hardly be called traditionally virtuous. They are rewarded with satisfaction of their prandial and sexual desires. For a female executor to display such roguishness and to find such rewards would in no way enable her to appear sympathetic.<sup>77</sup> It would instead align her with female stereotypes of bibulousness, eroticism, dangerous wile, and so forth, and thus doom her project to save the city.<sup>78</sup> Rather than roguish ingenuity, the female executor needs to display traditionally male virtue, which seems insufficient for defeating tragic-style dangers in Aristophanic Comedy. By not opposing Lysistrata with a quasi-divine opponent, Aristophanes allows her to work against the human-made problem that faces Athens, the men's warmongering and incompetence. The same logic holds true for *Ecclesiazusae*. By not characterizing any of Praxagora's male opponents as quasi-divine, Aristophanes eliminates the possibility of tragic-style danger and enables Praxagora to demonstrate her own skill at governing.

## VI. Conclusion

Most successful comic protagonists are addressed as "savior." The conceivers and executors of Great Ideas bring salvation to Athens and to humanity. Salvation in Aristophanes' comedies is a guarantee that humans will be able to pursue their goals, especially peace, without

<sup>76</sup> Henderson (above, n.38) ad *Lys.* 387–423. Henderson continues, "In early 411 an antagonist like the Lamachos of *Ach.* or the Kleon of *Eq.* would have frightened rather than amused the spectators and so might have exposed the poet to dangerous resentment."

<sup>77</sup> See Newiger (above, n.38) 231–32, who cynically but justifiably adds that the good intentions required of Lysistrata's plan may have seemed in 411 as fantastic as Trygaeus' flight to heaven.

<sup>78</sup> Henderson (above, n.38) xxviii notes that Lysistrata may have been the first female protagonist in an Old Comedy. It should be no surprise, then, that she breaks from stereotypical female roles. Elsewhere, J. Henderson ("Pherekrates and the Women of Old Comedy," in D. Harvey and J. Wilkins, *The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy* [London 2000] 135–50) traces the development of female stereotypes in Old Comedy. Only women who regularly appear in public (hetaerae, market-women) are satirized. When respectable women appear, as in *Lys.* and *Ec.*, they are strongly marked as bringing the virtues of the *oikos* with them into the public sphere (see also Foley [above, n.38]).

any threat from unpredictable malicious forces. The functions of tragic gods, who could cause good or bad fortune, are split in two in Aristophanes. The few gods who do appear are benevolent toward humans, even *Wealth's* Zeus in the end; they facilitate (though never bring about) humans' ability to live securely. The gods' malevolent side is assumed by ineffective quasi-divine humans. They function as opposition to the Great Idea and thereby give the comic plot its conflict. They, however, always fail to keep the executors from achieving their goals. The divinities' occasional benevolence—but more prominent absence—and the quasi-divinities' inevitable failures make salvation possible for those who deserve it and work for it. Goods are secure and readily available, and, therefore, human agency is possible.

The comedies imagine a primarily instrumental human agency. The goods are so safe and manifest in Aristophanes' worlds that the characters generally need not evaluate the goodness or desirability of a given end nor decide which goods to pursue. Indeed, as was notably the case for Dicaeopolis and Demos, they are even able to pursue goods that logically stand in conflict. No matter. Their only agentive act is to discover and effect the means for achieving the goods. The only possible disruption to this agency is, not the malicious gods nor the ineffective quasi-divine humans, but human corruption. In contrast to tragedy's recognition that there is value in human fragility because we have unbreakable attachments to a complex and dangerous universe,<sup>79</sup> in Aristophanes' comedies any human fragility results from human capacious pursuit of ends. Chance and error are wholly undesirable and need to be eliminated. Successful executors of Great Ideas obliterate human-caused unhappiness by directing their ingenuity against corruptors who like to play god.

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<sup>79</sup> See Nussbaum's remarks cited above, n.21.